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RTL GERMAN TV

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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AN INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
CONDUCTED BY ANTONIA RADOS OF RTL GERMAN TV,
THE WHITE HOUSE

Q (Inaudible) after one and a half years in the White House, how was it for you?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it's been very exciting and challenging. I'm very proud of what my husband has accomplished for the country, all of the legislation that has been passed and the changes that we are beginning to see. It has also been a very full year, with both opportunities that I personally have, to work on health care and to travel around our country.

I'm very pleased at what I see happening, but it's also had some difficulties, too. We both lost parents. My father died, and my husband's mother died. So it's been a year of mostly very good developments, but some difficulties as well.

Q In a certain sense, it was probably the most interesting year.

MRS. CLINTON: You're right. That is right. I think that's fair to say. And I really appreciate the opportunity that I have to be a part of what we're trying to do in the country, and I think most of us here feel that way.

Q You are, in a certain sense, very, very much a part of all that. You're a part of the history that is being made (inaudible) the White House. People say you are very colorful. What would you say yourself, how far your influence goes? Everybody asking -- accusing you of being too powerful.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I think they always say that about anyone who is my position, but I always remind myself, as my husband reminds me, that any time you try to change

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what is around you, you are going to provoke opposition. And my husband has certainly tried to make changes in America that he thinks will put us on a stronger road, and I want to help him.

I think back to people like Eleanor Roosevelt, and how bitterly criticized she was for helping her husband, in more recent times, some of the other women who have been in this position. So I don't know that you ever could satisfy people, and what I try to do is help my husband. And when he asks me for advice, or he asks me to work on a project, I consider that a great privilege.

Q Do you think it's because you're a woman, mostly?

MRS. CLINTON: I think that has a part of it. Yes, I do. And I think that is also something that he understands, because we are, in a way, transition figures in our country, and the role of women has been changing. And I think, still, people have questions about that, so very often they project onto me whatever concerns or questions they have about women in general. So I don't really know all the reasons for it, but I'm sure that's a part of it.

Q We've talked to some people who are against you, and they said, it's not because she's a woman, it's because she's so left, she's so (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I don't know. That's interesting, because some on the left say that I'm too much conservative. What I try to do is help solve problems, and I don't think that every problem that our country has, has a left or right solution. In fact, one of my husband's great goals is to get our country to move forward and not be locked into political and rhetorical battles with people on the left and the right yelling at each other. I don't think that's a very useful way to proceed in public policy, and I agree with him.

I have always been someone who believes strongly in my underlying values about what this country should do and how it should proceed. But I also recognize that you cannot have everything you want, and you have to work out the details with people from all parts of the political spectrum.

So whenever anyone says that about me, I say well,

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does that mean it's left, to think every person in America should have health care? I don't think that's a left or a right issue. I think that's a very down-to-earth, practical issue.

Q Mrs. Hillary, because you talked about the values, what would you say your values, your main, principal values, were you are not really made to compromise?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, with respect to health care, which is the issue I've been most involved with on behalf of my husband, I believe every American is entitled to guaranteed health insurance, just as in your country. And I don't think that's a value that should be compromised away.

There are many different ways of achieving that, and the President has said many times he is open to different ideas, but at the end of the process he wants, and I believe he is absolutely right, for every American to have what members of congress have, which is guaranteed health insurance. That seems to us to be a fundamental value.

Q In a sense, in your health care program you are very routine, aren't you? Basically you want that, what we have in Germany. I even read somewhere that you are -- you took Germany as a model and --

MRS. CLINTON: We worked on that, yes. I mean, because Germany has a public-private system, which is what we are trying to build on by expanding our private insurance, but having a safety net for people who are unemployed and otherwise would lose insurance. And so we looked at European models, we looked at Canada, we looked at Japan.

Every advanced economy except for our own has figured out a way to deliver health care to every citizen. Now every country has continuing problems because we are all living longer, we are demanding more from our health care system. But there is no way to compare our country with what yours has and conclude that we are doing as good a job using our money for health care as you are. We spend much more, and we don't even cover nearly 40 million Americans, and many millions more are in danger of losing their health care coverage.

So it is not a left or right issue. I tell many people, trying to provide affordable health care is a

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conservative issue. It is absolutely fundamental to not only our personal health but our economic health as a country.

Q Let me ask you one quite personal thing: Where do you take all your energy from? You have been (inaudible) you have been working so much for a year. Are you simply such a strong woman?

MRS. CLINTON: No. I think, though, that I'm a very lucky woman. I have a wonderful family and a very strong faith, and I believe that what my husband is trying to do is right for America.

So I know full well that there are people who defend the status quo because they make money from it, or because they are ideological, with blinders on, and want things to be done only their way. And they see my husband, and then they see me, as threats to the way they want to run this country. I understand that they will then attack us, but I can't take that very seriously because I know where it comes from. And so we go on with our work.

Q You are particularly threatening to men.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I think to some. But you know, any woman who achieves, as you do, or any woman in today's world, who tries to balance her roles as wife and mother with a professional role, knows that sometimes that is threatening. I hope that in my lifetime, and certainly by my daughter's adulthood, both men and women will let women make the choices that are right for them and not be threatened by the choices that women make for their lives. And that's what I believe in, and that's how I've always lived.

Q Mrs. Clinton, because you mentioned your daughter, I learned she is (inaudible) Germany?

MRS. CLINTON: That's right, yes. She has gone to a camp for a number of years that specializes in the German language and the German culture. My husband studied German when he was in college, and so she is following her father's footsteps. She is a beginner, but she loves the language.

Q Is there any particular (inaudible) or message you would give to your daughter after all the experience you have (inaudible)?

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MRS. CLINTON: That I want for her what I want for every young girl. I want her to develop every one of her capacities, mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, so that she can live up to her God-given potential, and not let anyone tell her what she can or cannot do, but to listen to her own heart and mind, and make her own decisions in life.

That's what I want for all children, but particularly for girls. I want them to be able to have that range of choice, which is what I'm fighting for, for the women in my country.

Q Thank you very much, very much. I would like to talk about four hours (inaudible).

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THE WHITE HOUSE

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October 8, 1993

INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
BY A RHODE ISLAND AFFILIATE

Q I know you're here to talk about health care today. And the plan addresses health care costs. But we want to talk a little bit about health care quality. In Rhode Island a hospital recently misread a woman's Pap smear four times. And she died of cervical cancer. How does the Clinton plan address quality, as well as the cost? Is there a way to weed out the bad doctors, the bad labs?

MRS. CLINTON: You know, I was shocked when I read that. And apparently there are a lot of other women out there waiting to be retested to find out what the truth is about their condition. I just was so sick to hear about that.

What we want to do is enhance quality. And we want to do it by opening up records, you know. One of the articles that I read about what happened here said that the hospital didn't have to tell anybody. And they didn't.

We want to have report cards. We want to know what is being done in hospitals. We want all of us, you and me, to know, so that when we make judgments about where we go for care, what plan we enroll in, we're going to have that kind of information available.

And I think if we provide more consumer information, and if we put hospitals and doctors on notice from the very beginning that they're going to have to be more open in what they tell their patients and tell those who will collect the data, we will begin to weed out some of the problems.

But, you know, they're not just found here in this state. Unfortunately, they're found all over the country -- luckily, not in large numbers. But still any mistake is a large mistake for the individual who is the victim of it. So I'm very hopeful that we will be increasing quality by

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getting more information out and holding more people accountable.

Q Any revolutionary change like this is very difficult for people. It takes a great leap of faith. Why should people in this area trust Washington?

MRS. CLINTON: You shouldn't. They shouldn't trust Washington. They shouldn't trust insurance companies. They shouldn't trust anybody but themselves. And that's the kind of system we want to have.

It's a system that will be very familiar to most Americans. They will continue to get their insurance through where most of them now do, their workplace. But instead of having the employer or the government make the decision about what health plan they have to join, the individual will have that power.

And every year the individual will be able to change, literally walk with their feet. If they have a hospital that, during the middle of the year, it's learned has done something wrong, they can not sign up for that plan again. And they won't be locked in like too many people are today.

Now Washington and the federal government need to set certain standards. We want to make sure every American has health coverage. And we want to make sure everyone has a good benefits package that they can count on. And then we want the states to make sure that they really monitor the system to make it work.

But mostly we are looking to individuals and doctors and hospitals to be making the decisions between themselves. We want -- we want Washington to set the ground rules and then kind of get out of the way.

Q The Clinton plan, will it guarantee that costs in this area will go down? We have some of the highest costs. Massachusetts is the highest in the country. Rhode Island is 13th. We can't guarantee that health care is going to cost less.

MRS. CLINTON: It should. I can't speak exactly how long it will take for any particular state. But even in New England there are big disparities.

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For example, in New Haven the cost of taking care of a Medicare patient is one-half of what it is in Boston. There is apparently no difference in quality. So why don't we have incentives in the system so that the costs are reduced without in any way decreasing quality?

There are many examples of that even in New England. So we think this new system will get better information out. Physicians and hospitals will have incentives to do things differently at lower cost without interfering with quality. Right now those don't exist. So, yes, costs should go down over a period of years.

Q I know time is at a premium here. Let me ask about your role as First Lady because a lot of people say you're so different in this role. Is it something that you carved out to be, a different kind of President's wife? Or is it something generational that would have happened at this time?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I think it's more generational. But I also think there have been many women in this position before who have done a lot of wonderful things. But they may not have gotten the credit for it. It may not have been as visible as it is today with all the TV cameras looking at everything.

I don't think there's ever been a First Lady more influential than Eleanor Roosevelt. But even someone like Bess Truman, if you read the Truman biographies, was very influential, but on the inside, didn't choose to make her influence and her discussions and the role she played with her husband --

Q I have to ask you, do you want to be president?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh no. Uh-huh.

Q Ever?

MRS. CLINTON: No. No. You know what I want? I really want this country, from my perspective, to get back on the right track. You know, I can remember -- and I'm not that old -- when I could leave my house in the morning and wave goodbye to my mother with my friends and get on my bike. And she'd say, "Be back in time for dinner."

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And, you know, we'd have a great childhood. And we were secure. And the schools worked for us. And we thought there'd be jobs for us when we grew up. I look at my 13 year old daughter now. Even if we weren't living in the White House, I wouldn't feel safe telling her to be home in time for supper, let her get on a bike with her friends, you know. I don't know what the future holds for her.

I mean, I would be happy today, and my husband would, too, if we could get rid of violence in our cities, if we could get our economy back on track so that the good people of Rhode Island had decent jobs again that paid living wages, if we could make sure they had health security. Gosh, you know, I would be happy to get out of public life and go back to being a private person again. (Laughter)

(The interview was concluded.)

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Q Mrs. Clinton, first of all, what's been the reception among the real people out here in the world to your proposal so far?

MRS. CLINTON: I think people are very excited about the idea that when this plan is finally passed into law, no one will ever lose their health insurance again, no matter who they are or where they live, and that every American will have health security with a good comprehensive set of benefits.

I think that has just taken the country by storm. And everywhere I go people are saying, "We want health care security. We want it as soon as we can get it. And we don't ever want to worry about losing it again."

Q I know we're all excited. But I can imagine that people must be a little afraid of just change, if nothing else.

MRS. CLINTON: I think that's right.

Q What about these people, older people, my mother, for instance? I was reading in the paper today that the co-payment on prescriptions, drugs, could go up -- could go up. I know everything is negotiable at this point. How do you assure elderly people in nursing homes and around the country that they're going to be all right?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, first of all, they don't have prescription drug benefits now. And so what we have found are literally millions of older Americans spending more money than they should have to on prescription drugs, not being able to get the medications that they need, or even ending up back in the hospital because they couldn't afford the prescription.

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We're going to give prescription drug benefits for the very first time to older Americans. It'll cost a little bit. It has to cost something because, obviously, we can't just give it free. But we're doing it at such a reduced level. And it's going to save so many older Americans literally millions and millions of dollars that the cost will just drop dramatically.

And we're also going to be offering long-term care benefits for the very first time. Prescription drugs, long-term care -- those were the two issues we heard most about from my mother and from older Americans all over the country. And we're going to address both of them.

Q You said that everything is negotiable. You're open for new ideas, better reforms than perhaps you started with. Is there anything that's non-negotiable about this plan, be it philosophy or specifics?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. Yes. The principles that the President outlined in his speech to the Congress are non-negotiable. We have to have a plan that includes everybody. Nobody will be left out again. We have to make health care security a basic right for all Americans. We have to have a comprehensive benefits package that will take care of most of the problems that the majority of Americans have.

And it has to include preventive care. We've gone at this backwards for too long. We have to make sure that people get choice among their health plan so that they can have some control over their own health care destiny, which right now they don't, because either their employers or, often, the government makes that choice for them.

We have to do it in a way that saves money. If all we did was try to provide more benefits and better care, but we only added cost to it, that wouldn't work because then eventually we'd be back in the same position with people not being able to afford it. We have to insure quality. Quality is absolutely essential.

And we have to simplify the system. We need to get rid of these forms and this paperwork and bureaucracy that not only tie up doctors and nurses times, but really confuse a lot of people who have to fill them out.

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And we have to try to have a system in which people are responsible. And to the President that means that it needs to be fairly financed. And it needs to be financed in a way that has everybody involved in the system. No more free rides, no more shifting costs from one part of the population to another.

But those are the basic principles that we cannot compromise on. But there are a lot of different ways of getting there.

And I've been thrilled at the spirit of cooperation among Democrats and Republicans and people all over the country who are saying, "We can work this out. My goodness, if we could, you know, get a social security system, if we could start Medicare, if we could send somebody to the moon, we can deal with the details as long as we're committed to what we want to do."

Q Everybody agrees this is a noble and bold move on this administration's part. But there's got to be risks to it. Do you concern yourself with the political risks of this?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure. There's always risks, any time you try to do anything in politics, you know. It's just easier to kind of go along and try to tell people what they want to hear and not to cause any waves. And that's an unfortunate fact that we face all the time in the public arena.

But it's a risk that has to be taken. It's not worth, in my husband's view, being President if we don't try to deal with our health care crisis. And so for him it's not a risk. It's part of the obligation of being President today. And we're going to go after it. And we're going to get it done. And we're going to make sure that it's done right.

But everything's risky. But what's the point of being there if you don't try to solve the problems that people are most concerned about?

Q Being from Arkansas, I've watched really closely how the media has handled you and how the country looks at you. And, of course, during the campaign in the beginning of the administration, everybody had the tough

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things to say. But now you're the person to take a picture with. (Laughter) Do you feel a little bit of vindication that it's all turned around? Or do you concern yourself with that?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't think that way, you know. I always believed that a lot of people who were saying things about me or jumping to conclusions about me didn't really know anything about me. And I just had faith that if, you know, I just was concerned about what moved me, issues that I have to worry about as a mother or as a woman, that most people would begin to understand that that's why we're doing what we're doing in Washington now with the President and the people working with him.

We had a great life in Arkansas. We had a lot of friends and we enjoyed our time there. But we really believe that this country can be better. And for me that is a very exciting thing to be part of.

Q Okay. Thank you very much.

(The interview was concluded.)

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