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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
BY SANDRA THOMPSON THE LAS VEGAS SUN

Q (Inaudible) many psychological scars created by last Monday's earthquake. Did you share that?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know that I did, Sandy. I knew that it was one of the most important problems facing the country and that my husband felt very strongly about addressing it and not neglecting it any longer. But the full dimension of how the health care system works or doesn't work was something that I've learned over the past year.

Q I'm trying to get over (inaudible). And I'm wondering if (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Well, any time we try to change, there is going to be opposition from really two sources. There are people who have profited from the existing system who are going to be against change because it will disrupt their situation. And maybe they don't want that to happen. And then there will be opposition from people who are fearful that change won't work, won't be as effective as it needs to be.

And I'm fully sensitive to people who are in that second category, which is why we're working so hard to try to answer people's questions and one of the reasons why I'm doing the forum tomorrow. And then, we're just going to have to do the best we can to get public opinion to deal with people in the first category who don't want change because, you know, change will not benefit them.

What we need to think about is what's good for the entire country, and that's what the President is trying to do.

Q (Inaudible).

MORE

MRS. CLINTON: Well, in the current system, most health care is paid for from two sources: individuals and employers. And that's exactly the way it will be under the President's plan. In fact, we believe that most people who currently have insurance will pay less for their insurance, because we're going to organize the way we finance health care better. And all of us who are currently insured will benefit from a streamlined, simpler, more effective system.

Those who are not insured now are going to have to make some contribution to be insured. And we will continue to help provide support for people who are unable to pay the full share for themselves. But that is exactly the way it has been before. The real good feature of the President's plan is that we're not asking for a big tax increase. He ruled that out.

We are building on what works and trying to give people who already have insurance better, more affordable, secure insurance and then provide it to those who do not.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: You're right. And, under the President's plan, no one will be denied insurance, as the President said in his speech on Tuesday night. He wants guaranteed private insurance for every American, with no discrimination against any American because they have a preexisting condition or because they're older, with no lifetime limits, so that when you need health care, you're not told, "I'm sorry, you've got cancer, and you've exceeded your limits."

So he wants to eliminate and make illegal the kind of barriers that have prevented people from getting affordable health care in the past.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: The same thing we expect will happen in the rural areas, because everybody will, for the first time, be insured. Some of the highest percentage of uninsured or underinsured Americans are in our rural areas. And many farmers and ranchers are very discriminated against.

The pay exceedingly high rates for private

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insurance. Even if they try to go through a group, like a ranchers' association or a farm bureau, they are discriminated against.

So we believe that insurance will be cheaper and readily available for the first time, and there will be incentives for doctors and hospitals and other health care professionals to locate in rural areas, because they will be guaranteed payment, which is something tht they are not now.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Well, the President's plan is very inclusive in the way it tries to provide benefits for mental illness and drug and substance abuse as part of a comprehensive benefits package. For too long, mental health has been excluded. It's excluded from many private insurance plans. And we know that that costs everybody money, not just in the way that people can't get help for mental illness, but the kind of spinoff of criminal problems, homelessness and other things which are often related to untreated mental illness.

So the President's plan specifies the benefits that would be covered under insurance and includes mental health and substance and alcohol and drug abuse treatment, as well.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Well, under the President's approach, every American would be guaranteed insurance, and every effort would be made to make sure that all people were covered. And, if someone were discovered not to have health insurance, they would be required to do so, because we want everybody to make a contribution.

And we don't think there will be very many people who will be left out who are legal citizens of our country, because there will be an incentive for employers to provide insurance and for individuals, because they will continue to get their tax deduction.

Self-employed individuals will be able to get 100 percent tax deduction. So we think there will be some good reasons why everybody wants to be insured for the first time, and it will be affordable for the first time.

MORE

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Well, absolutely not. The President has made very clear from the beginning that illegal aliens will not be eligible for the health security insurance that American citizens will be eligible for.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: I think the biggest distortion is the claim that, under the President's approach, Americans would lose their choice of physician. That's distorted for several reasons. First of all, what's happening right now is that more and more Americans are losing their choice because they buy their insurance through their workplace. And they don't make the decision of what their insurance will cover. Their boss makes the decision.

And so many people, I'm sure, in Nevada and all around the country are having the experience of the thousands of people who have written me to say, "Look, I loved my doctor, but my employer changed health care insurance, and now I can't go see my doctor anymore." So it is a very big distortion.

And then the other huge distortion which has just begin to be made because, you know, the claim that we were going to take away choice has been around for a couple of months. And they have run ads. And, you know, it's just flat-out wrong. In fact, if anything, Americans will be guaranteed more choice, not less.

But the second big distortion is that there's no health care crisis. You know, a lot of people are saying that. "Oh, my gosh. What's the President doing? There's no health care crisis." Well, as the President said so clearly Tuesday night, only people who are well-insured and rich can say there's no health care crisis. They have never had to wait in an emergency room. They have never gotten cancer and had an insurance agent say that, "I'm sorry. You've exceeded your lifetime limits."

They have never had their diabetes diagnosed and been told, "I'm sorry, we can't insure you because you've got a preexisting condition." Just like the people that the President talked about from Reno in his speech, they have

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never had to face personal bankruptcy in order to take care of a loved one's illness.

So there certainly is a crisis, and it's not just for people who are in a particular income group or who have a preexisting condition. Nobody in America is guaranteed health care if you're under 65. You know, we have done a good job in taking care of our older citizens, and Medicare is a very important program to guarantee health care coverage to Americans over 65. But if you're under 65, you don't have any guarantee at all that you will continue to have health insurance.

And I don't care whether you're well-insured and whether you're feeling very good about the insurance you have today. If you get sick, if you lose your job, you may not be able to afford insurance. And that's wrong.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Well, there are many in the medical and insurance industries who are very supportive. They understand that we do have a crisis and that if we don't start getting it fixed, what they care about is at risk, as well. But there are others in the medical and insurance industries who don't want any change who like things just the way they are, and they're opposing what the President's trying to do. So we're working with some but, unfortunately, not all of them.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: I don't have very many frustrations going across the country, because I spend so much time learning about what people's problems are and talking to them and meeting with people who are trying in good faith to help deal with the health care issue. I get a little frustrated when people deny there's a health care crisis or when they claim inaccurately that the President's approach would do something that they know darn well it wouldn't, but they want to try to scare people.

I don't think this is an issue that should be a political issue. I don't think it should be a partisan issue. I don't think that it should lead to people running ads and distorting reality. I think it should bring us

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together to try to solve the problems that we face, to guarantee everybody health security. So I'm pretty upbeat at what I think is going to happen.

But they're waving at me, telling me I've got to move on. And I'm going to see you tomorrow, I hope. Well, I appreciate your questions.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Okie doke. Bye.

(Whereupon, the conversation was concluded.)

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