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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
BY DAVID LAUTER

Q One of the things that you said at the -- at that interview back in Colorado was that you felt -- that you'd always felt for years that given enough time you could always figure out the rules of the game, whatever the game might happen to be. And I wonder how you feel now about figuring out the rules of the First Lady game. Do you feel you've mastered --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I've only been at it for three months. (Laughter.) I don't really have any sense of that yet -- whether I'm doing everything I should or as I would hope to because it's been a pretty tumultuous three months. And I'm trying to get settled in a reasonable schedule and understand all of the different obligations and getting our family acclimated. All of that has taken up a lot of time. So I don't really have a clear idea yet what exactly I would be doing or how I would be doing it.

Q One of things that I guess Maggie and I talked about a few weeks ago is the sense that everything you do, however -- whether it's major or incredibly tiny, people read huge amounts of significance into it. It's similar to something that -- this is -- but something, that theme of first -- and there's a sense of everyone always looks to whoever is the first person to do and analyze. I wonder how do you react to that? How does that make you feel the --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think some of it is a misunderstanding of history; that this role that I have has been filled in the past by a lot of women who were first and did things that hadn't been done before. And I just think a lot of it is way overblown and it's kind of just an industry that doesn't have much relation to me. So I don't really understand it, all of that kind of intent, interest and speculation, acceptance, in terms of it being an industry almost. It's just something that people have gotten into doing. But if they go back and look at women who have been in this position, gosh, there have been a lot of people who have been first and done things that were pretty remarkable.

MORE

Q Isn't it annoying? Does it get in the way?

MRS. CLINTON: No, it's more bewildering, I suppose, than anything. It just doesn't seem to be very important to me. And I don't understand why it's so important to other people. (Laughter.)

Q It does, though, I guess, give you on some level a platform. It enables you to send messages if you want. And, for example, when people found out that the policy of the White House is going to be no smoking, that sent a message to --

MRS. CLINTON: I did the same thing in Arkansas. The thing that is, I guess, hard for me to fully appreciate is how the values and views that I've held all my life and have spoken about all my life -- I mean, I've made lots of speeches around the country for many, many, many years -- are now viewed as new because of the particular position that I'm in at this point. So that's something that I take as part of the role and part of the opportunity. But it is not anything very different from what I've always done.

Q How have you found the -- you obviously have, like a lot of women, who have families and jobs, you have this juggling act that you have to do. You have to do it under a level of scrutiny that most people don't have to deal with, no one actually has to deal with -- how have you found that? Has it been --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, again, we've only been at this three months. And I think it takes longer, even if you move to a new house and a new city and you're not in the position we're in, it takes longer to get adjusted and to feel comfortable. And then that's the process we're going through. It is different. It is much more confining. It is hard to reconcile a lot of the competing demands. But it's something that we're all working through to try to figure out how to do it.

Q Marilyn Quayle used to say the thing that drove her crazy more than anything else was that she wasn't allowed to drive a car anymore, and the Secret Service insisted on driving her everywhere. And that sort of became her symbol for how confining it was.

MRS. CLINTON: I can understand that.

Q Is there some particular thing that's taken on that kind of symbolic metaphor --

MRS. CLINTON: No, nothing in particular. It's just the feeling that you're confined -- I don't know any other word to use.

MORE

In many different ways; not any one in particular. You know, that you can't walk outside of the house you live in and take a walk without it being a major production. And I don't like that and I don't think it's healthy. So it's hard on all of us.

Q The President, from time to time, has referred to it as the crown jewel of a federal penitentiary.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, I've heard him say that.

Q One of the things that I wanted to try to make clear to people -- I mean, there are a lot of things that people think they know about you which strike me as ranging from completely untrue to moderately misleading, at least one thing that I wanted to try to get across is that the public has an image of you as humorless.

MRS. CLINTON: Really?

Q And I think part of it is that most of the time people see you in public you're doing very serious -- about health care and things like that -- truly serious --. I was wondering if you could tell me -- there's a story that several people have told me that -- about a former client of yours who found a rodent in a can.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, yes.

Q Can you tell me that story?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, gosh, David, that was another life. I think any of my friends would tell you that I love to laugh and I love to have a good time. I just can't do it on command; it's not part of my nature -- you know, I'm rebellious in that way. I'm not able to perform.

Q I wonder whether that -- do you sometimes find that as a public figure it would be easier if you could?

MRS. CLINTON: What, perform on command?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: I never think about it, because it's not me. Some people can and love to do it, and some -- it's not my way of being.

Q I remember, there's a scene that sticks in my mind of seeing you in New Hampshire three or four days before the primary, wearing your angel's wing. And I wanted to ask, if I could, without

MORE

prying too much into something that's probably to you very private, how does your faith -- how does that help you get through all of the things that you feel you have to do? What would you say about that?

MRS. CLINTON: I think that faith is a wonderful gift of grace. I mean, it gives you a sense of being rooted in meaning and love that goes far beyond your own life, and it gives you a base of assurance as to what is really important and stands the test of time day after day, minute after minute, so that many of the pressures that come to bear from the outside world are not seen as that significant in light of what is really important in your own sense of eternal values and your own fundamental beliefs about your life.

Q You talked a bit about values in an interview you did with Parade. And I was struck by similarities -- to a speech that you gave way back when you graduated from Wellesley. You had a line in the speech about -- there was a strange conservative streak that runs through a lot of new left campus protests. And I wonder how you see those conservative values, as you refer to them, working through your life and into your current job?

MRS. CLINTON: I view myself as very conservative. It's so amazing to me to be characterized by other people. I believe strongly in individual responsibility and in taking responsibility for your actions and taking the consequences of your actions, and believe in the necessity for individuals to be part of a community that is based on families and other intermediate institutions, because that's the best way to transmit values and to sustain a culture as well as to stave off anarchy and disorder.

And I just feel strongly that bigness, whether it's big government, big business, big anything, combined with big media, has over the last several hundred years helped to further disconnect people from their moorings and from some sense of rootedness that gives meaning to your life and gives you structure in your life so that you can learn to be an orderly, contributing person. And it's a struggle that is particularly played out in America between individuality and community. And we are struggling to find the right balance, but it's played off against much larger historical trends that are now being talked about in sort of post-modern man terms.

I'm going to have dinner with Havel tonight. He's someone whom I have admired for a long time because he has tried to come to grips with what a government means in today's world and what culture means and what politics means. He had a great line in this long essay he wrote about how we need to worry less about information and more about understanding.

MORE

The motivating force for me is to try to conserve a lot of what I consider best and most glorious about the human condition against all of the onslaught of particularly the 20th century, but it started before then. And I am struck how a lot of those who call themselves conservative are so radical in the way that they disconnect people from meaning and structure whether by believing that the marketplace is the answer to everything in the face of considerable evidence that it is a wonderful institution for ordering economic choices but not for instilling meaning into life or maintaining culture. I mean those are some of the things that I have always worried about and thought about a long time.

Q Havel's a remarkable person.

MRS. CLINTON: You know, I'm really looking forward to meeting him. It's a big week -- Havel and the Holocaust Museum. You could hardly have a more stark confrontation of the dilemmas of the late 20th century.

Q I know the President's gotten quite interested in the history of the presidency, the history of this house, those people who have lived here; and went up to Hyde Park, spent a little time looking for Roosevelt memorabilia. Have you also?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, we spend a lot of time reading and talking about that. In fact, I was just thinking that one of the things I might do is to try to restore this room to look like a map room like it did in the second World War to give people some sense -- I don't know if you've ever been to the underground offices that Churchill used in London with all the maps laid out and cots and everything. But that might be an interesting thing to do to kind of recreate the atmosphere of the map room and have some pictures of when Churchill was here and they first rolled out all the maps.

We're very interested in making rooms of the house come alive historically. The office that Bill uses on the second floor, which was the Cabinet Room for many, many years and then became the president's office, but it was used nearly all the way through Theodore Roosevelt as that. We've sort of restored it by bringing a lot of the furniture and memorabilia that other presidents have used and that suggested the treaties that were signed on the treaty table that Bill is now using as his desk. We're both very interested in that.

Q What have you learned by studying about that? Have you learned things that have been helpful to you?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know. I'm still sorting all that out. I've learned a lot about what actually happens and how people

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lived and the kinds of schedules and routines they established for themselves so that they could get some control over their time and make the house a comfortable as well as working house for them and their families. And that's what we're struggling to do -- how you really manage that. I read a lot about what their personal decisions were and how they spent their personal time.

Q -- policy level. The President has a lot of advisers, a lot of very good advisers. What do you feel that you bring in particular to the process when you sit down and talk to him about an issue or when you sit in a meeting?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know. I suppose a sense of shared history; we go back a long way and have talked about these matters and values for a very long time. So, I have maybe more of a context than some people who have only known him for a year or two would have or could have.

We know how each other thinks and can sometimes shortcut discussions because of that. But I think it's more the long association and the shared values that are the most useful contribution.

Q You, during the campaign, were subject to a lot of attacks on various topics, a lot of stories that were inaccurate or unfair -- referred to from time to time since then. Do you find yourself more wary now than you were when you got into this, more cautious?

MRS. CLINTON: Got into it in the campaign back in the very beginning?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, it kind of comes and goes. I suppose, you know, there's a certain amount of caution that you have to bring to any experience like this, because you never know what people's agendas are. That's true not just with journalists, but with anybody. And you have to be aware that what you think is happening may not be what the other person thinks is happening. (Laughter.) And you have to be prepared for that, I guess. But it depends on the person. It depends upon the situation. I don't have any hard and fast rules about it.

Q What do you think when you hear that Rush Limbaugh, for example, is turning Hillary jokes into a -- I mean, does that bother you?

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MRS. CLINTON: That doesn't bother me at all. I don't listen to it, I don't pay any attention to it. It is being done for commercial purposes. It has nothing to do with me personally. He's a mouthpiece for a certain political point of view, and so he's determined to try to enhance his own commercial position by this political posture he's taken. That doesn't bother me. That's his deal.

Q So you just shrug it off.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, because, I mean, what else. I mean, why get upset when somebody who has a commercial interest in making up stories about you. (Laughter.) -- do about that. So I don't -- I mean, the man who -- the man's name never crosses my mind. I don't even think about it.

Q Most people in public life don't react that way.

MRS. CLINTON: People like that don't bother me, because I think I've got them fairly well figured out. What bothers me are people who I view as serious journalists without any ostensible commercial reason or other political agenda, but who because of the nature of journalism today or because of their own personal feeling, jump to conclusions or allow themselves to be used, or print things that they doubt are true but feel compelled to go with because somebody else will go with it first, that bothers me more. There are newspapers that you can pick up and you can know everything that's in it is from a slanted point of view -- that doesn't -- I don't waste my time reading that. I mean, I could write that before I ever had to read it because there's an angle. But it's more the people who get caught up in the process and don't seem to know that it's happening to them, and then come back and apologize to you. I mean, that's the kind of stuff -- I don't understand that. But the rest of it, the guys with agendas, that's their business.

Q Do you think that has an impact on the public -- when people read something saying, well, we don't know if this is true, but rumor has it she threw an ashtray at him, and that sort of --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I'm sure it does have some impact, hopefully not much, because it's a lie. So I don't like people to be mislead by falsehoods. But I learned a long time ago that I couldn't control anybody else, let alone somebody I don't even know -- (laughter) -- who I have no personal relationship with. And I just can't worry about that kind of stuff.

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Q I'd like to ask you, if you don't mind, if I could ask you just a couple questions about what you've been through the last few weeks with your father.

MRS. CLINTON: Okay, maybe -- we'll see. (Laughter.)

Q It's obviously a very trying experience. I don't want to pry too much into it, but -- it strikes me since you're so focused these days on health care and trying to get the health care system to work better, and in the last few weeks you've been enmeshed in that -- and trying to deal with it. Whether it brought certain things to the fore in your thinking that it hadn't been before or that in some way it's focused the way you look at the whole system.

MRS. CLINTON: I haven't really thought about it that way. I mean, I'm so involved in the experience, and it was so personal, I don't really think about it in terms of policy. It's something that only now -- I mean, like today for the first day, I really felt like some normalcy was returning. And I'll have a chance to think about all of that. I don't have any grand conclusions to draw at this point. I had a very positive experience -- my whole family did. It was just something that you kind of went through hour by hour.

Q The speech that you gave in Texas, where did those ideas come to you from the -- or you had them probably a few days earlier -- coming here -- children's issues that you had to cancel. I'm sort of curious -- I sort of got the sense in reading the speech and talking to a couple people about it that this was much more a personal statement than --

MRS. CLINTON: I think it was. You know, I didn't really know for sure I was going to actually go until a day or two before and I didn't have any real time to prepare anything. And I didn't ask anybody to prepare anything for me because I was not sure I was going to go at all. So I think it was more personal. It was -- by the nature of it with the hope of the people who put it on, particularly Liz Carpenter, that it could be a conversation about values and community and healing our nation. Those are concerns that I hold deeply anyway. And coming off of the emotion of the past two weeks before, it was just a very good opportunity for me to be able to think through feelings and thoughts that I had and talk about them.

I also -- I mean, I laughed about this because I really didn't even know what I was going to. I thought I was going to a -- really I was doing it for Liz Carpenter, who is a great person and a wonderful advocate. But I thought it was maybe a couple hundred people in a small room in the LBJ library. (Laughter.) I didn't

MORE

have any idea what it was until, I think, Sunday or Monday and I started hearing about all these tickets being given away and I kept telling Liz, well, you know, Liz, I'm not sure I even be able to get there. So it was such a funny experience to be talking about all that in front of all those people. But it felt very natural, partly because that's what she really wanted to have happen, which was for people to get engaged on that level about those kinds of concerns.

Q You hope that the health care and the process of rebuilding the health care system can go beyond simply establishing a health care system and also try to reknit some of this. How will that --

MRS. CLINTON: You know, David, I really -- I really do. I said in -- wherever Nebraska or Montana, some place that I've been in the last couple of days -- that I really hope that we're not just solving economic problems, although that is crucial. And we're not even just restructuring the way we deliver health care, but that we truly are taking responsibility and being willing to help one another, understanding how we're all linked together, and how at the most basic human level, issues of life and death join every person no matter who they are and where they live or how rich or poor they are.

And that if we could do this right, so that we restore a sense of security on this issue to all Americans, then I think from that sense of security will flow a better understanding of one another, a greater recognition of our interdependence, a willingness to help each other, to share the burdens of living together.

And I know that sounds maybe hopelessly idealistic but I certainly felt that way during those long days I was in the hospital with my father that I don't think it's just peculiar to that hospital and that town and those doctors and those nurses and my family. I've been in that hospital a lot on other occasions, and there was a real sense of caring and compassion that cut across all kinds of lines to bring people together. And I just hope that that's what we were really aiming for even if we have to talk in budgetary terms and all the other buzz words you have to use in the discussion.

Q Okay, let me ask you one more thing. Sum it up for me. On the one hand, you've got -- you can't walk out and take a walk on your own when you want. You've got to deal with people running around saying crazy things about you and you've got all these demands on your time. On the other hand, you have the opportunity to influence public policy, have dinner with Vaclav Havel and so on and so forth. What's the net balance?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know yet. I'm not sure. I think it's mostly positive. But we've only been at it three months.

MORE

(Laughter.) Hard to believe it's only been three months. Feels like a lot longer than that. I don't think we've given David enough time.

MS. CAPUTO: Well, what do you want to do? You've got to go do this.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, when is your deadline? I can't do anything else today. I've got to do this and then I've got to do that and then I've got to go to the Hill and then I've got to do -- you know.

Q I have to get this think to them by the time they come into work on Tuesday of next week.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, that's a week, that's a lifetime.

Q It does seem that way these days.

MRS. CLINTON: I already looked into this, you know, for tomorrow or Thursday which are shot. So I can look at Friday.

Q Okay, I will make myself available whenever, particularly since it looks like the baby's over her flu. I was --

MRS. CLINTON: Isn't it the worst think in the world to have a baby who's sick?

Q Yes. It's a little better now because she can talk.

MRS. CLINTON: Because she talks.

Q Yes, and she's 22 months. So that she can, you know, -- and on the one hand, you feel bad when she says my tummy hurts but on the other hand at least you know.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. I think -- I mean the preverbal sicknesses were awfully hard because, you know, you never really knew what was going on and they were just in pain and cried all the time.

Q And you can't comfort them at all because they can't understand what you're saying.

MRS. CLINTON: Just make you want to go away. Yes, although it's also pretty hard when they're verbal and preschool and, you know, they go mommy, why does this hurt so much, I don't like this, make it go away. You know that kind of stuff.

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Q Last week, I guess it was Thursday, yes, it was Thursday, because I was scrambling around to get ready to go out to Nebraska.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, were you in -- yes, that's right, you asked me a question.

MS. CAPUTO: That's when you called me from the bathroom when she was in the tub, right?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: I was in the tub?

MS. CAPUTO: No.

Q The baby was in the tub.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, your daughter was in the tub.
(Laughter.)

Q I got a call about 4:00 p.m. from our babysitter saying that Miriam wasn't feeling well and -- had to go to something and she -- I could hear her in the background saying daddy come home. So -- and I threw all this stuff into the my bag and ran home and she had thrown up all over the place, so I put her into the bathroom and gave her a bath and called Lisa from the bathroom while I was bathing her to find out some detail stuff about the schedule. It was a little crazed. But she's getting better.

MRS. CLINTON: I know, but I just hate it when they're sick. I mean, I hate -- Chelsea just came home from this event all sunburned. I hate that she's sunburned. It just never ends. Well, I got to do this event.

Q You go do this event and we'll talk about --

MRS. CLINTON: Okay.

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