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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
CONDUCTED BY JANE FULLERTON
ARKANSAS GAZETTE

(Inaudible.)

Q Well, let's go ahead -- since we've got a lot to do, let's go ahead and get the -- let's get the Whitewater out of the way, so we can get on to the book after that.

MRS. CLINTON: Okay.

Q Let's start by talking about the billing records and some of the questions from that, and then questions about the Castle Grande development.

MRS. CLINTON: Right. Right.

Q And the fact that there were approximately 14 conversations or discussions between yourself and Mr. Ward. Can you tell me just what it was that you talked about during those conversations?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, let me start by clarifying something. Castle Grande refers to a trailer park on a much larger piece of property. I never did any work for Castle Grande, and, so far as the building records show, neither did the Rose Law Firm. So when people ask about Castle Grande, I know nothing about Castle Grande, and the appropriate questions are about what the Rose firm did on behalf of what we called IDC, which was the Industrial Development Corporation, which was the big purchase of land that was done.

Now, I have very little that I can tell you that I remember, independent from what the billing records say, because I don't. It was not a very big matter for me. There were many other things I was working on at the same time, not only at the Rose firm, but, you know, as a volunteer and advocate, working at the governor's mansion, and the like.

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What the billing records suggest is that there were numerous conversations and work that was done concerning an option that was being considered. I don't know much more about it than that.

Q Did you help to draft the option?

MRS. CLINTON: I had something to do with the option, based on the time records, but I do not, at this time, know exactly what I did. I cannot tell you that. I can only tell you what the time records show, which is that I had something to do with it. I think it is unlikely that I would have drafted it, plus done everything else, in the two-hour period in which the work is referenced, but that's all I can tell you, and that's based on looking at the time records, which -- before they appeared, I had no independent memory of that.

I also supervised some legal research on issues like whether there could be a -- as I recall, a brewery -- on that property, how they were going to get sewer and utility services. But the only way I can tell you that is because I have now seen those billing records.

Q What about the conversations with Mr. Ward? Do you recall what you discussed during those at all?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I don't. I assume it was about things like the brewery and utilities and this option, and that's all I can tell you.

Q When you talk about the fact that you worked on the IDC property, can you be more specific at all in terms of what you did on that, as opposed to what people are calling Castle Grande?

MRS. CLINTON: I can only refer you to the billing records. That's the only information that I have. And they speak for themselves, insofar as they are able to, but I'm doing the best I can to answer questions about something that happened 10 and 11 years ago that -- even though I have a pretty good memory, I do not have total recall, particularly about events that were not very meaningful to me at the time, and this was one of many, many things I did in the course of my days, my weeks, my months, that didn't make any lasting impression on me. And that's all I can tell you.

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Q Now, the RTC ended up criticizing that particular deal, between Madison and Mr. Ward, pretty significantly, and some of the Republicans on the Whitewater committee have insinuated that you, as an attorney, since you had an affiliation with that agreement, in some way may have fault for what the RTC ended up criticizing. How do you respond to that?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I don't know how to respond to that. I think it's something we'll just have to leave for people to make up their own minds. I've told you all that I know that I did, and I have nothing further to add.

Q Let me ask you, on kind of a different angle -- Senator D'Amato has accused some of your staff and friends of being somewhat less than forthcoming in their testimony, and I'm just curious what you think of their testimony and the fact that he has -- I think you could characterize it as threatened them -- with perjury charges. Just what do you think of that potential out there, for them?

MRS. CLINTON: I think there's no basis for that. I think it's more of the political grandstanding we've seen out of that committee. I want to be very clear about this. No documents were taken out of Mr. Foster's office the night that he died. Maggie Williams has passed two independent lie-detector tests -- one, I think, was conducted by the FBI -- verifying her story. I did not direct anyone to interfere in any investigation.

But I don't find it unusual that, in the wake of shock and trauma and tragedy, people could not tick off, with perfect recall, exactly what they said, when, to whom. I know perfectly well what I was talking about with them and others of my friends during that very painful time. We were talking about how this could have happened, how Vince's family was holding up, our own personal grief. You know, there were times when people, including, you know, members of my staff -- when one or the other of us was crying on the phone.

So I know exactly what we were talking about. I cannot tell you what I said, when. And I also know what we were not talking about. We were not talking about documents or anything other than how we felt about this unbelievable occurrence.

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Q Now I'm going to ask you -- I know you've been asked this question before, but I'm going to go ahead and ask it again. Couldn't you just go ahead and clear up a lot of these questions, and maybe keep your staff and some of your friends from having to appear again, if you just went up and voluntarily testified before the committee, or held a news conference, something in a public forum, along those lines? Is that something you would consider?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I am speaking out very frequently. I am going to answer every question anybody poses to me, in as many different ways as I can, and I will cooperate, as I have, in every way possible, with anyone who is trying to get to the truth of this matter.

Nobody wants this over with more than I do. So I will continue to do everything that I can to try to bring this to a close.

Q So would you rule out the concept of testifying before D'Amato's Whitewater committee?

MRS. CLINTON: I'll do whatever I can to cooperate.

Q On a different topic, let me ask you about Mr. Watkins' memo. In that memo, he characterizes the White House -- he characterizes you as a driving force in the Travel Office firings, and as staff members being frightened of you. Can you tell me, why would he make that kind of a characterization if it weren't true?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think you have to ask him, and he'll have a chance to speak for himself. I think that it's well known -- and I have said for a number of years now -- that I did express concern about the reports of financial mismanagement in the White House Travel Office, and that an independent accounting firm found that there was cause for people to be concerned, and action was taken. But I did not direct the action, and Mr. Watkins' memo does not say I directed any action.

But I also think it's fair to say that there is something about being in the White House that does magnify people's words, so that, if my husband says, for example, he likes bananas, all of a sudden, everywhere he goes, there are bunches of bananas. He doesn't -- you know, that's something we've had to learn, being here, and it is one of the lessons

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that we've learned. So that my very expression of concern, which is what it was, could be heard differently, third-, fourth-, fifth-, sixth-hand. And, since Mr. Watkins doesn't say I ever told him to do anything, but it was just the impression that people had, I can't speak to that.

But I certainly do not in any way back off from saying that I did express concern, because I did.

Q I'm curious. When was the last time you or your husband was in contact with Mr. Watkins? What kind of relationship is there now?

MRS. CLINTON: I can't speak for my husband. I don't know that. But I haven't seen or talked to him for quite some time. I couldn't tell you exactly when.

Q He is just one of the many Arkansans who followed you -- you and your husband -- up here with high hopes for what was going to be done for the country, and a number of those people have met with controversy or some disappointment -- Mr. Watkins, Mr. Foster, Mr. Hubbell, Mr. (inaudible), and some of those people. How do you react to that, on the human level, kind of on a personal level, in terms of what has happened to some of those people who came with you to Washington?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it saddens me greatly that anyone -- not only those of us from Arkansas, but anyone -- has had any difficulty. But I think the bigger and more important story for the country is how much has been accomplished and what important work many Arkansans have done in this administration. Look at the work James Lee Witt has done. It has been extraordinary. Bob Nash is now the head of personnel in the White House, and he's the first African American man ever to be an assistant to the president. He is performing, as you would expect, admirably.

I think, if you look at many of the other Arkansans, throughout the government, there is so much to be proud of, and that story doesn't get told, and I wish that the Democrat-Gazette would start profiling the many, many success stories of people from Arkansas who not only have done great jobs, but have contributed to the successes of this administration, because any fair reading of what has been done the last three years demonstrates that the president has accomplished much of what he set out to do, and

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he has also held the line against a lot of the efforts in the current Congress to turn the clock back on programs like Medicare and Medicaid, because he knows what life was like in Arkansas and how important that is for people.

So that, to me, is balanced against the sadness that you feel anytime people you know encounter trouble.

Q Let me ask just one more along these lines. The whole cumulative effect of all of this stuff has been to raise questions about your credibility with a lot of the people in the public, and now the timing of this is not only just as you are starting your book tour, but as the reelection campaign is getting ready to begin, as well. So, in essence, this time around, you have also become a character issue, so called, in the media. How do you respond to that, and how will that affect your campaign role, if at all?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't think it will affect my role at all. I think that much of this is politics as usual, and it's just more heated now that it's a presidential election year. I think that goes with the territory. It's not pleasant to live through. It is certainly regrettable for our political system that that has happened. You know, the president, I think, said the other day that there have been more than 40 hearings on Whitewater and only one on the future of Medicare.

So I understand that this is part and parcel of what happens in the political system today, but I'm going to talk about my book; I'm going to go and talk about the issues that I've worked on for more than 25 years, about children; I'm going to support my husband in his efforts to save Medicare and Medicaid and education and environmental investments we have. And I have a great deal of faith in the fundamental fairness of the American people. They will see this for what it is; they will make their own decisions about me as a person, about the president as a person and as a president.

So that's how I think this will play out over the next year.

Q So you see yourself taking the same kind of active role in the campaign that you have always done?

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MRS. CLINTON: Absolutely. I believe strongly in all of the issues that the president is standing up for, and I will do whatever I can to help him.

Q Okay. Now we're all done with that. Let's talk about the book for a while.

MRS. CLINTON: Mm-hmm.

Q Much of the -- let me start by asking this, though. Most of the attention, at least inside the Beltway, has focused on travel arrangements and who wrote the book and questions like that. That's got to be frustrating to you.

MRS. CLINTON: Yeah, but after you've been here a while -- you know, it took me about, oh, a year to figure out that this place is not like any other place, and so I now just have to accept that. I've learned a lot in the three years I've been here.

What's important is that this book is about what America should do for its children, and "it takes a village" is the idea that all of us have a role in helping to raise our children. That means we can mentor or tutor a child, or try to protect children from the violence and destructive behavior on the television that they see, or persuade businesses to be friendlier to families. And I just hope that this message, about children, gets out broadly to the American people, despite the storm over Whitewater, because these are the issues that, as a mother, as a woman, as a long-time volunteer and worker on behalf of children, and as a First Lady, that really matter to me and the people that I talk with.

So I have very little control over a lot of the other stuff that happens, but I can take every chance available to me to talk about, what should we do to better educate our children? What can parents do, starting tomorrow, in Little Rock or Blytheville or Fayetteville, to get their children better prepared for school? How can teachers bring out the best in each child and not just put them into cookie-cutter education formulas? What can we do to control the TV? Turn it off, for one thing; band together with other parents to protest programs that are destructive. There are many ideas in here that will work.

And so that's my biggest hope: that I can have a

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chance to talk about these ideas, so that other people can do what they can do to help our children.

Q A lot of the ideas that you talk about include a very substantial role for the government, in terms of health care, day care, Head Start, some of those kinds of programs. Given the current tenor of the time, sort of the anti-government mood, do you think that those are realistic proposals, that that's something that can actually happen?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think what's important about this book is that it is not a book about government. It is a book about families. It's a book about neighborhoods. It's a book about schools and churches. It's a book about the media. It's a book about businesses. It's a book about service. It's a book about all the different aspects of our lives together.

There is a role for government, but I think the debate over our children's future has been much too skewed toward what the government should or shouldn't do. Instead, we should ask what each of us can do. I do believe that every child, whether through private insurance or public insurance, should be insured for health care. Others disagree with that, but I believe it's important for children to be as healthy as possible.

But I also believe businesses should recognize that every business is a family business, and when they make decisions about their workers, they're making decisions about people who are also parents.

And there are many other institutions in our society. I think that the role of the government is necessarily limited, and what it does it should do well. That's what the president has been doing for the last three years. You know, my husband has lowered the size of the federal government to the smallest it's been in 35 years, and by the end of this year, without the Republican Congress doing anything, it will be the smallest it's been since the 1930s, because he knows that big government is not the answer, but that good, effective government, in partnership with families and with schools and with businesses and every other institution, is how we build the village that I think our children need.

Q You also talk about divorce and how it affects

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children in the book, and you told Barbara Walters that you had never considered divorce, despite ups and downs in your own marriage. But I'm curious. A lot of commentators have pointed out the fact that your husband has gotten more flak, so to speak, for keeping the marriage together than other politicians have gotten who have ended up divorced. Do you find a little irony in that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I don't want to speak for anybody else's perceptions, but I think that what's important is that we now face up to the evidence we have: that divorce is not good for children. There are situations where violence and abuse are present, where, as I say in the book, divorce should be considered, probably sooner instead of later. But most instances of divorce are not that kind of dramatic violence encountered.

And so, where children are involved, I believe couples should work as hard as they can to keep their marriages together. I think we should have what I call braking mechanisms in the law, so that couples have to attend education and counseling sessions to understand the impact of divorce on children. And, if divorce occurs, I would just hope that the adults would put the best interests of the children first.

You know, I know, from my own law practice over the years, that, you know, when people are caught up emotionally, as they are in a divorce, they may do things that are not in their children's best interest. They may try to turn their children against the other parent. They may try to use their children as bargaining chips in a support or property-distribution agreement. And I'm just begging people not to use their children in that way.

My wish would be that families would be intact and adults would be devoted to their children, and that divorce would be harder for families with children, but that, if divorce comes, it be done in a way that tries to minimize the damage to children.

Q Now let's talk about your own child for a minute, if we could. You all have really gone great lengths to protect her since she's been here in the White House. Do you feel pretty comfortable with the upbringing she's had during these first three years?

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MRS. CLINTON: That is one thing that I feel very grateful about: that we have been able to keep her out of the public eye, to be sure she could get a private life. And I think that's one of the most important things that we've been able to achieve in the last three years, and I'm very hopeful that we can keep it up for the rest of the time that we're here.

Q I know you talk about this some in the book, but can you discuss again just how she copes and how you help her to cope with some of these negative images, of yourself and your husband, that are portrayed out there in the media and by your critics?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, when she was about 6 and we knew that she would start reading and hearing things about politics, we thought it was important to bring her in as a participant in our lives and in her father's life in public service, so we began, around the dinner table at the governor's mansion, to try to explain to her how elections worked and tell her that sometimes people said mean things and, you know, made up stories about you, and that was all, unfortunately, part of being in public life these days.

And we even did little mock debates, where she would pretend to be her father. And I remember the first time we did this, and I said, "Well, Chelsea, if you were your daddy, what would you say?" She was 6 years old, and she said, "I'm Bill Clinton, and I try to help people, so please vote for me." I said, "Well, that's really good. Now your daddy's going to pretend to be somebody running against him." So Bill said, "Bill Clinton's a terrible person. He's a mean to people. You know, don't vote for him," and she got very upset, hearing even her father pretend to criticize himself.

So I was glad that we had begun this process in the privacy of our own home, to help prepare her for being the child of somebody in public life. It is not a fair experience for children to be basically turned into political pawns or for them to feel that they can't help their parents. And so I wanted her, you know, to know that these were things that were going to happen, and we would do our best to, you know, keep her informed and help her to deal with things.

Q Has she been able to deal with that as she's gotten older and things have gotten more negative?

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MRS. CLINTON: Yes. She is very knowledgeable about politics and about the games that are played and the partisanship that has taken over much of our political life.

Q Chelsea's going to be 16 next month.

MRS. CLINTON: Right. I know. Much to my regret.

Q Well, tell me just a little bit. Is she still working on the driving up here? I saw the story that the president told about Camp David. Is she still working on that here? How about that dating thing? Is she working on that?

MRS. CLINTON: She dates. She has -- yeah, she has many, many friends, boys and girls. And she'll get a driver's license when the time is right.

Q I like that little hedge in there.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. Well, her father and I are still thinking of ways to stall, but we're not sure we're going to be successful.

Q What about college? Has she started thinking about that? Is she a sophomore or a junior?

MRS. CLINTON: She's a junior.

Q Oh, so she's kind of -- is she going to start looking this spring at colleges?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know what -- you know, we haven't really focused on that yet. That's another thing I want to put off as long as possible.

Q I bet. I bet.

What's she interested in maybe doing?

MRS. CLINTON: She's very interested in many different things, and she loves school. So it will be, you know, an exciting adventure for her when she eventually gets to go off to college, maybe when she's like 30 or 35.

Q My next question is, so how are Mom and Dad coping with this?

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MRS. CLINTON: We are not doing well. This is not something that we talk about a lot in our house. We talk about politics, but we don't want to deal with the really important stuff, like, you know, "Don't go to college. We're going to miss you too much."

(Laughter.)

Q I can only imagine. I can only imagine.

Well, let me ask you -- I've got one final question now. Assuming that your husband wins a second term, when you all get done, you're still going to be very, very young, too young to retire. So have you thought about what you might want to do then?

And, of course, let me tag on here, have you thought about running for office yourself?

MRS. CLINTON: But you're right. I mean, I do believe that my husband will win a second term, which I think will happen because of the job he's done and what he's doing now, and we will be -- you know, as it gets closer, it seems younger and younger -- and then we'll have our whole life ahead of us, and I don't know what we'll do.

We're very open to new ideas and adventures all the time. We'll just have to wait till that comes, I guess, in the year 2001 or something.

Q So you really haven't thought about it?

MRS. CLINTON: No. Apparently we're going to have to make some money, since we're bankrupt, because of these legal expenses. And, you know, that's something we have to take very seriously, because I always paid my bills; we've always paid everything that we owned anyone. So we will take that obligation seriously, as well.

And, you know, we won't have a house. You know, we'll start pretty much from scratch when he finishes being president, plus having to pay off this rather enormous debt.

Q Yeah. Yeah. That's true. That's true.

MRS. CLINTON: But we'll have fun, whatever it is.

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Q All right. Well, that's great. I got through my whole list of questions.

MRS. CLINTON: Good.

Q Which I did not expect to do.

MRS. CLINTON: And you're color-coordinated and everything.

(Laughter.)

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