

03/18/94
ST. LOUIS ONE-ON-ONES

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Internal Use Only

March 18, 1994

ST. LOUIS INTERVIEWS
WITH THE FIRST LADY

Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I don't think there's any problem in doing that out in the country. I had a great day in Colorado yesterday. I had a wonderful day in St. Louis talking literally with thousands of Americans who care about health care and want to see action this year. That's what the president and the Congress and leadership like Dick Gephardt are going to give to the American people. So I think that's the issue that most people want to hear about and that I'm really excited talking to them about it.

Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I'm talking more about the way that I didn't really appreciate how important this was to the press for many months and focused all my attention on health care and really kept my mind there instead of worrying about what the press was saying about this issue. I should have perhaps paid more attention earlier.

Also, I'm sure that over the course of 15 years we didn't do everything exactly right if you look at it in retrospect and probably did make some mistakes. You know, that's just something you live and learn and you go on from. This is what the special counsel is appointed to look into. We are truly cooperating with him and looking forward to his report whenever it is finally given to the public.

Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: You know, that is something that we are working on, that we are gathering documents on. I don't think people realized that we didn't keep the books, we didn't have the records. We've only recently acquired enough to actually be able to compare them to the records that we did have. So we will continue to look at that and make

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adjustments as we go along, if necessary.

Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that it is going to be as it always has been a nonevent. It is a failed land tract action that we lost money on. It has no effect on my husband's governorship nor on his presidency. That's what I always thought about it. That's what the American people will see to be the truth about it. But perhaps we should have taken more seriously the press's concern about it because that is something that until the last several months, I didn't really pay that much attention to.

Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you.

Q First of all, (inaudible) do you think that you are more a central figure (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I don't know. You know, this whole thing is so overblown and really being made such a major deal, but it doesn't deserve to be. So I don't know who is. That really depends upon all of you in the press. I guess you're the ones who make that decision.

Q Do you think there's a possibility you'll wind up paying any more taxes?

MRS. CLINTON: I have no idea. I don't think so, but, you know, that is something that is going to be examined by the special counsel and that's who we want to do the job.

Q Well, you've been trying to (inaudible). I'm sure that questions like this have taken you off the mark of what you wanted to do.

MRS. CLINTON: No, not really. I rarely am asked questions about it as I travel around the country. Most people want to know how they'll get their health care and how much it will cost and what it will cover. That's what the Congress is working on.

I think when it's all said and done, you know, this whole other deal is going to be what we've always said it was which was a land transaction we lost money on. Thank

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goodness we didn't make money or you all would really be asking us some questions. But it's going to be very insignificant compared to what has already been accomplished by this president and the Congress and what's going to be accomplished this year.

Q Why does it keep (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, you guys will have to answer that.

Q Do you think it's more of a media (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Let me say this. I think this was an issue that was raised and kind of stimulated by people who are desperate to say something negative about the president. There's really not much to say. They've been making up stories about him for over two years.

I think most people in the country are pretty pleased of the progress we've made on important issues like the budget. So we're not going to spend a lot of time worrying about anybody's motives. We just want to get the work done that he was elected to do.

Q Health care, how soon, how long will it take? A lot of people are very excited about the kinds of things you're talking about. But they're saying with all of the findings over there, are we ever going to see what the president originally proposed?

MRS. CLINTON: I think that the president's principles of guaranteed health coverage for every American is going to be successful in the Congress. That's what Congress is working on.

Q You're the person that's supposed to carry this program. Do you have any idea (inaudible) how long it's going to take to do this?

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: We're (inaudible) on the president's desk sometime in August before the district work period. I think that's the goal.

Q You think you can do it that quick?

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: I do. I'm optimistic about

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it. I've never seen members of Congress as intent on getting something done as this.

Q Would you like to see if there's no other legacy in the legacy of the present administration (inaudible) an administration that does turn health care around, that does do something (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: I want that to be one. I mean, I think we already have a legacy. We already have the first responsible budget that is bringing down the deficit and having the impact of more jobs being created. We've already passed the Brady bill. We've had the most active Congress in over 35 years.

There's already a legacy, but this year we're going to do health care, we're going to start to do welfare reform, we're going to have a crime bill that puts more police on the street. I think any American who looks at the real problems in our country has got to be pleased at the partnership between this president and this Congress with leadership like Congressman Gephardt.

Q Maybe (inaudible). You don't have any friends in the NFL, do you?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, no, but you all deserve a football team. You're a great sports town and I think you should have one.

Q (Inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: I sure did. That was a great visit to Washington University.

A PARTICIPANT: Thank you both, and back to you, Julius.

Q That's right. The First Lady has joined us along with Congressman Dick Gephardt. I know you're on a tight schedule. We'll get right to the questions. You worked for months on your health care plan (inaudible) it. The Whitewater controversy has taken a lot of your time. Now the polls are showing a little down on the favor of the health care proposal (inaudible) problem. How much do you think Whitewater is hurting you?

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MRS. CLINTON: Not at all. I think that if you look at the polls, and I've obviously looked at them very carefully, people are confused about some features of the health care plan. But when the president's plan is explained to them, they like what they hear. In fact, there's been a couple of headlines that say it's the Clinton plan that people like, even though they may not know it.

But they like the fact that they're guaranteeing private insurance for everybody. They like the fact that medicare (inaudible). They like the fact that they would have their choice of doctor and hospital, and that we would outlaw the kind of discriminatory insurance practices that affect people so badly now.

So I think that what is happening is there is some confusion, which is understandable. This is a very big change that we're trying to bring about to improve health care. But I'm very optimistic and I think the congressman will tell you that Congress is really moving very well in trying to implement the kind of legislation the president has signed.

Q I know the complexity is certainly a part of it. You have expressed some frustration with the lack of privacy that you've had in Washington and admitted that there were some mistakes made when you probably didn't tell everything right up front and people misunderstood that as being (inaudible).

What do you think, though, about the critics that are saying well, okay, you say they're being (inaudible) special prosecutor. Why not release these tax records of 1979 and 1980? Do you think that would help get them off your back?

MRS. CLINTON: No. We have a special counsel and we've given everything to the special counsel. Actually, the press was very adamant that a special counsel should be appointed. The president agreed and the attorney general appointed one, and that person is proceeding with his investigation.

So we're kind of in this funny position now because we don't want to do anything that interferes with his investigation because that is the legally constituted investigation that all of the press said we needed to do. So

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we do that. Now the press turns around and says well, hey, don't just give it to him, give it to us. So (inaudible) a very difficult kind of question to us.

What we think our primary obligation is is to cooperate with the special counsel who has been lawfully charged with looking into this. He'll make a report. Everything will be made public and then you'll have to read it. I think that's the right thing to do.

Q I take that to mean that if -- I think the figure was \$69 or \$70 thousand that was lost on Whitewater. If it was less than that, then that --

MRS. CLINTON: That's fine. If it's less or it's more -- you know, I keep trying to stress we didn't have the documents that were used in that business. We didn't keep the records. We can't vouch for all the records. We did the very best we could during the years based on our own personal records.

What we're trying to do now is make sure that we have every single scrap of paper that could in any way give some light to the special counsel. We're very confident we did absolutely nothing wrong. We have nothing to hide. This is a transaction we lost money on.

As I said several times in the last 48 hours, even though I didn't like losing money, now I'm glad I did because if we had made money, you all would really be upset with us. So let's just let it run its course. Let the special counsel make its report. Let's get to the bottom of whatever it is instead of these constant rumors and gossip and innuendo of people making up stories which is just a bunch of nonsense.

Q Now that your health plan is into the congressional grinder, what do you think is going to come out the other end? How much do you think is going to change? Either one of you can go with this one?

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: Well, it's not a grinder. It's a little better than that. We're going to get it done. I'm very optimistic about it. I've never seen members of the Congress this enthused and aggressive about getting something done because they really believe they're dealing with the Social Security Act of 1935 and the Medicare Act of 1965. This to them is the biggest thing they will ever do in their

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congressional careers.

Q I noticed today in your speech you did not mention about the health alliances, also not specifically the (inaudible). That has come under some fire. Do you think that may be one of the (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Those are goals, approaches, that the president has proposed to solve problems. You know, the alliance or the buyers probably will purchase these co-ops as a way to get low cost insurance for everybody (inaudible) and to make sure that nobody is discriminated against by insurance companies. If there's another way of doing that, then we're open to it. We always have been.

We think that insurance should be available to the work place like it is now. Then employers and employees should share the responsibility. We believe there ought to be an 80-20 split between employer and the employee. But those are not the key features. The key features are the ones I mentioned in my speech today. That's really what we're working for.

The Congress, as Dick said, has never, in the history of a lot of people who have been there, been so intent upon getting it right. That's good for the country. We want it to be right. We want it to work just like social security has and like Medicare takes care of older Americans.

So we're going to be working with them. As long as it covers everybody (inaudible) affordable costs, preserves Medicare and does the other things I said today, it's going to be a bill that the president is going to sign and it's going to be great for the country.

A PARTICIPANT: That should do it. I'm sorry we lost the live signal. We were having all kinds --

(Interruption to the interview.)

Q We were talking with the First Lady about the Whitewater controversy and what has (inaudible). You said you didn't think it was really hurting the health plan that much as much as the complexity of the health plan?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, not even that so much as the way that it's been mischaracterized and fears have been

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raised about it. I want people to get good information so that they can make the right decision about the health care plans. What happens is that even when people say they are confused or have concerns, once we take the time to explain what is in the plan and how it will work, huge majorities of Americans support it.

I had so many people come up to me today after my speech at Washington University and say now I understand it. I really like it. I had a small businessman come up and say, you know, I've been so confused because I haven't known who to believe and I really now understand what you're trying to do. So the more we can get the information out, the more people will feel comfortable and support what the president is trying to get done.

Q What do you think it's going to take to get Whitewater to go away and concentrate on the plan like you want?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, there's a special counsel. I think we ought to let that man do his work. Whatever the outcome is, we obviously will abide by that. We are fully cooperating, unlike anybody in the past. We're not claiming any sort of privilege. We're not saying, you know, you can't have this. We're giving everything to them.

We are so grateful to have somebody who will look at this and evaluate it from a point of view of what's true and what is factually supported. Then that man will issue a report of some kind. I think we ought to wait and see that and get on with the business of the country, like health care, in the meantime.

A PARTICIPANT: We will do that. Thank you for visiting with us, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Congressman Dick Gephardt. Back to you.

(Interruption to the interview.)

Q -- your visit here?

MRS. CLINTON: I've had a very good day today in St. Louis. I've had a chance to go to Washington University, see some of the activities that are going on there, talk to the people who run the hospital, the doctors, the nurses, and others. I got a real firsthand view of why they need health

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care reform. We talked very specifically about how the president's plan would help Washington University in that medical system.

Then I had a chance to speak to thousands of people over at the field house to explain the president's plan. After it was over, I probably shook hands and talked to several hundred people who told me that now they really understood the plan, that they finally got a lot of the information that they hadn't been able to get through the confusion of the last months where people were saying things that were not always necessarily true.

So I feel very good because I think most Americans, once they know about the president's plan, support it. So the more time I can spend talking about it, the more support there will be. So that the congressmen and senators will be able to make the right decisions.

Q Thank you very much.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much.

(Interruption to the interview.)

Q (Inaudible)?

CONGRESSMAN GEPHARDT: Well, you know, we have a special counsel and everybody wanted that person to look into the facts. You can't have five different people looking at the facts. I think the special counsel is doing a good job. He just got started.

Our position is that we ought to let him do this job. It's fine to talk about other hearings. We can have hearings after his work is finished, but to jump into that now would mess up what he is trying to do. That's why he was appointed.

Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Good afternoon, how are you?

Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, indeed.

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Q (Inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. I've looked at that and actually talked to the reporter who wrote that story because I think that it demonstrates that we need to be a little more emphatic about getting information out about what the cost will be. You know, this is the latest of a series of concerns that have been raised.

If you remember a few months ago, the polls were showing that people liked the health plan but they were worried that they might lose their choice of doctor. We were able to get information out which, in fact, showed that under the president's plan your choice is likely to be better than it is if we do nothing.

So what we now need to do is turn our attention to cost and start talking about how this plan will lower health care costs and make sure that Americans know that and understand how it would work in their own lives. Once that information is communicated, I think (inaudible) will feel even better about (inaudible).

(End of tape.)

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