

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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TV ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Q First of all, what was your reaction to the reception you got in Seattle?

MRS. CLINTON: Terrific. Washington and Seattle are leaders in health care reform, and also understand what is at stake in turning this economy around. A lot of new jobs have been created since the President has been in; we've been fortunate to get some good, big contracts for Washington businesses. So I think the people of Washington understand what we are trying to do in the other Washington. So I was very pleased by the reception.

Q In terms of having the bill that was really the Clinton bill taken out of your hands, and the Democrats saying, "Well, we have a slightly different version," what is your reaction to what has transpired in that regard this week?

MRS. CLINTON: Absolutely what should have happened. From the very beginning, when we made our presentation about what we thought would work, the President said, "Change it, modify it, I have one bottom line: universal coverage. Guaranteed insurance for every American."

We have expected this; we have welcomed it. Because we have all learned a lot as the debate has gone on. We want to do it right, and I think the American people want it done right. So I thought that was exactly what should happen.

Q What about the statement earlier in the week when, maybe, it sounded as if you were backing away from universal coverage, or, at least, your husband was? How do you explain that?

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MRS. CLINTON: It just was totally misinterpreted. If you look at the transcript of what he said, he was just talking about the difficulties of, even in a universal system, like Social Security, for example, of guaranteeing that every single person is in. But that doesn't mean you have to stop. You have to continue to try.

So what we're doing is saying, "You have got to have a universal system." And, yes, it will take some years before it is fully phased in, and even then, just like with Social Security, there will be some people who fall between the cracks. But we have to keep working to get them as well.

Q I know that care for women and children is of special interest to you. If a bill to your liking doesn't pass, what are the losses? What are the tragedies, if you will, to women and women's health care?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, women and children will be the biggest losers if we don't get real health care reform, because women and children in today's system are often the ones left out.

There are many women working without insurance, and oftentimes, they are single mothers, raising their children on their own. There are many children who have problems that could be prevented that don't care, because even if they are insured, oftentimes, their parents' insurance doesn't cover well child care. So I just regret so much that if we do not do real health care reform, the real losers are all Americans. But particularly children, first, and then women, who have some special health needs that need attention.

Q What do you say to the small employers, the small companies, who are concerned about the cost of health care reform that they will have to bear? How do you convince them your plan is a good one?

MRS. CLINTON: Ask them to look at Hawaii, which has had an employer-employee system of paying for health care since 1974. Not only do they have the lowest health care costs in the entire country, but small business pays 30 percent less than small business in the rest of the country does. We are about to give small business a big bargain if they will actually study this and learn about it instead of listening to people who, for their own political and financial reasons, do not want health care to pass.

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Q Politically speaking, if a bill to your liking doesn't pass, what does this do to your standing or to the President's standing, knowing how much you have got at stake for passing health care reform?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I don't know. I don't think like that. My attitude and the President's is that he was elected to try to do what needed to be done in the country. It's not easy to change 12 years of neglect and the kind of deficit and real irresponsibility that was going on.

So it takes some time to change people's attitudes and to get a new vision about what we can do as a country in place. And you know, Social Security didn't pass the first time. A lot of things. Medicare didn't pass the first time. We know it's tough.

But every day we delay having real health care reform is another day we lose, and is another day in which more Americans who are working with insurance today lose insurance. We are going in the wrong direction. And the costs for all of us who are insured continue to go up.

So we won't be losers. I mean, we will get up and start again and keep fighting if, for some unforeseen reason, we don't get what we think is workable reform. The real losers will be the American people who will go back to being the victim of an insurance industry that takes advantage of them and health care costs that they have no control over.

Q If you had one message to give the detractors of your health care reform plan, who would those detractors be, and what would the message be?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, there are several different kinds of detractors. People who are confused and concerned about the future of health care reform, because they don't want to lose what they have, or they fear that it might be a system that would take choice away from them. I say, "Don't listen to what people are telling you because that's not at all what the President has in mind. In fact, the President wants to expand your choice, and to make what you have more secure."

Just like members of Congress, who get to choose from amongst 300 different plans. So, for those who are concerned, I want to answer their concerns.

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For the detractors who are politically posturing and trying to score points against the President who don't really care about the people I see every day who desperately need health care reform, I ask them to search their consciences and look in the mirror. And say, you know, how would they feel if they were the parent of a child who was being turned away from a hospital emergency room because there was no insurance. Or how would they feel if they were the loved one of someone who desperately needed some kind of health care, but had to postpone it and let the condition get worse because their insurance didn't cover it?

I really believe in the Golden Rule; I think it's a good way to live your life. And I would ask people who don't, for some reason, think that every American should have what members of Congress have, "Why?"

Q One of the real road blocks seems to be abortion. How do you deal with that issue? Coalesce a big enough group to pass a health care reform bill that would pass that issue?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I think the Congress will work that out. There are members in the Congress who have very different views about that issue that are all committed to health care reform. And I'm confident they will work out a very good way of dealing with that.

Q And I have got to ask you one more question, because my two little girls are dying to know: Can Chelsea have sleepovers at the White House?

MRS. CLINTON: All the time.

Q And does she have to have Secret Service guys there to watch the kids as they run around in their pajamas?

MRS. CLINTON: No, no, no.

Q How is she doing?

MRS. CLINTON: She's doing great. Thank you for asking.

Q Good. Well, thank you very much.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you.

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Q Pleasure to meet you.

MRS. CLINTON: Good to see you.

Q And I hope you have a fun, productive time in  
Seattle.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you.

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