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CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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PRESS AVAILABILITY WITH
THE FIRST LADY AND CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT

Q Why was the trip now as opposed to last week or next week?

MRS. CLINTON: It was just scheduled. I had a longstanding date to be in Denver. I don't remember when we scheduled it, but it was many, many weeks ago. Then, Dick had asked me to come to St. Louis and Senator Dan Forrest had urged me to go to Washington University. This fit in because it seemed efficient to stop either going or coming. My engagement in Denver was on a Monday so I couldn't very well stop on a Sunday, so we decided to stop on the way back to Washington.

Q I know that the people asked Whitewater questions and how it fits in. How does it, though, take away from the health care discussions?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't think it does take away from the health care discussion. I don't think it has anything to do with the health care discussion. I think that it is a diversion and certainly takes some of my time that I could otherwise spend on health care. But much of the work on health care has now moved to the Congress. So I don't think it has an effect on health care.

Q Is there a link between the opposition to some parts of the health care program and some of the uproar over Whitewater or at least those fanning it?

MRS. CLINTON: That has been suggested. I don't have anything to add to what others have suggested as being a possible link.

Q At the university, there was only seven picketers.

MRS. CLINTON: That's remarkable.

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Q They had Whitewater signs and they were also members of this area right to life, which I know. I know these people are opposed to certain provisions of the health care plan. I understand there were some banners and stuff in Denver. I mean, is there some sort of -- people are using it?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I'm sure the opposition is using it because they don't want change in the health care system that works in ways that they approve of right now. I was surprised that yesterday in Boulder and Denver there were so few protestors, and even here in St. Louis. I think that people are a little bit cautious about coming out into public to protest against the health care plan because there's overwhelming public support for the underlying principles of the plan.

Q As First Lady, I know you got this really heavy applause (inaudible) how you had redefined the roles. On the other hand, there are some critics, I'm sure you're heard all this, on the issue of can one play it both ways or what does one do when one is in a policy position but also not in a position where you can be like Nessbaum and say the heck with it. I'm going home. How do you deal with that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that has been an issue that women in this role have dealt with for 200 years. If you go back and read about Dolly Madison or Abigail Adams or, you know, Mrs. Polk or Edith Wilson or certainly Eleanor Roosevelt, those are some of the more dramatic examples of women who were criticized for the roles which they played. But that kind of goes with the territory. I understand that that is something that will happen no matter what you do.

I want to make a contribution to my country, and I want to do what my husband asks me to do to help him. I cannot think of anything more important than his agenda for change and particularly health care. So I feel privileged to be able to participate in trying to reform our health care system.

Q Now, is there any circumstances in which you would effectively, like, step out of the policy-making role?

MRS. CLINTON: No, unless, you know, my husband wanted me to do something else. But I'm doing this because he asked me to do. Everybody who works in the White House is

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there because of my husband, you know. So we're all doing what he wants to do for the country in trying to help him.

Q Some of the press stories after yesterday were hinting, saying well, it looks like maybe it's the tax problem. Some of them had talked to accountants speculating on what it might or might not be.

MRS. CLINTON: You know, I am not going to respond to people speculating about all of this. There's a special counsel who is looking into these issues. We're just going to fully cooperate with him and his investigation and let him issue the report about what is or is not the fact.

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: Everybody clamored for a special counsel and one was appointed. You can only run one investigation at a time. You can't have 50 people (inaudible) over whatever records there are, which Mrs. Clinton said a number of times today she never had the records. Finally, there is one place you've got a lawyer looking at it. He'll make a report to the people in the Congress and we'll move on.

The other thing I want to say is that she has done a better job in the policy role and leading on an issue than anybody who has ever been a First Lady in my experience. We would not be where we are on health care without her leadership.

The congressional budget office the other day, in evaluating the Clinton plan, said they had never seen such a detailed comprehensive plan on health care. We would not be talking about health care if she hadn't taken this on and made it an issue.

Q Are you married to employer mandates? That seems to be one of the things that's being bounced around Congress. Is there employer mandates or is there not?

MRS. CLINTON: There has to be some form of an employer mandate. You cannot get to guaranteeing health coverage for every American without some form of shared responsibility between an employer and employee unless you have a single payor system which substitutes a broad-based tax for the entire insurance premium system.

Q Are reporters the only people who really ask you

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about this?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, yes. I have never ever had any single person, other than a journalist, ask me about this for the last two years.

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: People are interested in their health care. They're interested in the crime problem. They're interested in the economy and their job. That's what people are interested in.

MRS. CLINTON: You know what, I think the other thing is suppose everything everybody had ever speculated or made up about this thing came true. It still doesn't amount to anything. I mean, it is like a nonevent in real people's lives which I think is a credit to the American people because they're trying to make their government work again.

They want the Congress and the president to work together to solve their problems. They are tired of political attack dogs and gridlock and excessive sensationalism. So I think it's a credit to our country that they want us to be talking about health care, which is what we're going to keep talking about.

Q Sometimes you've talked about a zone of privacy or what anybody should have. Is it possible?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know, but it should be.

Q Some of this current (inaudible) seem to begin when the treasury meetings came to life, when people found out about them. Looking back on that, is there any thoughts you have about that?

MRS. CLINTON: I have nothing to say about that.

Q Do we expect more health care trips?

MRS. CLINTON: I have been making health care trips for a year. I have been in probably 25 states. I will continue to travel on behalf of health care. It is the most important thing that I feel I can do to make my contribution to our country. Nothing is going to stop me.

So I just want to put anybody who thinks that this will derail health care on notice, that this is much bigger.

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than anything they might come up with or try to fabricate. We're going to get it done this year because the president is committed to it and the Congress is committed to it.

Q When you mean "this," you mean?

MRS. CLINTON: Health care reform this year.

Q With Chelsea, how does she handle all this stuff that's going on and seeing these front page headlines? I've got my own kids.

MRS. CLINTON: She knows that it's another example of politics run amuck, and she's been involved in following politics for her whole life because her father has been in it. She's known from a very young age that one of the unfortunate consequences of public service is that people will lie about you. They will make up stories about you. They will try to undermine you.

She takes it for what it is, which is a form of negativism that is very unfortunate but apparently part of our political process these days. She doesn't pay much attention to it at all, as we do not.

Q Does that discourage people from running for president or anything else?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I would think it would. I think the number of people who are leaving the Congress this year, announcing their resignations because they no longer feel that they can have a life and put up with the kind of attacks and innuendo and sensationalism that has just gripped Washington and our political system is a very sad commentary on our democracy at this point in history.

I, trying to get beyond any personal consideration, am concerned about how we're going to solve our big problems when we allow ourselves to be consumed by the kind of stuff that is affecting our political environment.

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: Tonya Harding one week and something else the next. It's just one sensational story after another. I must say that this newspaper is unique in that it does not engage in the sensationalism and printing rumors and the rumor mongering that's gone on in so many. It's unfortunate. I don't know whether it's the competition

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that everybody faces or what it is. It's awful.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think what has happened is that the business aspects of journalism have overwhelmed a lot of the other considerations and roles. I understand that it's a business and people feel a lot of pressure, but there's a very important reason the First Amendment exists.

It exists so that good information can be fairly and objectively made available to the public because the public in a democracy can make the right decision. That's very hard to do if they can't get that information because it's screened out by sensationalism.

Q One last question: What do you think about riverboat gambling?

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: I'm for it.

(An interruption in the interview.)

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: Inside we talked with senior citizens about the health care plan and, in particular, the inclusion of prescription drugs and medicare. It was a very good meeting. Like all the meetings the First Lady has had across the country, it's really helping us pass health care this year in the Congress.

Q Are you now saying it is likely that you overestimated your Whitewater losses?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying that we don't know what all the documents are going to tell us until they're all collected because we didn't keep the documents. We didn't keep the records. We've done the very best we could all through this based on what we knew to give a very accurate picture.

But I don't want to say any more because it's all in the hands of the special counsel right now. I want to continue to fully cooperate to give them every shred of paper that might in any way bear on any of their questions and let them issue their reports, and then we'll all see what is best.

Q But at this moment, you can't say that the exact figures you quoted back then are the correct figures?

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MRS. CLINTON: I can say that they were the correct figures and are so far as I know, but I'm not going to make any more statements until we have every piece of paper and we can review every piece of paper. You know, I've paid no attention for the last year to this whole thing. I worked on health care. That's what I care about. That's what I think the country cares about.

Since the special counsel has been appointed, we are spending our time to make sure we've got all the documents and we know what they say. I am not going to make any statements about any facts until we know everything at this point. That's what we we're going to do.

Q You have said, though, Mrs. Clinton --

Q Mrs. Clinton, how are you going to pay for the health care plan?

MRS. CLINTON: We're going to pay for the health care plan by requiring everybody to do what now the majority of Americans do, and that is have health insurance through their work place with the employer and the employee making a contribution.

We're going to raise the tax on tobacco products and we're going to use the money that we currently spend on health care through the federal government more efficiently. Like, for example, with the Congress. We're going to use medicare funding to improve medicare by providing prescription drugs for older citizens. So those are the three main sources of where the money is going to come from.

Q Mrs. Clinton, you said that you made --

Q You said last week that you were interested in (inaudible).

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: What I said last week and what we've said all along is we want the principles (inaudible) in the Clinton plan to be in the ultimate legislation that we pass. We want all of those principles to be in that legislation, including prescription drugs for medicare people. I believe we're going to get that done.

Q Including mandates and premium care?

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CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: I call it required responsibility. I think that's a better way to say it. We all ought be part of health care. I'm happy to pay health care premiums so that if I get sick or somebody in my family gets sick, they've got health care insurance. To make that work, everybody has got to be in the pool.

Q What about premium care?

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: I think we've got to hold down health care costs. If competition will hold it down, great, but I think we've got to have a cap that ultimately comes in to ensure people that they're going to be able to afford health care insurance.

Q Mrs. Clinton, you said that you may have made a mistake in the course of all of this Whitewater business. What mistake specifically are you talking about?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think, Linda, getting into the investment 15 years ago was the first mistake. I think along the way we based our decisions on the best information we had and we didn't always have the most accurate information. I also think that I made mistakes in underestimating what an issue this would become for members of the press and not thinking about it.

It was not an issue that I saw as very important because I knew what the truth was. I knew what we had done and I knew that it was a losing investment. As I said earlier inside, actually, now in retrospect, I'm glad we lost money because if we'd made money I'm sure we'd be attacked even more vigorously.

You know, mistakes were made. I want to get on now with having learned from those mistakes, cooperate fully with the special counsel, which we have done, and try to make sure that the entire story gets out so nobody has any more questions.

A PARTICIPANT: We've got to go.

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