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NBC

INTERVIEW WITH THE FIRST LADY  
BY KATIE COURIC 6/2/93 pt. 2

Q Health care reform is incredibly complicated. Can you tell me, in one minute, exactly what you're trying to do?

Mrs. Clinton: The President is trying to --(inaudible)-- so that every American has the security of knowing that no matter who he is or who he works for, or whether he's ever been sick before, he will have access to health care. And that means providing a universal coverage, or package of benefits -- (inaudible) that will meet the primary and preventive health care needs and hospitalization of every American.

Q Let's say there's a middle class guy working for General Motors. Will he have the same benefits, the same choice of doctors, and pay the same money that he does now, under your plan?

Mrs. Clinton: I can't really answer specifically, because I don't know exactly what he has or how much he pays. But in general, most Americans will have access to a very good benefit package that provides the kind of primary preventive health care that they need to have, and also takes care of them with the kind of acute hospitalization all of us fear, as well as providing benefits for paying for drugs, prescription drugs and long term care, which in some cases will be somewhat more than what is available in the market right now. And in some cases, (gap in tape)

--(in progress)-- the way they get health care right now, and how they go to their doctor, how they get services, and what they will find after the plan goes into affect because we really think we've got the best quality health care in the world in America. We just don't provide it in an equitable way for all Americans, and we don't provide security for even those who are currently insured to know that they will always be able to get it. And we haven't done a good job in controlling costs, and in eliminating the fraud and abuse that still does drive up the costs of health care.

Q But it is conceivable, that someone could get fewer benefits and pay more.

Mrs. Clinton: It's conceivable. It is conceivable, but I can't really answer a hypothetical question like that because what we find is that for most Americans now, they are in danger of losing all or part of the benefits that they currently have. That employers are finding it increasingly difficult to continue to pay for what they have been paying for. So even if someone

were to say, "gee, well now here's what I've got now," they can't with any assurance in today's world, no matter who they're employed by, say, "and I can tell you for sure that's what I'm gonna have next year."

Q So their paying is a pay-off, fewer benefits, more money, greater security?

Mrs. Clinton: I don't think fewer benefits. I think from our perspective, the right kind of benefits, provided to everybody at an affordable cost, that controls cost and ensures quality for everybody.

Q We've been reading, we've been hearing that health care now may be delayed, until September.

Mrs. Clinton: You know the President had asked that a number of us, conclude the work providing him with information he should make decisions on. That work is over. We have completed the task that he assigned to us, and have created mounds of paper and many different kinds of analysis. And he's now in the process of making what will be the decisions on his plan. But certainly he's also very focussed on the economy -- trying to get the first realistic budget this country has had in a very long time through the Congress. And that's what he's working on day and night right now. But he will turn to health care with the same kind of attention that he's always given, as soon as he's able. He wants to do that as soon as possible.

Q Doesn't he have to get his budget passed on Capitol Hill before he gives them some massive proposal on health care?

Mrs. Clinton: Well I think he in terms of his resources, being able to focus and make the decisions that he feels comfortable taking to the country, and saying, "here's what I have (inaudible) -- and do it quickly," he has to feel that he's had enough time to digest all of this information, and although we've met for many, many months; many, many people, the ultimate decision is the President's. It's clear that he's focused right now on the --(inaudible)-- but he's also continuing to work on health care.

Q But again, don't you think that he has to take care of his budget first?

Mrs. Clinton: I think he wants to get the budget over with, he has always wanted to. He had the earliest success on budget resolution any President in many, many years has had. He feels very strongly that we need to attack the issues that he raised forth in the budget, but yes, I mean he wants to get that behind him.

Q But that could mean waiting until September to introduce health care.

Mrs. Clinton: I don't think so. I don't think so. I can't really speculate on that. I can tell you that he believes you cannot solve our economic problems without a health care plan. It needs to be linked to the economic package. He wants Americans to know that all the work that has gone into trying to reduce the deficit, to try to make life better for millions of Americans through things like taking millions of them off tax rolls with the Earned Income Tax Credit. And all the other issues that are in that budget that a lot of people don't even know about, have to go hand in hand with controlling health care costs. So, for him they're bound up, and he wants both of them to be successful -- (inaudible)--.

Q There are others who say that there's no way you can get the budget passed and health care reform passed in one year.

Mrs. Clinton: Well you know there are a lot of people in Washington who say things can't get passed. And I think that's one of the attitudes that the President is coming right up against. There are a lot of people who are tied to doing things the old way and not making much progress, getting all locked up in gridlock and dancing to the tune of the special interests. And so one of the reasons why we're having the difficulties we are now, is coming up with a very responsible and realistic budget for the first time. I don't think the President buys that. I think he believes that the country has big challenges in front of it, he wants us to address the big issues: the economy, creating jobs and solving the health care crisis.

Q You want to see it dealt with this year?

Mrs. Clinton: I think that every year that we wait the cost continues to --(inaudible)-- hundreds of thousands of people go uninsured -- through no fault of their own. People who have insurance see their benefits cut, and I think every year we wait, we get further and further --(inaudible)--

Q How much is this going to cost? And how long will it take?

Mrs. Clinton: Well I that it's going to actually -- (inaudible)-- and it will be the kind of plan that, that I can't get out in front of, --inaudible-- that will over time, help control our deficit, help to control the incredible budget problems that people in their own households --inaudible--

Q But in the short term, this plan costs an awful lot of money, we've heard anywhere from \$30 billion to \$150 billion dollars.

Mrs. Clinton: Than's just way out of line.

Q \$30 billion is way out of line?

Mrs. Clinton: No, 30 billion may not, depending upon what the President tries to put into the package. It's really a -- (inaudible)-- because a lot of it depends upon how it's phased in, how many savings we can get up front, you know, for example, if we eliminate a lot of the administrative costs in both the public and private sector, so that it's no longer there. So that you don't have hospitals having to pay for people filling out forms, they can provide care instead.

Q Taxes will have to be raised, won't they?

Mrs. Clinton: No, not really.

Q You can say unequivocally, that taxes will not be raised?

Mrs. Clinton: I can say unequivocally that the President has some options in front of him that will minimize any general kind of tax that will be put on anybody --(inaudible)-- is to work to try to figure out how the burden can be shared fairly in America. And that doesn't mean putting big taxes on people, that means taking what is currently spent, spending it better to provide better --(inaudible)--. And frankly making people who have been free riders pay their fair share. Now you could go into any town in America and walk down any main street, and you can walk by stores and just say, you know, the dry cleaner pays for insurance for their employees, and the employees contribute. Next door you've got another store and they don't pay anything. When they get sick, they go to the hospital and they are treated, and it's usually too late and too expensive, and all the rest of us pay for it. That kind of unfairness is at the root of solving the problem. So some people will have to pay instead of having a free ride. But most people will see their costs stabilize overtime, and actually increase --(inaudible)--

Q But to make it fair some people will have to pay higher taxes?

Mrs. Clinton: No, not higher taxes, they'll have to pay premiums for insurance that will give them the benefit -- (inaudible)-- they won't pay taxes --(inaudible)--

Q ...It will come out of their paycheck?

Mrs. Clinton: Or come out of a contribution, however they're gonna decide to do it. But it will go toward insurance for them and their family because right now it is such a fallacy to think -- (inaudible)-- are uninsured and therefore don't get

medical care. They don't pay for it the way that the rest of us pay for it, with contributions in our paychecks, sharing with our employer or the self employed on our own. They show up at the same hospital, they do get the treatment and usually they pay what they can, but often they don't pay anything. And then we have a system called medicaid which basically pays for people who are very poor. But it doesn't inspire people to get the kind of primary preventive and go to people in the primary care field so that their problems could be taken care of earlier. So they show up at the Emergency room, which is the most expensive kind of care.

Q Will abortion be included in the package?

Mrs. Clinton: I don't know.

Q Do you want it to be in the package?

Mrs. Clinton: I think that's all up to the President. We've given him all the information for him to make that decision.

Q How do you think people feel about you being in charge? Do you think senior aides can walk up to your husband and say, "Mr. President, I think your wife is way off base?"

Mrs. Clinton: Sure. Sure, we have a very open relationship, you know people have all these stereotypes in mind about, you know how if somebody's in this role, then therefore you have to treat them a certain way. I suppose there are some people that may not feel comfortable, but they may not feel comfortable talking about anybody in a direct way about their opinion. The President really encourages that and he goes out of his way to ask everybody what they think, which is one of his great strengths in life. I've been in lots of meetings where people said, "I don't agree with that", and I said, "I don't agree with that", and we've gone back and forth about it, I think that makes a better team.

-- tape change --

Mrs. Clinton: That looks like something out of a science fiction movie. Can you ride it up and down? See I'm dreading when Katie asks me about my space alien baby and that I haven't -- (inaudible) -- this is the thing I'm really worried about. I don't know how those tabloids found out everything. The thing I want to know-- if you ever look at the picture of me holding the baby, who's arm is that?

Q One senator, albeit a Republican, complained that there's no give and take at some of these health care meetings, because no one wants to offend the President's wife.

Mrs. Clinton: I've been in lots and lots of meetings where I've had very good and honest conversations with many Senators and many members of the House, so I really can't comment on that. I'm open to any point of view, I've sought it out, I've tried to be as easy to reach as possible and I've been very grateful for the honest counsel that I've gotten from both Republicans and Democrats.

Q Much has been said about the success of the Clinton administration riding on health care reform. That's tremendous pressure for you, and what seems to me to be a tremendous political risk. Wouldn't it have been easier for your husband, or wouldn't it have been wiser for your husband, for your husband to hire someone who could be fired? For example if he or she fails?

Mrs. Clinton: Well I suppose that by traditional political standards it would have been. But I just want to say, one of the things we keep trying to get across, my husband feels very strongly about these issues. They are not just political issues, to be looked at on some polling chart. He thinks we need to solve the health care problem. He doesn't want to be distanced from it, wants to wade right into it. He knows it's a political risk. Whether it were me or someone else, the fact is he's the one that's going to be making the decisions and be out in front. It's an enormous political risk. It's the reason health care reform has never passed in this country. There have been decades of trials, but they've never gone forward because it is extremely complicated.

Q Don't you think that the public sees you as the person, ultimately, maybe not ultimately, but mostly making the decisions on health care?

Mrs. Clinton: No, I don't think so. I think they see me as somebody who has tried to do a job that the President has asked me to do. And I've tried to go out in the country. I've had enormous positive encounters with people all over our country, talking about health care. Doing things the President -- (inaudible)-- trying to get out there and bring back the real human story and make this problem come alive, not just some dry economic conversation.

And I feel so strongly that it's not worth being President, it's not worth being in public life today if you don't try honestly to deal with our problems. We've had too much denial and too much avoidance of the problems that our country has. And we deserve better as a nation. Is it a risk? Sure it's a risk. Am I conscious that I could get blamed, or be criticized? Sure. But I think it's a risk that my husband believes is worth taking. And I agree with him.

Q How are you held accountable, if you fail?

Mrs. Clinton: Oh gosh, read the papers, turn on the t.v., there'll be many people who'll be willing to jump up and down and say, "I told you so," and point fingers. But it's not whether I fail, and even whether the President fails, but whether the country fails, I mean that's -- sounds kind of hokey and old fashioned -- but that's the way I feel about it.

I mean, I would be happy if someone in the last ten years had dealt with this problem. I would be happy if someone right now came up with a solution that they thought answered all of the problems that we've been dealing with. But what I have found is that in the months that we have worked on this, many people have worked very hard, they've come up with good ideas, but they've never had a President who could give the leadership to pull it all together and --(inaudible)--

Q Are you nervous?

Mrs. Clinton: --(inaudible)-- because you know, everybody wants to get it right. We want it to work for Americans. I want my mother to feel secure, I want my daughter to feel secure, I want to feel secure. I want to be able to choose my doctor. I want to know that the kind of health care I expect is the kind of health care I will get. But I also want to be responsible, and I want Americans to feel responsible again. Like so many of our other issues in this country --(inaudible)-- . There are a lot of people who don't even know how much they really pay for health care or how much their employer pays for health care, they don't pay much attention to it. Somebody else has to worry about it. There are other people who don't make any contributions, --(inaudible)-- they don't pay for it themselves, --(inaudible)--. So, I think all of us are going to have to face up to these problems, and be more responsible and I feel very, very much that this is a big, big issue. I want to do the best job I can --(inaudible)--

Q The appointment of David Gergen as Counselor to the President has been widely interpreted as a move to the center by your husband, or a return to the center, if you will. Do you endorse that? Do you think that's necessary?

Mrs. Clinton: Well I don't think that he ever really left the center. I think that anybody who looked fairly at what he has done for the last several months would conclude that. I think that David Gergen, who's been a friend of ours for a number of years, will bring a real added perspective. He does have experience in the White House. He's been in this city -- which, based on my short experience, is a very difficult place to understand why it does what it does sometimes. And I think he'll

be a good counselor, which is the role that the President has asked him to play.

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Q Surely it's not simply the perception that he has lurched the left as many columnists have described. I mean gays in the military, abortion rights, raising taxes rather than giving the middle class the tax break that was promised during the campaign, don't you think it's clear that he has...

Mrs. Clinton: Well...

Q ...strayed a bit.

Mrs. Clinton: Both those first two issues were talked about in the campaign. He made it very clear where he stood on those issues. And he won the election.

Q Yes, but he made them his top priority, right away.

Mrs. Clinton: No, he, there were a number of things like fetal tissue research ban, that you know we've had children and their families come up to us and thank us because they had chronic diabetes, or someone with Parkinson's disease, and that was a bill that had passed the Congress with Republican support, and that was one of the first things that the President did because he believes in research, he believes in helping to solve people's health problems. --(inaudible)-- the medical -- (inaudible)--, I don't consider either of those to be liberal, quite frankly. I think that they are in line with a more sensible and reasonable approach to dealing with our problems. And with respect to the economic package, you know, to wake up the day after the election and find out the deficit was worse than you had been led to believe, that there were a lot of tough decisions that were now made even tougher because of economic changes that had occurred, required him to be responsible. And I think he's done that.

And I don't think it's left or right to say, you know, we're going to deal with the deficit, guys. We're going to cut spending, and we're going to try to invest to create jobs. I consider that pretty much down the center.

Q You left out gays in the military.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, that was something else he talked about in the campaign. And it was never, as best as I can recall, ever made an issue. Nobody ran commercials against him. And I think he didn't see that as a left issue so much as, here is our most important institution to protect this country. And there are

many people in this institution who have served honorably. And even the Persian Gulf War demonstrated that.

Nobody really complained much about it during the campaign. So he moved to do it. And this great big eruption occurred. But

I think he didn't view that again as something left or liberal so much as, you know kind of letting people live their own lives, which is a pretty good American tradition.

Q I know you had a one on one interview with David Gergen which might lead people to think, gosh, can't President Clinton hire anybody without Hillary talking to them?

Mrs. Clinton: Well, David and I have been friends a long time. And he came over to the White House to wait for Bill to return from trip, and we visited for about twenty minutes. And then Bill came in. And we visited for about another ten minutes and then I left. And they visited for another two hours. But he's somebody that I've known and respected for quite some time.

Q Your husband will be appointing a Supreme Court Justice, to replace Justice White. Can you imagine him appointing someone without giving you the opportunity to talk to the candidate?

Mrs. Clinton: Oh, of course. He will do that. I'm not going to talk to them.

Q You have no interest?

Mrs. Clinton: Oh I have great interest. I'm an American. I care deeply about who's on the Supreme Court.

Q No interest in talking to the individual?

Mrs. Clinton: No. No, I don't do that, despite what the newspapers say.

Q Your husband has had a tough time lately in terms of the public perception. His approval rating is lower than any post-war President at this point in his administration.

There are some people who believe had you not been in charge of health care, some of these embarrassing fiascos wouldn't have happened. The haircut. The travel office debacle. That had you been keeping your eye on the ball, you would be the one who could say, hey, Bill, you can't do that.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I think that's, it's not squaring with any reality I know. I mean I am very committed to doing what he's asked me to do, which is to work on health care. And you

know, a lot of these other matters are ones that, you know, things happen. You know people make mistakes. And you regret it. But you learn from it and you go on. And I think that any time you've got someone like Bill who's trying to do a lot of things because he thinks the country needs some changes to face up to its responsibilities. It's not going to be batting a thousand.

You know I mean in baseball, you win batting trophies for batting three hundred. And I think from his perspective there are a lot of tough issues that need to be taken on. And honestly I don't think he really is that concerned about his popularity except as it affects his ability to get what he thinks needs to be done.

Q But those two things are linked.

Mrs. Clinton: Well they're linked. But you know they may be linked more in theory than in practice. Because I don't know that any President could be more popular with coming in and trying to do some of the stern stuff that he's tried to do on the economy. You know a lot of --(inaudible)-- cut taxes and raise spending at the same time, ruin the deficit like we did over the last 12 years, never pay the price, you know roll right along, never face the consequences. It's a lot easier to send a budget to the Congress, knowing that it'll never get passed because it's not a responsible budget to begin with. That's the kind of leadership we've seen over the last 12 years.

He took very seriously the job he was elected to do. And what he believes is that as President he's got to take the heat. That means saying look, we've got to cut spending. And you know, cut spending in many instances means taking things away from people that they believe in or that they care about or even need. It's real easy up here to talk about cutting spending. But often times that means cutting jobs out. It means cutting services out. He's been willing to do that. And he's been willing to say we've got to deal with the deficit. And that means we're going to have to be responsible with revenues.

Q But some of his public perception problems have nothing to do with that, about making hard choices. They have to do with making bad decision. Sort of, bad judgement, in recent weeks.

Mrs. Clinton: Well I just, don't think that if he weren't trying to do hard things and he weren't engaged in the kind of struggle he is, to get the budget that makes sense for the first time, (and that frankly is opposed by a lot of very powerful interests,) much of the rest of this would seem as, yeah, somebody mad a mistake. Somebody had a misjudgment. It's not the end of the world. It's not going to take food off somebody's

table, because of a policy that was wrong. It's not going to deny health care to Americans.

So from my perspective, the fact that he's taken these hard things on, has left him open to extraordinary attacks from a lot of people who have a lot to gain by preventing the changes he's trying to bring about.

Q No?

Caputo: Done.

Q I was going to ask you what you thought was wrong with the way the White House was being run, but.....

**NOTE: THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS PREPARED FROM A VERY POOR QUALITY TAPE AND MAY CONTAIN INACCURACIES.**