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MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWS HOUR

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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INTERVIEW WITH THE FIRST LADY
BY JIM LEHRER OF McNEIL/LEHRER

(Unrecorded question)

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you, Jim. Glad to be with you.

I would describe this plan as a historic opportunity to provide health security to every American to guarantee their choice of doctors, to give them a comprehensive benefits package that emphasizes preventive care, to do it in an affordable way, which guarantees quality, and asks everybody to be responsible for themselves and their health care. I think that is a description of what the President promised in his speech and what this plan delivers.

(Unrecorded question)

Well, I think that it is a very good solution. Now, the President has said repeatedly that he is open to better ways of achieving his goals. But there are some nonnegotiable aspects. We have to reach universal coverage. That's essential. We have to have a benefits package that takes care of people's needs. And we have to fit the other principles that the President has outlined.

But if you look at what this plan does, it really draws from what is best about American medicine and tries to focus in on fixing what doesn't work. Primarily how we finance it, and some of the regulatory and other micro-management problems that have undermined the delivery of health care. So I think that this plan presents some of the best ideas about what works in American health care in one place, and puts them together in a comprehensive way.

(Unrecorded question)

In the big areas it doesn't differ much. This is

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still a plan that guarantees universal coverage, which still outlines the benefits, unlike some others which would postpone that and have a national board do it. The basic structure is intact.

But there have been some changes based on very good and constructive suggestions from all different kinds of people that we think have made the plan even stronger. We have tried to eliminate any vestige of over-regulation or smacking of bureaucracy that anybody found in the plan. We want it to be clean and simple and try to get to the point. We have tried to make sure that all of the issues that were raised were addressed. And I think we have done that.

(Unrecorded question)

Yes. One of the very good suggestions that came from the many small businesses that are supporting the President's plan is that it was too abrupt in the way that it ended the discounts at a certain level, and that there needed to be a smoother ending of that. And we have tried to accommodate those small business concerns. Right, yes.

(Unrecorded question)

Well, what we have done is to clarify the conditions under which a state could do that. You know, we have said from the very beginning that we want states to have flexibility. We don't think that the problems in Vermont or Montana are the same as the ones in Texas or Florida. And many at the state level came back and said, well, it may be after we look at all of the options available to us, this would be the best option because we have so few people, for example, on a very large land mass. And they wanted clarification, which we have given them. It will still be a state decision made at the state legislative and executive level.

(Unrecorded question)

Yes, that's right. They would have to meet certain conditions like every other state, but if that were their choice at the state level, they could do so.

(Unrecorded question)

No, I don't think that's been changed, Jim. I

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think that under the original plan we had always said we were not going to penalize any individual or employer that currently had more benefits than were going to be offered in the President's health plan. There is two big differences between the President's plan and some of the others because some of the others would say that any kind of health insurance benefit above a minimum would be taxed. And the President rejected that.

The second big difference is that the benefits in some of the other plans would not even be set forth. So nobody would know whether their benefits were secure or not. And the President decided that we would go ahead and set forth the benefits. And then at some point in the future when some additional benefits have been added to the comprehensive benefits package, at that point we would consider taxing any plans above that. But that's far off in the future, and only after additional benefits that aren't currently in the proposed plan would be added.

(Unrecorded question)

Well, I think everybody wants the best plan to be the one that's adopted by Congress. But I think the President has made very clear that there is a lot of room for trying to figure out the best way to reach the best plan so long as his basic principles are met. And I think that is the important difference. Some of the plans on the table do not reach universal coverage. The President will not work with or sign any bill that does not reach universal coverage. He believes very strongly in that both because we want everybody to have health security and because he doesn't believe you can ever control cost until everybody is in the system paying what they can to be responsible.

So although we want to work with every other approach that is up there and find as much common ground as possible, there are certain principles that will have to be met in order for the President to believe that the best plan is the one that he would approve of.

(Unrecorded question)

No, we are very anxious to continue the good conversations that we have had with the Republicans. And Senator Dole and Senator Chafee have an alternative that they have been promoting, which has many things in common with the

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President's. We consider that a very good base from which to work. Other Republicans in the House have also come forward with their ideas about how they can work with the President's plan. So, no, we intend to work with everyone. We are not in any way trying to shut the door on any good ideas. And we hope that no one else is.

We don't want this historic opportunity, to finally solve this problem for America, to be turned into any kind of partisan game. And I hope nobody in either party intends to do that. The President is serious about finding the best plan, finding as much common ground as possible, and working with everyone.

(Unrecorded question)

No, because as we have gone out and explained it to people, the more they know about it the more they like it. They have been given a lot of information. It's been hard to digest. And, frankly, some of the information they have been given is just flat wrong. So now that the bill will be going up, and the Congress will begin to do its work in the legislative process, that gives us a tremendous opportunity to work with people all over the country to help educate them, answer their questions.

Because what I find as I travel around the country is that the opposition to health care reform kind of falls into two big camps, I would say. The first is what I call good-faith opposition. These are people who share the President's goals but have legitimate questions about what we are doing, and want to understand it. And then there are those who are just anxious to keep the status quo because it works for them.

We'll do what we can to try to change the minds of those in the second category, but we are mostly concerned about working with Americans all over the country who want to know why the President is proposing a certain approach, want to get all the information they can so that they can make a good decision. And I am confident that the more they know, the more they will approve of the decisions that the President has made.

(Unrecorded question)

That's right, Jim, it is. Thank you very much.

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INTERNAL TRANSCRIPT

MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWS HOUR
INTERVIEW WITH : HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1993

JIM LEHRER: Health care reform is first tonight. Five weeks ago President Clinton addressed Congress and the nation about the broad outlines of his reform proposal. Tomorrow the detailed version goes to Congress. It was drafted by a task force chaired by his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton. I spoke with Mrs. Clinton this afternoon.

(Videotaped segment)

MR. LEHRER: Mrs. Clinton, welcome.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you, Jim. Good to be with you.

MR. LEHRER: How would you describe this plan that is going to Congress tomorrow?

MRS. CLINTON: I would describe this plan as an historic opportunity to provide health security to every American, to guarantee their choice of doctors, to give them a comprehensive benefits package that emphasizes preventive care, to do it in an affordable way which guarantees quality and asks everybody to be responsible for themselves and their health care.

I think that is a description of what the president promised in his speech and what this plan delivers.

MR. LEHRER: You make it sound like a perfect solution to a very difficult problem.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think it is a very good solution. Now, the president has said repeatedly that he is open to better ways of achieving his goals, but there are some non-negotiable aspects. We have to reach universal coverage. That's essential. We have to have a benefits package that takes care of people's needs and we have to fit the other principles that the president has outlined.

But if you look at what this plan does, it really draws from what is best about American medicine and tries to focus in on fixing what doesn't work, primarily how we finance it and some of the regulatory and other micromanagement problems that have undermined the delivery of health care. So I think that this plan presents some of the best ideas about what works in American health care in one place and puts them together in a comprehensive way.

MR. LEHRER: How does this version differ from the original outline of five weeks ago?

MRS. CLINTON: In the big areas it doesn't differ much. This is still a plan that guarantees universal coverage, which still outlines the benefits, unlike some others which would postpone that and have a national board do it. The basic structure is intact but there have been some changes based on very good and constructive suggestions from all different kinds of people that we think have made the plan even stronger.

We've tried to eliminate any vestige of over-regulation or smacking of bureaucracy that anybody found in the plan. We want it to be clean and simple and try to get to the point. We've tried to make sure that all of the issues that were raised were addressed and I think we have done that.

MR. LEHRER: The issue that was raised by small business, you have accommodated that, have you not, or at least in some way you've raised the number of employees that a company can have and still be eligible for subsidies?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. One of the very good suggestions that came from the many small businesses that are supporting the president's plan is that it was too abrupt in the way that it ended the discounts at a certain level and that there needed to be a smoother ending of that and we've tried to accommodate those small business concerns.

MR. LEHRER: From 50 to 75, is that right?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

MR. LEHRER: Now also, as I understand it you're going to make it easier for individual states to adopt a single payer system if they wish to do so?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, what we've done is to clarify the conditions under which a state could do that. You know, we have said from the very beginning that we want states to have flexibility. We don't think that the problems in Vermont or Montana are the same as the ones in Texas and Florida. Many at the state level came back and said, well, it may be after we look at all the options available to us, this would be the best option because we have so few people, for example, in a very large land mass, and they wanted clarification, which we have given.

It will still be a state decision made at the state legislative and executive level.

MR. LEHRER: So you would have no objection -- you and the president would have no objection if an individual state decided they wanted to go with single payer system. They could do it under this plan, is that correct?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, that's right. They would have to meet certain conditions like every other state, but if that were their choice at the state level, they could do so.

MR. LEHRER: Is it also not a change that now employers who wanted to offer a more luxurious health care system to their employees could do that now, that they weren't able to under the original plan?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I don't think that's been changed, Jim. I think that under the original plan we had always said we were not going to penalize any individual or employer that currently had more benefits than were going to be offered in the president's health plan.

You know, there's two big differences between the president's plan and some of the others because some of the others would say that any kind of health insurance benefit above a minimum would be taxed and the president rejected that. The second big difference is that the benefits in some of the other plans would not even be set forth so nobody would know whether their benefits were secure or not, and the president decided that we would go ahead and set forth the benefits.

Then at some point in the future when some additional benefits have been added to the comprehensive benefits package, at that point we would consider taxing any plans above that, but that's far in the future and only after additional benefits that aren't currently in the proposed plan would be added.

MR. LEHRER: Now you already mentioned there are some alternative plans already on the table up on Capitol Hill. There's one Republican plan, there's another one that's been offered by some Democrats along with some Republicans. Are you ready and willing to work with these folks to see if there is one plan you can all agree on, or is this from your point of view going to be a matter of there's this plan, there's this plan, there's that plan, let the best plan win?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think everybody wants the best plan to be the one that's adopted by Congress, but I think the president has made very clear that there's a lot of room for trying to figure out the best way to reach the best plan so long as his basic principles are met, and I think that is the important difference. Some of the plans on the table do not reach universal coverage.

The president will not work with or sign any bill that does not reach universal coverage. He believes very strongly in that, both because we want everybody to have health security and because he doesn't believe you can ever control costs until everybody is in the system paying what they can to be responsible.

Although we want to work with every other approach that is up there and find as much common ground as possible, there are certain principles that will have to be met in order for the president to believe it the best plan, the one that he would approve of.

MR. LEHRER: Right now there's only one Republican senator who has signed on to support your plan. Does that concern you, or do you think you can win this without any Republican support?

MRS. CLINTON: No. We're very anxious to continue the good conversations that we have had with the Republicans, and Senator Dole and Senator Chafee have an alternative that they have been promoting which has many things in common with the president's. We consider that a very good base from which to work. Other Republicans in the House have also come forward with their ideas about how they can work with the president's plan.

We intend to work with everyone. We are not in any way trying to shut the door on any good ideas and we hope that no one else is. We don't want this historic opportunity to finally solve this problem for America to be turned into any kind of partisan game, and I hope nobody in either party intends to do that.

The president is serious about finding the best plan, finding as much common ground as possible and working with everyone.

MR. LEHRER: Are you concerned about these recent polls, particularly one last week that said the majority of Americans simply don't understand the administration's plan on health care reform?

MRS. CLINTON: No, because as we have gone out and explained it to people, the more they know about it the more they like it. They've been given a lot of information. It's been hard to digest and frankly some of the information they've been given is just flat wrong.

So now that the bill will be going up and the Congress will begin to do its work in the legislative process, that gives

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us a tremendous opportunity to work with people all over the country to help educate them, answer their questions. Because what I find as I travel around the country is that the opposition to health care reform kind of falls into two big camps, I would say.

The first is what I call good faith opposition. These are people who share the president's goals but have legitimate questions about what we're doing and want to understand it. Then there are those who are just anxious to keep the status quo because it works for them. We'll do what we can to try to change the minds of those in the second category, but we're mostly concerned about working with Americans all over the country who want to know why the president is proposing a certain approach, want to get all the information they can so they can make a good decision.

I'm confident that the more they know, the more they will approve of the decisions that the president has made.

MR. LEHRER: Well, Mrs. Clinton, I understand today's your birthday. is that right?

MRS. CLINTON: That's right, Jim, it is.

MR. LEHRER: Well, happy birthday and thank you very much.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much.

END