

103/A/2/94  
TIME MAGAZINE

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

Internal Transcript

March 12, 1994

INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
BY  
TIME MAGAZINE

Q Would you describe the pain of the last week?

MRS. CLINTON: Let me say that this last week has been like a lot of weeks in my life. There have been hard days and great days. And I really am trying to keep all of this that happens in the political part of our life in perspective because, you know, every day I've had to get up and be my husband's wife and my daughter's mother and keep going and doing what I thought was important. So, for me, it has been the constant balancing that comes, I think, to every woman, but is certainly part of my life and the life of every one of my friends where if it's a big thing that's happening to you or a lot of little things, you've got to get up and keep going. You've got obligations and responsibilities that you have to meet to other people. So, that's what I do, and that's what I've done this past week.

Q Let me ask you this -- before he died, Vince Foster said of Washington, "Here, ruining people is considered sport." Is it?

MRS. CLINTON: I hope not. But I can see why many people feel that way because it does seem to be a place where keeping life in perspective and keeping your focus on what's really important to people is more difficult than in other parts of the country. You know, I've done a lot of traveling in the last weeks, and I have been in real small towns -- gosh, I was in Lenox, South Dakota and Brooklyn, New York within the space of 10 days. And my feeling is the same that it was during the campaign -- that most people want everybody in Washington to be paying attention to what affects them. And they're not interested in the personality and the kind of horse-race aspect of politics. They want results for their lives and their children's lives. So, I hope it's not true, and I hope where it is true people can begin to have some second thoughts about it because we need all of our energies focused on trying to solve the problems of the country and take care of people.

Q Mrs. Clinton, you mentioned that people don't care about some of the things that maybe we seem to be interested in here in

Washington, including the Whitewater affair. And I was just wondering if perhaps you've thought about the fact that people do seem to care that you have a great deal of influence in the White House but no accountability officially. How would you respond to that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that's an understandable concern by the people who have it, but I think it's misplaced. Both historically, when you go back and look at the roles that other women in my position have played, both in public and in private, I think that it is absolutely the case, as I believe Mrs. Johnson said one time that everybody's in the White House because of the decision of one man. Everybody who works here is here, and if you're married to the President, you're here because that's the relationship you have, so --

Q You have more power and influence than any other First Lady. Is it right for you to have so much influence?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know that that's true. I mean, based on what?

Q Based on health care, based on influence over a lot of people who have been appointed to office.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I don't know that that's true either, frankly. But what I would be interested in is some historic perspective on this. This has been said about nearly every woman who has been in this position -- in some respect or another. And it is really -- in today's environment, the media attention is so much greater and the relentless attention is constant that I think it magnifies anything, even the smallest thing becomes much bigger.

So, but if you go back and read the editorial opinion and news coverage of other women who've been here and the kind of political attacks that they were subjected to, you know, I don't know that that's a fair comparison. But, if people are concerned about that, I can only say that what I am trying to do with respect to health care is what my husband has asked me to do. It's what he has turned to me to help on, but I am one of many. I mean, there are many people in the White House, in the Congress, around the country who are working on this. I serve as a spokesperson, but he's the decisionmaker. He always has been, he will be as this moves through the Congress. I think, to some extent, this is overblown.

Q Let me jump in here with something a little bit more specific. Did you or the President ask Bernie Nussbaum, Patsy Thomasson or your Chief of Staff to sort documents from Vince Foster's office the night he died?

MRS. CLINTON: No, not that I am aware of. I certainly didn't,

and I have no reason to believe anybody did.

Q Did you know about it?

MRS. CLINTON: No. I don't think that happened. There's been no -- I've never read anything that suggested that ever happened. So, I don't know what you're talking about.

Q Well, we've read that at least at some point during the night documents were removed, including the Whitewater documents.

MRS. CLINTON: That's just not true. I think what you're confusing, based on my reading of the press reports, is that the next day or the day after when the investigators came, Bernie went through the documents in the presence of the investigators. That's what I believe happened.

Q So, you don't believe that they went in there the night of his death --

MRS. CLINTON: And sorted documents?

Q? Yeah.

MRS. CLINTON: No, I don't believe that.

Q Okay. This is to another specific question, if you don't mind. Jim McDougal claims that your contribution to Whitewater was limited to just \$13,000, not the \$69,000 reported in the Lyons(?) Report. Do you recall who's right?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, Jim doesn't have any documents that he can recall only from his memory. And we are doing everything we can to cooperate with the special counsel so that everybody will know exactly what we contributed, and that's -- all we've ever done is to say, look, we lost money on this. And we made a losing investment, and we're going to give every scrap of paper we can find and have to the special counsel.

Q Do you think that you may have overdeducted on your income taxes during those years, during the 1980s?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we don't know. We don't believe so. But during the Lyons(?) Report, they brought to our attention a deduction, two deductions, that were supported in our documents which we had, but were contradicted in documents we had never seen before until they were collected for that report. And once that was brought to our attention, we paid back. Because we're not out to take any advantage of anybody. We are only able to act on the knowledge we had at the time. And we

have tried to be as scrupulous as possible about that. But there were many activities that were carried on we didn't know anything about and have been only recently brought to our attention. And as we gather new information, we will act appropriately as we did based on the information we had at a previous time.

Q One more question to that general area. In 1986 McDougal says you had the chance to sell out. Most of the lots had been sold at that time. Do you recall why you decided not to sell then?

MRS. CLINTON: You know, we're just going to let all of this unfold in the course of the special counsel's investigation. And, again, I would only say, this was a private and unsuccessful business deal. So, from my perspective, we will do everything we can to give every piece of information to the special counsel so there can be a full and fair and documented report that will get to the bottom of this and get it behind everybody.

Q Mrs. Clinton, you're wearing two hats now. As a private citizen under a potential legal cloud, you have an interest in not disclosing information. But as the First Lady, you have a responsibility to be candid with the American people. It's a tough situation to be in. Which comes first?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, but it's not, because we have been candid. We have been candid all the way through this. We made an investment decision that lost money. Now, I have only recently come to appreciate how important that fact has been to people, particularly to the press. I have to admit that for the last two years, I was bewildered by people's interest in this. I mean, it happened many years ago. We did the best we could always to be as straightforward in our dealings on this as we could based on what we knew. And so, I've never, until recently, appreciated how this became such a big issue.

We have fully cooperated with the grand jury, with the special counsel. We have been more than open and candid. We have not denied any document. We have claimed no privilege. We are not in any way unwilling to be fully candid about this. But for years now, we have been asked questions we didn't know the answer to. We did not run the company. We did not make its decisions. We did not have its documents or its records. So, we couldn't answer most of your questions anyway. We've done the very best we could based on what we knew and could vouch for.

Q Would you testify before Congress --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we'll have to see if that's what Congress decides to do.

Q Do you feel that you've -- anything that you would have done differently over the last few years or made any mistakes?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we've made lots of mistakes. We never should have made the investment, number one. But you know those are things that you can look at in hindsight. And I suppose the other big mistake that I made was not appreciating how other people viewed this when I knew we had done nothing wrong, and we had done everything we knew to make good on obligations that we had learned about like paying property taxes and other things to try to be as careful as possible.

So, yes, I mean, we've made lots of mistakes. I'll be the first to admit that, and obviously wish that we hadn't. But those are things that you look at in retrospect. And we didn't do anything wrong. We never intended to do anything wrong. And we're just going to cooperate with this process which people, I think, should let work its course until finally it gets to the bottom of all this, and then everybody can see the same information at the same time.

Q Do you worry about how this whole mess is going to affect your husband's presidency?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I worry that anybody would give it any credence that would affect his presidency. He said, I thought, very well several times last week that he is cooperating; he's having everybody cooperate; he wants to get to the bottom of this. There is no "there" there. This is something that has been, for reasons I now appreciate, whereas I didn't before, you know, blown up to huge proportions. And I think that there is no justifiable reason why anyone should let this affect his presidency. So, that's what I think will eventually be shown to the public and the press.

Q Health care is already in some trouble on Capitol Hill. Do you think that this will affect it?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, see, I see it differently than that. I don't see health care in trouble on Capitol Hill. You know, for the last two weeks, while I know there were articles being printed about how I was probably in seclusion somewhere, I saw, I think, 15 members of Congress on a one-to-one basis. I probably met with another 50 or 60. And all my conversations were really positive about where we are with health care. And that included some Republicans as well, not just Democrats. The vast majority of those I met with were Democrats who are on the committees of jurisdiction who are working with the leadership on health care. And from my perspective, we are moving right on the -- we are moving on the right track with health care.

The committees are taking the issue seriously. They are beginning to wrestle with a lot of the hard choices that are posed to

the Congress. I cannot help what other people say about the process. I can only tell you from my experience of the last two weeks how positive I feel about how seriously this issue is being addressed and how much progress is being made. And I've heard that from the chairs of the committees and the subcommittees on a regular basis. So, I'm very encouraged by where we are with health care right now.

Q Can we go back to Arkansas one more time? How do you respond to charges of conflicts of interest in your dealings with some people who had been appointed by your husband when he was governor of Arkansas, and, also in representations of Madison? I mean, while you were a business partner with McDougal.

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know of any charges other than this incident arising out of a limited representation I had of Madison in which a request for a legal opinion was made to the Securities Commissioner. I don't know of any other legitimate claims. Now, there are lots of illegitimate ones floating around these days. Apparently, you can say anything and get somebody to print it. So, I can't comment on all of that.

And I don't believe that there was anything that was improper about that, nor do I believe that there is any evidence that the Securities Commissioner in any way was influenced. It was not proven at all that she would have done anything differently than what she did. And the facts, as they will, I'm sure, be finally produced in this special counsel effort, is that she acted responsibly and appropriately and expeditiously to deal with Madison when there were not many state regulators able to do so around the country because of the changes in the S&L laws.

So, I don't -- you know, I know people can say whatever they want to say, but we're trying to break through all of that and get to what the facts are. And I don't think there are any facts that anybody should be drawing conclusions about that are aimed at impropriety at her or at me.

Q Mrs. Clinton, you worked on Watergate. How do you feel when people compare Whitewater to Watergate?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, it's the way that I think a lot of the people who have been commenting in the last few days have expressed -- that there is no comparison; that there is no basis for it; and that it's kind of a sad commentary that anybody would draw such a conclusion.

Q It's been reported that you opposed originally the appointment of a special prosecutor or a special counsel on this. Is that true, and if so, why?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, there were no allegations of wrongdoing against the President or me. There were lots of wild and unsubstantiated stories which are filled with hurtful claims about people. There were questions that led to the President agreeing to appointing a special counsel in order to get on with the rest of the work of his presidency. And that's where we are now, and that's, I think, appropriate and am pleased that we are going to have this process unfold because we will get to the truth of matters and not have to be subjected to, on a daily basis, wild and unsubstantiated rumor and innuendo and gossip.

Q When you go up to the third floor and close the door and your husband's there, how do you explain this to each other? I mean, you must -- worked all your life to get here. You must look at each other and what do you say?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you know, the reason he worked when he ran for President to get here was to do what he's doing. And it's working. He is changing the economy. I mean, the budget went through the House yesterday on a big vote, and it was a yawn story because we now have a President who knows how to present a responsible budget. I tell him that I think he's making it look too easy, that people are not going to give him the credit that he deserves for changing the course of the country and doing what needs to be done on the budget and crime and health care and welfare reform; that somehow, he needs to have more sensationalism attached to the hard work of the presidency so people will pay attention to it again.

But, you know, when I stop kidding him like that I just tell him that I'm very sad that this kind of situation has occurred, and that I'm sure we could have handled it differently or better or tried to --

Q What would you have done?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I never would have made the investment. I mean, it was a stupid investment; it lost money.

Q -- the politics of it in the past few weeks or few months?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that -- no one likes to be accused of doing things they didn't do. No one likes to see people make accusations that are terrible that would have never been printed, even a few years ago, about the President of the United States and people associated with him. It's a very hurtful and distressing turn of events.

I probably worry about that as much as anything because I know that when all is said and done, there's nothing there on this whole

Whitewater situation except a lot of confused documents that are only understandable in light of what happened at a certain point in time and it will be fit into some sensible order and presented to the world when the special counsel get's done. So, I don't even worry about that. That's not something I concern myself with. I worry a lot about what we are doing to ourselves and what we are doing to the institution of the presidency. And I worry a lot about my husband who I think has worked as hard as anybody could to try to get the country turned around in the last year.

Q           What do you worry about?

MRS. CLINTON: What any wife worries about with their husband. You worry that it's not fair. That he's not being given the chance to make the case that he deserves to make because it's what the people of this country want to hear him make.

I had a photojournalist tell me the other day, he said, gosh, some people say that the President didn't get a honeymoon; he didn't get to the bridal suite. You know, I think that despite all of that, he has never lost his optimism. He's never lost his hope. He's never lost his commitment to this country and to what he's trying to do. And so, he keeps going no matter what anybody says or does.

Q           What about you?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I feel on most days good about what I'm doing. But on other days, I get down like anybody else. It's not easy to have people saying untrue things about you. And you wonder, why can they do that? And then when you stop and think that now that you're in public life at the level we are, we have no protection against any of that. People can lie about you on a regular basis and you have to take it. That's very hurtful. I mean, that really is hard to take, you know, because I've got a family. I've got a mother who is very proud of us. And to see the things that are said without any refutation or correction most of the time is painful to your friends and your family. So, I worry a lot about them. I mean, I spend a lot of my time sort of cheering up my friends who are in distress and anger over what they see or read. But I feel like I've got a wonderful --

Q           Who -- you up?

MRS. CLINTON: My husband and I. I mean, because we know how this is going to turn out. And we will be fine. We are both resilient and committed, and we are here because of what we want to do for this country. So, we just get up every day and keep going.

In addition to my personal obligations to my family and my friends, I mean, I have -- I have a lot of young women who work for me whom I think deserve an example of somebody who keeps going and gets up

and does what she's supposed to do because that's what women have to do every day of their lives. And a lot of the young women I see when I go to college campuses with the kind of bright eyes and enthusiasm about what's lying ahead of them, I want them to know you cannot be deterred. You cannot be turned into a victim by other people who have either ignorance or malice towards you. You've got to live your own life. So, you know, you just kind of take the good with the bad and you have faith in the way it's all going to turn out. And that's what I do.

Q How do you explain this to Chelsea?

MRS. CLINTON: Chelsea doesn't need an explanation. I mean, she is fully aware of what happens in politics. We've been telling her that since she was six years old. We've told her that her father has chosen a profession because he really cares about people, to serve people and that with that, come great opportunities and wonderful experiences. But also with it come a lot of the worse that human nature has to offer. And that is something that we have prepared her for and that she has seen more of in her young life than probably most children her age. But we spend most of our time together, you know, playing cards and doing jigsaw puzzles and watching basketball on T.V. So, that's something that we don't really spend a whole lot of time dwelling on.

Q That's great. Thank you very much.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. I'm glad you could come in.

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