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AN INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
CONDUCTED BY DONNIE RADCLIFFE OF THE WASHINGTON POST

Q Well, you know every President and First Lady have their own style of entertaining. How do you define yours?

MRS. CLINTON: I think that we try to combine the traditional and sort of appropriate elegance that is attached to this house with a sense of fun and energy, so that people feel that they're really welcome and that there's an informal cast to it, even though we entertain in ways ranging from extremely formal to very casual.

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: It's a kind of eclectic style, I guess you would have to say. (Laughter)

Q That's good. How do you hope history sees it? And what have you accomplished with it? Because there, I would think, has to be a --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I hope that we're viewed as genuinely enjoying people, and warmly welcoming all kinds of people to the White House, and opening the White House to a variety of visitors from all walks of life, and combining guests in an exciting mixture of accomplishment and promise and potential and contribution, so that people really feel that they've had not just a visit to the White House, but they've had a really special time being here.

That's what we want, and much as you would do if you were entertaining in your own home, we want people to feel a sense of joy that they've come here, and not be stiff and constrained by the atmosphere, but to really enter into it and take pleasure in it.

And I guess -- Ann and I were talking the other day -- we have entertained more people than anybody that we have records for, and I hope that we've done it in a way that

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gives them some sense of our pleasure at having them here and really makes them feel excited about being part of history.

Q Have you tried to physically greet or shake hands with every one of those people who has come?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it's hard. It's hard, but certainly at small events we have, and even at the large events. I don't particularly think receiving lines are a lot of fun, but at least it guarantees everybody gets a chance to say hello to the President, which I think is very important, in events that are of a manageable size.

And then at very large events, we just try, by our words and our efforts, to reach as many people as possible, to make them feel like they have been personally welcomed.

Q That sort of leads into something that I wanted to ask you, that you obviously had to make some decisions early on about your social priorities, and that you, did that include looking at state dinners a little differently than your predecessors, and why? I mean, I think I know what the answer is, but I would like to --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you know, this was never any kind of conscious decision on my part. It grew out of what the State Department and the National Security Council thought was appropriate. You know we love to have parties. As you know, we like entertaining people, and we get a great deal of satisfaction out of doing that, but we never were engaged in any discussions with either State or the NSC, other than to say we'll do whatever you want us to do.

And we were more than happy to accommodate whatever they thought was appropriate for the President's first year in office. And I think their decision, which makes sense to me, was that it would be important for the President, first, to meet people in a more working and informal atmosphere than the traditional state visit often permits.

And he has seen dozens of world leaders, and actually a lot of the world leaders have told me -- and him also -- they've appreciated the chance to come, bring their top aides, in a much smaller group, have a lot of one-on-one time with the President and his top aides, and then, maybe on a second visit, we can have a more formal kind of state visit, according to protocol.

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But that's something that just grew out of the foreign policy kinds of considerations that this team brought to the White House, but the White House is ready to do it any time we're asked to do it. Yeah, we love parties. We're excited about the dinner for President Kim tonight.

Q How did that -- what's the genesis of that dinner? How did that come about?

MRS. CLINTON: I'm not really sure, but I think -- when we were in Korea, they had a very nice dinner for us. And we extended our invitation that, if they were able, we would love to return the hospitality. And it turned out that they were going to be here for the conference in Seattle and then coming on to Washington, so it was a wonderful chance for us to return the hospitality that they graciously extended to us when we were there.

Q Sure, yes. Do you think that people are -- let me put this in another way. What are some of the considerations that go into decisions about these dinners, now? I mean, right now this is really the sort of start, I would assume, of more of these dinners that are going to come up. I mean -- and there will be a state dinner, then. Who chooses who comes?

MRS. CLINTON: I think the President and his top foreign policy advisors. I mean, I believe that's the way it has always been done. But there are lots and lots of factors that go into a formal state visit, as I understand that.

There is a great deal of protocol attached. There are reciprocal dinners at embassies, as well as at the White House. There is a military -- an elaborate military greeting, and that is all determined based on the broad kind of political and geographic and other considerations that they take into account. So I don't have any idea how that comes about.

Q So when they reach that decision and the invitation goes out, and then the next one and --

MRS. CLINTON: Right.

Q When you plan a White House party -- now you've you've had all these different varieties or types of parties, and I think that the public doesn't know -- probably because

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the press hasn't told them -- but the public doesn't know about all of these other parties that you give.

I don't mean the small dinner parties and I don't mean the (inaudible) dinner parties, but the ones that accompany the bill signings and those, and that is where so many people come and have a chance to see you. Well, I mean, talk about that a little bit.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that's something that is very important to us. We want to open the White House to as many Americans as we can.

And when I asked Ann to sort of just do a brief recap of what we've done this year, I was stunned at how many thousands and thousands of people we have entertained, in all kinds of settings, from very small breakfasts, lunches, dinners, teas, coffees, receptions, to huge events and seated dinners in the tent and buffet dinners in the tents and big parties in the State Floor and in the private quarters and the semi-public quarters.

I mean, everywhere, all over the house, we've been entertaining people, and I have just loved it, because it gives us such a great satisfaction to be able to invite Americans from all over the country to come spend time at the White House, and even people who have been here many times before, have remarked about how much fun they had and how good they feel.

And, of course, that makes us happy because that's what we're trying to create, is that atmosphere of openness and joyousness that we think should accompany a historic invitation to the White House.

Q You must work on the guest list, and I would guess, just by snatches of conversation, that you probably have to do that in snatches of time that you have on the plane maybe, or in between things, constantly thinking of people that you want to invite.

How do you go about deciding who to invite, and by that, I don't mean specific people, but I mean are there categories of people?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, sure, and we get lots of suggestions from other parts of the White House, from people

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outside the White House. It really depends upon the kind of event. If it's for a particular purpose, then we invite people who are associated with that purpose.

If it's to celebrate some kind of accomplishment of someone, we have those people come. You know, I'm looking forward greatly next week to a Medal of Freedom ceremony where we are honoring four very distinguished Americans, two posthumously -- and their family and their friends and their colleagues and their co-workers -- and this is going to be just an extraordinary occasion.

And one of the people being honored is Marjorie Stohlman Douglas (phonetic), who is 103 years old.

Q Oh.

MRS. CLINTON: And, you know, her being able, and wanting to come to the White House has meant so much to me personally, because I think she's such a pioneer. There's this whole group of older people, and a lot of neat older women in their nineties now, who have been real pioneers in moving women's concerns to the forefront.

One of my great friends, Ellie Guggenheimer (phonetic) is coming to the dinner tonight. I mean, Ellie is in her mid-to-late eighties. And back in the thirties she was, you know, advocating for children and for families and for day care and for things like that. And Marjorie Stohlman Douglas was one of the earliest environmentalists in America.

Q Really?

MRS. CLINTON: And to be able to include people like that --

Q Yes. What about these women who are 102 and 104, these sisters, you know --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, yes, right.

Q What is their name? (Inaudible) and I read in one of the magazines this week.

MRS. CLINTON: See, I mean, finding people who are not in the usual social circuit, but who have made real contributions to America, and who are well known where they

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come from, but who have maybe been to the White House, but oftentimes not, and to extend an invitation to them, in some appropriate setting, is so exciting for us. So we keep -- you know, we come up with ideas ourselves, but we also get lots of advice from people.

Q Sure. Now, I know Phyllis is going to do the food, but, I mean, you have to go to all these things and eat all these things, and how in the world do you --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I have not been as diligent as I need to be with my exercise. If I can get my exercise regimen back, going like it was before I came to the White House, I'll be all right. But, well, you know, as you get older, Donnie, you have to make an extra effort. (Laughter)

Q Tell me about it.

MRS. CLINTON: But, you know, I love the food, and I have so much fun with kind of doing little surprising things. We had a dinner last week around the movie Philadelphia, which is opening in a few weeks. And we had our dear friend Mary Steenburgen, and then Tom Hanks, and others who are associated with the movie, and the Mayor of Philadelphia, because it was shot in Philadelphia --

Q Oh, good.

MRS. CLINTON: -- and we kind of had this wonderful mixture of people. And we served shoestring potatoes. And it was just so much fun, because it was like this, well, "Gee, here we are in the White House." And Tom Hanks looked over at me, and he said, "Well, can I pick them up?" and I said, "Sure." (Laughter) Well, you know, we like to have fun. We like to do this in a way that is elegant, but with some, you know --

Q Relaxed.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, some relaxation and a little bit of pizzazz and energy associated with it.

Q What about conversation, you know? That's one of the great things about parties, isn't it?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, it is; it is.

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Q And how do you keep it rolling? Do you choose people because they're great conversationalists?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, in part you do, but, you know, some great people are not great conversationalists. And some good conversationalists are just great at it, beyond anybody's expectations, so you just kind of mix and mingle. But I think that's one of the things I've liked most about all of the parties that we've had, is that everybody talks.

I mean, the din in the room is just wonderful. Every table is just talking, talking, talking, and laughing and telling stories, and people come and thank me for the people they sat with at their table. They say, "Well, we had the greatest conversation." And we've tried to create an atmosphere in which people are unafraid to talk, and that they really enjoy conversation.

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: And it takes some people a little while to warm up, because they're not used to doing anything other than sort of the usual table talk that you do to kind of get through the dinner. But a lot of people really get into it and have great conversations across tables and including, you know, their partners and the people next to them. That's what I love to see.

Q Do you try to include somebody from the administration at the other tables?

MRS. CLINTON: Sometimes, sometimes not. You know, it's not a hard-and-fast rule.

Q Do you find people are sort of reluctant to address you in -- you know, beyond just the sort of --

MRS. CLINTON: Not after we get started.

Q (Laughter) Do you encourage debate?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, yes. Well, not debate, I don't know if we want to turn our dinners into debate, but certainly vigorous discussion, where people really talk about things that matter to them.

Q Do they talk to you about health care?

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MRS. CLINTON: Oh, they talk to me about health care and history and other issues. And I've had -- I mean, just speaking personally, I've had wonderful conversations at dinner. And I've learned a lot.

Q Does that mean that you take that back and you use that in some way in thinking through a project or something?

MRS. CLINTON: Sometimes. Or I might pick up the phone -- with somebody I had never met before until we had dinner -- and pick up the phone and call and say, "Gosh, what we were talking about the other night was so interesting. Could you send me some more information?" Or, "What else could I learn about that?"

And people do that to me. They'll say, "Remember when we were visiting the other night, and I mentioned so and so? Can I send you something?" So, yes, there's a lot of follow-up.

Q But you don't ever feel that you're being taken advantage of in these situations?

MRS. CLINTON: No, no. I think partly it's because we try to treat people with a level of respect and openness that puts them at ease. So I don't think they have to try as hard.

They don't have to kind of make their mark, you know. They feel much more comfortable with us, and I like that, because I think it's a much better way for people to really communicate, as opposed to just score their points, you know, and try to move on.

Q Sure, yeah. What do you keep in mind when you're seating a table?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I get a lot of good advice from Ann and her staff and others, because it's always hard. But sometimes we have good friends who come, and we've seen them a lot, and even if they're people who are on some sort of protocol list, very high ranked, they won't be at our tables, because they're people we always get to see and we want them to meet other people.

So we just kind of mix and match. We're trying to

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be both sensitive to the position people hold, but also to create an atmosphere at every table, where people feel comfortable and engaged.

Q When you first moved here, was there something about the entertaining prospects that sort of, made you, sort of, stand back and think, "Gosh, I didn't know there was so much to it"?

MRS. CLINTON: No.

Q You'd been here. You'd been here as a guest

MRS. CLINTON: I'd been here as a guest, and we had entertained, obviously, when Bill was Governor. There were a lot of things we wanted -- we wanted to entertain in a very open way and use a lot of the house, so we wanted to get a lot of work done in the house and get the renovating we were doing, because it gives us a lot of pleasure when people come, to be able to show them The Treaty Room, for example.

Q Sure.

MRS. CLINTON: Because it's such a historic room, filled with extraordinary objects from America's past, and associated with this house. And that took a while. We couldn't really start entertaining the way we like to entertain until we were able to get a lot of that behind us. And we also had a series of very large events.

There were some surprises that -- you know, we had to learn, as you do any time you come to a new place. You know, how many people you can accommodate, what the best movement patterns are, what are the best seasons to use a tent. I mean, those are things you just kind of have to go through once to figure out how best to make it work.

Q Anything in particular about tonight that you wanted to be sure --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we wanted to do a couple of things. We wanted President Kim and all of the members of his group to feel very welcome. So we went to some length to find out what kind of food he likes. So that we could serve an American menu, but, for example, he really loves American beef, so we're going to serve beef.

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And we wanted to find out if had any favorite music, and we were able to get a copy of a very favorite Korean song for him, so we will be playing that during the evening.

And we know that he likes American music, so we will have a medley of American songs by Jessye Norman, who has just come out with this terrific new CD of American songs. So we try to do some things that have some touches that he would feel particularly comfortable with, because we thought that was an important way to extend the hospitality we wanted to him and his wife.

Q So have you been having fun? Are you enjoying --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, we're having a great time.

Q Enjoying your job?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. (Laughter) My many jobs. My many jobs, my many hats. I am actually enjoying them. I am looking very much forward to the Thanksgiving break, though, because I think both my husband and I are pretty tired, as are many people in the White House and in the Congress.

But, you know, we come back on Monday, and we have this big PBS -- our second PBS event. We have a huge event in the East Room for the second of our series -- you know, we had that jazz --

Q (Inaudible)

MRS. CLINTON: -- performance, and we've got a cabaret night Monday night, and we have a big dinner -- we have a number of house guests Tuesday night because of the premiere of Schindler's List, which is a very important movie, we think. I read that book, and I'm almost tense about seeing the movie, because it was such an extraordinary story. Then we have a big dinner Wednesday --

Q That's in connection with that movie?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, yes. Steven Spielberg has made this movie, which is an extraordinary story about a man named Schindler who went to great lengths and lots of personal danger to save many Jews during the Nazi Holocaust.

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And then we have another dinner Wednesday night, a big dinner in the dining room for a lot of friends and other people. Then we close the house, and reopen it for the Kennedy Center honors on the weekend. And then we have nonstop entertainment all the way through Christmas.

And we're adapting the traditional schedule; we're kind of adding some things; we're trying to upgrade a little bit with some of the events, trying to add a little more sort of Christmas holiday season. And the whole tone of the house, which Ann has just done a superb job organizing all of -- you know, using American crafts, and the kind of excitement we've got from these 8,500 contributors from around America.

So we've really tried to do a lot of things to elevate the house itself and to use the house in ways that Americans feel that they can relate to and are comfortable with, but, give it that sense of dignity and timelessness that it deserves to have. So we're having a great time. (Laughter) We really are having --

Q So you're going to, sort of, go on hold with health care during this --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, no. You know, during the day I'll work on health care. During the night I want to have fun.

Q (Laughter) Oh, God.

MRS. CLINTON: I told a bunch of the Members of Congress -- you know, we're having a congressional ball. I said, "Now, you all need to be here. We need to have some fun. I mean, I want no serious talk. I don't want any business. I want fun." (Laughter)

Q Well, I didn't see you out there on NAFTA. Where were you?

MRS. CLINTON: I was on health care. (Laughter) The whole world was on NAFTA. It had a huge -- I mean, I think every American was called, 250 million of them.

Q You decided that there was enough help that they didn't need you --

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MRS. CLINTON: Oh, more -- and obviously very good. A winning combination. My husband has done an extraordinary job. I mean, this year.

Q Hasn't this been --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh. This is another fun thing we did. We had a group of historians, and they were all in a couple of weeks ago. We had a long dinner Friday night, which I came to late because I was travelling to get back, but the President and some of his top aides and I got to sit around and talk to these historians.

And they kept saying, "This is extraordinary -- you have accomplished so much. I mean, you've changed a lot of the direction in this town; you've gotten people being responsible about the budget; you've got all kinds of positive initiatives going on. The Congress is being very responsive. If you look at any president, it's just extraordinary --"

That made us feel so good, because it took us, out of the day-to-day, you know, bang, bang, bang that has to go on, gave us a little historical perspective.

Q Right.

MRS. CLINTON: And once that happened, then there has been a series of articles about how successful the President has been with Congress and how much he's gotten done and how effective he's been. And so, I mean, we feel very good about --

Q And what about you?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I'm thrilled.

Q I mean, there were a lot of misconceptions in the beginning about you, and don't you think that people have now gotten --

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. And I think they've gotten to know me. And, you know, I have got lots of interests and I'm very committed to doing what I can to move our health care system in the directions that the President has outlined. I think people are seeing me in a more well-rounded light.

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Q Do you think that's because you've worked towards that end, or they just are beginning to see you?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I think both. I mean, until you really get here, you don't have a chance to kind of display all of your facets. And anybody is given such a wonderful opportunity, when they come to this house, to serve and try to do what they can.

Q And how about Chelsea? Is she having fun?

MRS. CLINTON: She's having a great time.

Q A lot of parties?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we have a lot of parties here. We had -- 13 girls spent the night two weeks ago. We've had lots of entertainment for her friends, too, which is fun.

Thanks, Donnie. I'll see you later.

Q Okay.

MRS. CLINTON: All right.

Q Bye.

(The interview was concluded.)

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