

02/18/91  
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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Internal Use Only

February 18, 1994

INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
KDLT-TV

Q I guess, first of all, there are so many people that I have talked to, coming here today, that I wanted to see what they wanted me to ask you. So many people said we are all for you out there, but they hesitate because they are not exactly sure what's in the plan, what's going on.

I know you mentioned earlier it's kind of a complex issue. How can you calm the fears of the people about this plan?

MRS. CLINTON: I think what I can tell you is we are not making that many changes. What we are trying to do is to build on what works in there. We have the finest hospitals, doctors and nurses in the world. But we really do have a stupid financing system that needs to be changed because it uses up billions of dollars that should go to better health care instead of into paperwork.

And what we are doing is taking what works for most Americans. Most insured Americans get their insurance through their work place. That's what we think the best model is. That's an American model. That's not a Canadian or a European model. That's an American model. And we want everybody to contribute because right now those of us who are insured at our work place, we pay for everybody else who uses the system, who is not insured. That's not fair to us. Everybody should have to pay something. And once everybody pays something, everybody will be in the system.

And then we want a system -- it's kind of like what Congress has. Congress gets its health insurance by the citizens paying their taxes. And that's the employer, the government. And the employer pays for part of the health insurance, and members of Congress pay their share. Then every year members of Congress get to look at a whole variety of health plans and they decide which one they want. And it's not their employer's decision. It's their decision. That's what we want for South and North Dakota, and

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Minnesota.

We want people to pool their money together so small businesses and farmers get the same low insurance rate as big business and government do. And that's not a government-run system because it is still going to be private insurance. The money is not going to the government. It's going to go to whoever you choose to be your health care plan. And you are going to be able to pick from among a variety of plans. And they are not going to be able to discriminate against you because you are older or you have a pre-existing condition.

So we think, actually, the system will be much simpler, easier to understand. You are going to have only one form to fill out and it's going to save a lot of money.

Q Do you plan on any cut? How far will you go as far as cutting back to make this approved by Congress?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we don't have to make very many cuts because if everybody contributes something, we will have more than enough money to do this. And everyone who has independently looked at the President's plan, who doesn't have some particular interest that they are trying to promote, have said that the President's plan will save businesses and families and the government money at the turn of the century.

It's going to take a while to get it all phased in, and we want to do it right. And we want to give each state flexibility because the problems in South Dakota are not the problems in Texas. And so we want each state to be able to phase in what they think will work. But once it's all phased in, in the next couple of years, it's going to start saving everybody money.

Q Senator Daschle recently said that because of your work on (inaudible) health care task force, you are an easy sell almost on rural health care. And honestly that's a big important issue to South Dakotans. He also said Congress is going to be the hard sell.

What will you be taking back to Congress today, that you have heard today, and how are you going to convince them that we need more health care and not to forget us?

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MRS. CLINTON: Well, the President won't forget rural health care because he knows, being a governor of a small rural state, how tough it is to get doctors into rural areas and to keep hospitals open. And that's why in this plan we've got all kinds of provisions to encourage doctors and physicians' assistants and nurses to go to rural areas.

We've got money set aside to help keep hospitals in rural areas open and functioning. We have a special program to encourage medical students to go in rural areas and to have their loans that they needed for medical school reduced to forgiveness. So we have done a lot. And from the President's perspective, that has to stay in the program.

I mean, we can't just perform health care for urban America. That's not fair. We need to reform it for all Americans, and that means paying special attention to rural areas.

Q What about special -- can you get this approved? Do you have a special strategy to get it approved?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we are going to be doing a lot of education and talking with people around the country because ultimately it's the people in the states talking to their members of Congress who will make this happen. And if members of Congress only hear from special interests, if they only have people who had made money off the status quo and wanted to continue knocking on their door, we are going to have a tough time.

But I think there are millions of Americans who know why we need to make some changes in order to preserve what works for us. And I think they will be making the hard case to members of Congress, and we are going to get health reform this year.

Q Do you see a lot of different special interest groups or different people out there -- obviously they are battling against you. Do you see this (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that's maybe a little bit too much to say, but it's going to be a real battle.

Harry Truman, who everybody remembers as a real battling President, really fought hard for health care reform. And a lot of the same groups that are fighting against this president were fighting against him.

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But we are going to get it this year because one thing that my husband has proven is he is persistent, and he doesn't give up easily. Just as he believes that if we have responsible budgeting the first time in years in Washington we get the deficit down and we start seeing economic activity, he believes that health care reform will do the same thing. It's going to really help people if we do it. And so he is going to stay with it until we get it done.

(The interview was concluded.)

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