

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

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ROUNDTABLE OF FOREIGN  
JOURNALISTS

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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ROUNDTABLE INTERVIEW WITH THE FIRST LADY AND  
FOREIGN JOURNALISTS, (LA REPUBBLIA, THE STERN, REZPOSPOLLTA,  
AND PARIS MATCH)  
THE WHITE HOUSE

Q So the first question, obviously, is what you are looking forward to when you are going to visit these countries, Italy, Poland and Germany, and what you are particularly interested in.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I am looking forward to visiting the countries. It will be my first trip to Latvia or to Poland. I have been to Germany and Italy before. But in all of the countries I will get to do some things I'm very interested in. I will get to meet some women in some of the countries. I think there will be several occasions, as I had the opportunity in Paris and in Rome, to do on my previous trips.

I will be able to visit a facility in Warsaw that is of great interest to me, which is a home for children who are not completely orphans but have difficulty living with their own families, and so they are given the opportunity to be in a residence during the week but they are still in contact with their families. I think that is a very important model.

I also will have the chance to see some cultural and musical events. I will be attending kind of mini concerts in Warsaw and in Bonn, and Adravello (phonetic), which I am very much looking forward to. And then I will get to see some of the sights of the country which I'm very excited about, the new museum in Bonn, certainly, being in Berlin --

Q The museum of German history?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, I will go there. Being in Berlin will be a thrilling opportunity. I will be, along

MORE

with Mrs. Cole (phonetic), going to the JFK high school for a commencement speech to the German and American students. In Italy, I will get to go to Naples, where I have never been before; and in Warsaw, the Warsaw Ghetto and some of the other places in the country that are going to be of interest to us historically and culturally.

So that's a longer answer. But I'm very excited about my trip, when I get to see all of these things and meet all of these people.

Q Mrs. Clinton, my readers just have to know whether you have any Polish connections, family or any other aspect, because we know that you had lived in the Chicago suburbs, and Chicago is such a Polish city.

MRS. CLINTON: I have many friends and many colleagues who have Polish ancestry. I do not know of any in my own family background. I would be proud to have some if I were to discover it, but I don't know of any.

Q As a European press, we are not many -- very often with you, and we would like to tell our American colleagues a side of the President, the President's life in the White House, that no one knows. Can you help us?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I don't know that anything is not known these days in America, but certainly the President is someone who has such a great enthusiasm for life that -- at home, at night, we listen to music. He's a great sports enthusiast. We have been caught up in the World Cup fever, so we are watching as many of the games that we can get.

He is a great games player, so that we play a lot of card games and board games together, and he also loves crossword puzzles and word games. We play Trivial Pursuit or Scrabble. He has a very, you know, family oriented kind of home-based side to him that actually -- since he lives so close to where he works, we get to spend more time together than we even did before, because it's so convenient.

Q How about yourself? I mean, is there a side to you that doesn't come over in the press in what is published about you, or is misrepresented?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that people often see only one side, or only one part of a side. I think if you

MORE

put everything together you would see any one of us in the public eye in a much broader way. But some people want to write about me only in my official First Lady capacity, which I very much enjoy and am pleased to do, the dinners, the receptions, the events.

Others are more interested in my personal side, with my husband and my daughter, and that is the most important thing in my life. And then many people want to write about my public volunteer activities on behalf of causes and issues I'm concerned about with health care.

It's difficult, I think, for many to get all of it together, but it would be as if you or anyone were written about and they only wrote about one slice of your life. So my hope is that people will see me as I hope they see every woman, and certainly any person in public life, as a full integrated person, and let us have the many sides of our life that make up the person.

Q You juggle all of these multiple roles at the White House: the First Lady, political advisor to your husband, mother. Is it very stressful? Do you enjoy it, and don't you sometimes think that you are paying too high a price for it?

MRS. CLINTON: It really depends. Overall, I enjoy it very much, and I feel just positively committed to what my husband is trying to do, so it's a great joy for me to be part of it. Some days are harder than other days. I mean that I think is part of the life that you sign on for when you are in the public eye, and I accept that. But most days I am very enthusiastic about the changes my husband is making. I think he is doing what the country needs to have done, so I feel privileged to be a part of that.

Q But you are often seen as the motivator, as the ambition that's driving, and you are presented that way. Is that accurate?

MRS. CLINTON: People who say that don't know my husband. They don't have any idea about my husband, who comes across -- because he is -- as a genuinely nice person who loves people and is enthusiastic about life. But he is a motivated, very committed leader, who has a very clear idea of what America should be doing here at home and in the world.

MORE

I think sometimes people say, well, how could this very nice person accomplish all this? And they still, when they look at the record he's acquired in the last year and a half, it's the most effective presidency, in many respects, for the last 30 years. In fact, the Congressional Record said that no president had a better first year since President Eisenhower was in office.

So I think people underestimate and in many respects don't appreciate -- again, going back to what I said earlier -- the full range of my husband's attitudes and emotions, and convictions, which is what I think makes him such a great president.

Q On a typical day, what are the best moments of the Clinton family? Is it the morning, the breakfast, the evening?

MRS. CLINTON: The evening. The evening, usually, because that's when we all gather and usually have dinner together.

I remodeled upstairs and made the kitchen, which was only a pantry/serving kitchen, a family kitchen, so we sit around our table like any family, and we have dinner together, and we talk about what happened during the day. And then during the school year my daughter does her homework, and maybe one of us helps, although it's becoming increasingly difficult, because her work is so much harder. But we try to help her. And then usually when she finishes we have some time together where we'll play cards or watch television, catch up on the day, talk about our families.

Q Is there a time that you forget about politics, that you can cook, read, go shopping? Is that possible?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it's possible for me, to some extent. We go to Camp David more often, now, because we are totally away there. And we spend time together just walking around, riding our bikes, swimming in the pool, just generally being together.

I have the chance, unlike my husband, to -- I take my bike out, and I go riding in various trails in Washington, and nobody knows. I go for long walks. I go to stores and oftentimes am not recognized right away because people are so surprised to see me. I go places with my daughter. I went

MORE

to tea just the other day. My daughter and I, and her friend, and her friend's mother went over to the Hay Adams, and we had tea together, and nobody knew, and nobody bothered us. So I get to do that.

Q So you live behind bars, but you --

MRS. CLINTON: Not -- no. But my husband has a much more difficult time getting away.

Q It has been said that you don't like cooking a lot, except for maybe cookies.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, actually, I did cook a lot.

Q Here, in the White House?

MRS. CLINTON: No, not in the White House. I've cooked a few things in the White House. You know, the first time I realized how difficult that was going to be was when my daughter was not feeling well, and I wanted to make her what I always would make her before, which is, you know, some applesauce, very soft applesauce, and some scrambled eggs, and, you know, some dry toast -- just for her to feel better.

So I went into the little kitchen up there and I started to scramble the eggs. And all of a sudden the kitchen was filled with people who said, oh, no, we'll do it for you. And I said, no, no, I will do it. I haven't had too many occasions. But we've made cookies, we've done -- I do some, you know, quick eggs, some, you know, other kinds of simple meals, sometimes on the weekend, but not very often at all, anymore.

Q Now this one and a half years in the White House occasionally have been very tough, both on your husband and on you. You have been under -- at least temporarily -- under constant barrage of criticism from not only the republican party but also people like Rush Limbaugh (phonetic). You have --

MRS. CLINTON: That is the republican party.

Q You have -- well, you have to face very expensive lawsuits. How does that -- what kind of impact does that have on your family life, on your married life?

MORE

MRS. CLINTON: Those have very little impact. I mean, what happened to us in the last year and a half that had impact was my father dying and my mother-in-law dying, and our friend Vince Foster (phonetic) dying. Those were, you know, real tragic losses, not so much with my father, because he was so much older, but still it was a great amount of personal grief associated with all of those.

These other attacks, and these charges, are politically motivated. That is obvious, and we take them for what they are: a desperate attempt by people, who cannot argue with my husband on the issues, to try to destroy him personally.

As a friend of mine said, it's oddly flattering to be so threatening to the forces of the right in this country, who do not agree with us that people should have health care, that people should have jobs, that people should be given more opportunities. So from our perspective, that is part of the political battle we are waging.

Q So do you argue a lot with your husband? I mean, we've read recently that sometimes discussions in the White House are very hot tempered.

MRS. CLINTON: They are, and we think that's good. I mean, I find it very sad that when you have people working as hard as the people in this White House to create change against great odds, they wouldn't feel strongly about that. I would be quite worried if we had business as usual, the way we had in the past, here, where people did not have strong feelings about what needed to be done. I think it's healthy if people have strong feelings and they argue them out.

And my husband likes that. He invites it, because he wants people to set forth their point of view and then strongly advocate it. And then he will make the final decision.

Q And is he -- are you open also to criticism of mistakes that you make?

MRS. CLINTON: Absolutely. I find it very invigorating, because people who believe as strongly as the people who are working in this White House believe are willing to just say what they think. But then once a decision is made -- like the budget plan, which was very much

MORE

discussed and debated -- it was passed, and it has worked. And I think that is what people should look to. The process has been a healthy process, but what's more important is the results have worked.

Q Let's see some issues in which you are involved in a political sense, for example, health care. You have a role, and he has a role. Do you argue sometimes on these issues? Who wins?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, he -- I mean, there isn't -- there is no argument once he makes a decision.

Q But before?

MRS. CLINTON: But before, all of us argue. He wants us to. I mean, if --

Q But the two of you?

MRS. CLINTON: We think so much alike, and my job is to do what he wants done, and that is what I've tried to do on health care. He knows where he wants to end up, and he wants people to work out the best way of getting there. But he's the one who makes the final decisions. He's the one who lobbies for the votes and eventually persuades the people to vote for them. It only matters what in the end he believes should happen, and all of us who are trying to help him understand that.

Q I wonder, do you see differences between women's roles and women's situations in Europe and the United States? And have you taken an interest in it, and what are the limits of this process of women's emancipation in the United States? Do you actually, I mean, see women in combat as progress?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know enough about women in Europe to be able to comment, other than the very impressive women I met in Paris and in Rome, and the opportunity I had to talk with them. I was struck by what I saw as their personal security about what they were doing and the way they presented themselves, which was very impressive to me.

I think that what we want is to reach a stage where women are given the same opportunities to define their own lives and to make choices for their lives as men are. And women who choose to be full-time mothers and homemakers

MORE

should be respected and supported. And I think Europe does a better job in supporting women who make the choice of being full-time mothers and homemakers than we do.

We seem to say, that's a very admirable choice, but we're not going to help you with child care, we're not going to help you with health care, we're not going to help you with, you know, maternal and child needs, whereas many of the European countries actually help women to be in the home more than we do. And I think that's a very important choice that should be supported.

If women want to be full time in their professions, they should have the same rights to progress as men do. I believe they should be held to the same standards as men. I do not believe they should be given advantages or disadvantages. But for most women in both the United States and Europe, we will play many different roles in our lives. We will have families or other responsibilities, and we will have jobs. And that is a difficult balancing act and women should be supported in making those choices as they go through their lives.

I don't think the needs of women are very different in Europe or the United States, but the social and political structures respond differently. And I hope that the ultimate objective is for each woman to be able to make the choice that is right for her.

Q So when you said that you don't want any special advantages for women, would that imply that you are opposed to a politics of quotas? Like the European parliament, for instance, started having a certain quota set aside for female members of the parliament, and some national parliaments and some political parties in Europe also have that.

MRS. CLINTON: I don't want to comment about European decisions. I just don't know enough about all the reasons that go into it, but I want to get to a point where people are judged on the basis of who they are and the job they are trying to perform, and I think we are a long way from that. But I don't believe in quotas.

I do believe in affirmative thinking, and affirmative action. Lots of times women are not even given the chance to show what they can do in a job because they are not given the opportunity, and I believe that you have to

MORE

think more affirmatively about the roles that women can play so that women have the full opportunity to show what they can do and how they can perform.

Q Well, it is a predominantly male power structure that exists in politics, in business and everywhere.

MRS. CLINTON: That's right, and I think that is one of the reasons why men have to be more open to the roles and the choices that women make, and to be more supportive of women in those decisions.

Q Some have already cast you as the next president of the United States. What is your thinking on it?

MRS. CLINTON: That's -- that's absurd.

Q You never even dream about that?

MRS. CLINTON: No. No.

Q Nightmare?

MRS. CLINTON: No. Yes, nightmares, right.

Q Tell us about the appearance of the First Lady. I assume when you come from Arkansas to Washington you have to be -- the appearance is very important. When you were in Paris, for example, women there are very curious, saying, why did she change her hairstyle so many times? Is it because there is a hair style for foreign policy, hairstyle for domestic policy? Is it because of your -- some insecurity or some -- your husband's advice?

MRS. CLINTON: No, it is none of those things. I have always changed my hairstyle, ever since I was a little girl. If you look at pictures of me going back to the time I was a child, there is no set hairstyle. And it's because -- I have a confession to make -- I am terrible with hair. I cannot figure out how to do my hair, so I just change it all the time.

Q (Inaudible) morning and you don't --

MRS. CLINTON: No, I just -- I don't take it seriously. It is not anything that I have ever cared all that much about. I think if it's -- hair is something that

MORE

you can have fun with, because it grows back until we get to a certain age, but you know, it grows back, by and large. So why not do different things with it? You know, you can't make yourself taller, you know, you can't change the shape of your face, but you can do things with your hair.

Q About the last 18 months, was it difficult for you to adjust to this role of First Lady, I mean, one day meeting the empress of Japan, the other (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: No. It's been very exciting. I mean, I've had -- I've had a lot of interesting experiences so far in getting to meet all the people that I've met and doing all of the entertaining that we've done. I mean, we had a dinner last week where I had Jack Nicholson on one side and Mike Nichols (phonetic) on the other. That was wonderful. And so for me it's been an exciting opportunity to do things I never would have gotten to do otherwise.

Q But you have done some things differently?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we've done a lot of things differently. I've tried to have a more informal style of entertaining. I've tried to have different people mixed with different -- with different experiences. We've been told that our parties are lots of fun because people come from different walks of life, and they meet people they wouldn't meet otherwise.

We've done a lot of private entertaining. We've tried to make coming to the White House a special but not intimidating event, so that people can relax and enjoy themselves as well as feel that they're part of history. So we've done a lot of things differently, and I hope we'll continue to do things, and try new things, so that we always can be growing and changing, which I believe is very important.

Q Do you believe gay couples should be allowed to adopt children?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I'm not going to get into that right now. I don't -- I think again it depends so much on the individuals involved. I don't think you should make blanket statements one way or the other on very sensitive personal issues like that.

MORE

Q Yes, but this brings an ethical question. Should the state be involved in that or not? Should it be something regulated by law or not?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, adoption is, and adoption should be, and it should be in the best interests of the child. And that is, in our country, a state-by-state determination, which is what I think it should be.

Q Yes, but on your personal feeling about that?

MRS. CLINTON: It depends upon the individuals.

Q So you are not excluding that?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I don't exclude -- I don't exclude on the basis of stereotypes. That is so important to me. I want people to see people in their full humanity, and I think it's very unfortunate that often in our world today we want to say, well, that's a woman, that means this, you know. That's an African-American, that means that. I think we should work every day to overcome stereotypes.

You know, I've -- I mean, I'm a Christian, and I believe each individual has dignity and worth in the eyes of God, and that each individual should be valued, and that all of us should try to see each other as respected human beings. Then if someone makes a mistake, or someone doesn't perform in a certain way, that person should be treated with respect, but as an individual. And that's what I believe in on all of these issues.

Q But what does hurt you the most when you see on TV Rhonda (phonetic), a kid without health care. What is --

MRS. CLINTON: Children. I mean, what I care most about are children. That's what I've worked on for more than 25 years. Children who do not have the love and the attention, and the discipline that they need to be able to grow up to be productive human beings.

You can be very poor, but with love and parental guidance and support, live a very good, satisfying life. You can be very rich and have all the health care and the material possessions in the world, but be a lost soul because you're not given what is most important in life. And I believe that children need both the love and the support, and

MORE

the discipline of their families, and they need for those families to have certain support and help from the government so that the families can do the best job with their children.

So that -- for example, my husband is fighting very hard to get guns and assault weapons off the streets of America, because even the best family, taking care of their children as carefully as they can, cannot protect them from the senseless gun violence we have in too many of our cities. So it needs to be both the family and the government, working together, to help raise a child. And that's what I want to try to help do.

Q Yes, well, may I touch one -- your favorite subject, health care, for a moment? It seems that the Clinton administration is now backing away from the promise of universal health care, which is, for me as a German, something that is almost like a natural given, because health care cannot be taken away ever in Germany. I'd be interested how much --

Q And in Italy.

Q -- and in Italy and other Scandinavian countries. I'd be interested in how much you took that European/German model, and how far you are willing to compromise on universal health care.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we are not backing away or compromising from the goal of universal health care coverage. We have said ever since the beginning, when the President announced his intent to achieve health care reform, that we knew there would be many different ways of getting there. And there would have to be, given where our country starts, a phasing-in of a program. But the ultimate objective has to be universal health care coverage or it will not meet the President's requirement.

Q Okay.

MRS. CLINTON: That's right, and -- that's right, and we looked very closely at European countries. There is an excellent book that was recently published about the German health care system, by a correspondent with the Boston Globe named Knox, which we read and relied on. I had meetings with health officials from numbers of European countries, and we think that the European countries that have

MORE

universal health care coverage prove our point, that you can provide that security to your citizens and save money, because you spend less money.

In every country here, you know -- I know the Italian and the German, and the French, I don't know so much about the Polish system -- you spend less money than we do. And you guarantee a basic level of health care coverage, which we don't do.

Q So let me try to get this very clear. If there is not a health care reform program that would provide health insurance to every American, it would not meet -- it would be vetoed?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

Q And you would wait for a different congress to pass it?

MRS. CLINTON: That's what the President said in his speech, and that what he intends to do. He has to believe that the legislation passed will guarantee universal coverage at some point that he can trust will occur.

Q So is that the state of mind of your administration, that you can win this one by enduring the difficulties?

MRS. CLINTON: I think that the administration believes that this is not an issue that should be politicized, and it certainly should not be an issue that is subject to partisan political infighting.

Q Well, it is.

MRS. CLINTON: But it is. But that it shouldn't be, because it is so important to the economic and social security of our country, and that all of the other approaches that have been proposed would make matters worse, not better. So we have yet to see a piece of legislation, that the President thought would improve health care for Americans but not guarantee universal coverage, that he could agree with, because we believe you have to have universal coverage to do it right. And that's what we've told the congress, over and over again.

MORE

And that's what -- we're going to wait to see what they come up with in this final stages. You know, up until now every public poll I've seen of Americans shows that 70-plus percent -- 78 percent on the last poll -- favor universal coverage. We believe once the argument starts in the congress for the house and the senate, on the floor of both houses, that public support will make the difference.

Q If I may (inaudible) 500 days into the Presidency, I wonder, have you softened your expectations of bringing change to this country, to the society? And was Washington too cruel for you?

MRS. CLINTON: I think that if you look at what the President's accomplished in these first 500 days -- he's brought so much of what he's promised. I mean, he -- the budget is, you know, finally responsible. The deficit is going down, 3 million new jobs, more small business starting up. I mean, you go through the list of everything that has been done and it is in line with his vision of change, which is to make Americans more secure and responsible, and productive in the future.

Now Washington sometimes is out of touch with what the rest of the country wants. That has been more of a surprise to me than I thought. And Washington is also a place that seems to value what you say as much as what you do. And that's not the way my husband is.

My husband is someone who likes to get things done, and I believe that he's shown how to make the system work. He hasn't had to veto any legislation. He's been able to get legislation through that nobody could get through for many years, the Brady Bill, and the assault weapon. He was able to take NAFTA -- which would have never passed under Bush, because he never would have gotten enough democrats -- and able to make that happen. So you go through the list, and his accomplishments, I think, are very significant for the country.

Q Why do polls not speak about those?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, because -- if you look around the world -- look at every one of the countries, the advanced countries in Europe and Asia. People in the advanced democracies are concerned about the future, and they want many things that are contradictory. They want individual

MORE

freedom and individual rights, but they want security and a strong community. They want all kinds of social programs, but they don't want to pay for them. I mean, you know, that's going on in the entire advanced, developed world right now.

I think that from my husband's perspective you just have to keep working and see the results, and they're very hard to argue with. So that's -- those are momentary kinds of ups and downs that --

Q So no frustration about how messy that process is?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, sure. I mean, don't you wish it weren't? I mean, I wish that we could all just get these things through. But you know they say two things that I often think about. There are two things you should never watch being made: sausage and laws.

Q Well, if we have (inaudible) is the First Lady happy in the White House?

MRS. CLINTON: Absolutely. I'm having a wonderful time. I mean, who wouldn't? It's a great opportunity, and I'm proud of my husband, and my daughter is well adjusted, and -- you know. We're lucky.

Q So we thank you all for this (inaudible) and hope you have a pleasant and rewarding trip to Europe.

MRS. CLINTON: I'm very -- will you be there, or are you going to be back here?

Q I will be here, but I think some of my colleagues will (inaudible).

Q What are the (inaudible) things that come to your mind (inaudible) countries? I mean, Italy. What is the things that you like most?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, the people, the food, the beauty.

Q And France?

MRS. CLINTON: The people, the food, and the

MORE

beauty. I've not been there yet, but the strength of the people, and the history and the enthusiasm about the future, you know.

Q And my friend -- my French colleague wants to ask if you prefer the Italian food or the French food.

MRS. CLINTON: I love them both.

Q (Inaudible) culture -- anything comes to mind?

A PARTICIPANT: We're going to take a picture of you (inaudible). Where is the best place to do this?

Q (Inaudible) book about you that was published in Germany. I hope you got a copy (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, thank you. Well, I (inaudible).

Q This is a book (inaudible) called the (inaudible) power of women, and it deals with the Holocaust and (inaudible) in America, and the highlighting is on your area. And I'd really love you to sign it for me.

MRS. CLINTON: I would love to. I'd be honored to. Well, you know, my husband studied German at Georgetown, and my daughter has studied German.

Q Yes. How is her German?

MRS. CLINTON: It's very much beginning German, but she is excited about continuing to learn more.

Q Yes, maybe she can read that book and (inaudible).

Q Is she actually coming on the trip?

MRS. CLINTON: We hope so, yes. Yes, yes, I think she is coming on the trip. That's the plan right now, unless something were to happen. But she -- yes, she is coming on the trip, and she is so excited, because she has never been to any of the countries. And she's coming on the trip, and then I think we're going to try to work out a side trip to France. She's begging me to do that if she comes, so --

Q So from Berlin, you'll go to Paris?

MORE

Q. Any special program for her?

MRS. CLINTON: No, no, she's just going to be part of the entourage and get to see what --

Q. (Inaudible) like to present it to you.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Well, I will. I'll have to ask my husband and my daughter to read it. Only read me the good parts.

Q. It came out last year in Germany, but this week there will be a Polish edition of this book coming.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, really? Oh, really? See, look at all these different hair styles.

A PARTICIPANT: Shall we -- we'll take an individual photograph of each you.

Q. Okay.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, that is so funny. Oh, where was this?

Q. I think that was in Boston. The photographer, who is a friend of mine, Rick Friedman (phonetic), took most of these pictures. I don't know if you've ever seen that one.

MRS. CLINTON: No.

Q. It's really not -- I think it was one published in Newsweek. Most of them are in New England, and he also picked up a few of your pictures from Wellesley.

MRS. CLINTON: I saw those. Yes. Yes.

Q. Yes, here is one.

MRS. CLINTON: (Inaudible) funny.

Q. Okay, well, thank you very much again.

MRS. CLINTON: My pleasure.

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