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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
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CONGRESSMAN STOKES: -- my privilege to present to you my friend, your Senator, Senator John Glenn. (Applause)

SENATOR GLENN: Thank you, Lou. I think I'll just quit after that introduction. It's a little like one Annie and I attended not too long ago in Columbus, and the person introducing me gave accolades and accomplishments I'd never dreamed of having in this life or the next, and he finished up by saying, "There are few truly great men in this world." Then he introduced me. Now that's rather heady. (Laughter)

Going home that night I was still thinking about it, I guess, and I said, "Annie, you know, if you think about it, there aren't very many really, truly great men in this world." And it took her about two seconds to say, "Let me tell you something. There's sure one less than you think there is." (Laughter) Annie sends her best to all of you today. Sorry that she could not be with us today.

I'll tell you a little story from back in my New Concord days. I know a very elderly couple in New Concord. The man had worked as a plumber all of his life -- hard work. Wife kept the little plumbing and heating store, was there every day.

Saved a very modest amount for retirement. Retired, two years later came down with cancer. Six year downhill slide and out, but in the first couple of years after the cancer was discovered, the savings of a lifetime went -- zero. That was my mother and father.

Now, they didn't lack for medical care. Annie and I didn't have a lot in those days, but we had enough to help out. They did not lose the home. Did not lose the car. This was just in the pre-Medicare days -- pre-Medicare.

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Ever since that time I have been very much impressed with how much we need national health care for every single person. (Applause)

In our time today, we now have spokesmen for this. Do they have a perfect plan? Hillary would be the very first -- Mrs. Clinton. I should be more respectful. But Hillary -- (laughter) -- will be the first to tell you there may be some changes in this.

It's an enormous change we're talking about. I place this front burner these days. And we don't -- one of our options is not to do nothing. Because you look at the health care cost curves and they are going straight up like that and we're going to wind up bankrupting every person in the country along the federal government lines -- through the federal government, if we do nothing.

And so they have had the gumption, the guts, to take this on and start the dialogue, and nobody is more knowledgeable in this area, and nobody have I admired more in this field than Mrs. Clinton. Because I have seen her in a number of different situations where questions are being fired at her, where she's dealing with people who have spent their lifetime in this field, and she has really developed into the most wonderful spokesman for this whole concept.

Now, whether you agree with every single facet of it or not -- but it's front burner, it's here, it's long overdue. And so I am very, very honored to be here today to participate, to welcome her to Cleveland and Ohio. I am traveling with her today as she meets with different groups across the state to take this on.

We look forward to getting this debate really going right after the first of the year. We had hoped it could happen in the Senate and the House late this fall, but the press of other business and things has pretty much ruled that out. But we look forward to getting into this next year.

And I hope that by this time next year, if we can come back here again next year, I hope by that time we have a health care policy, a health care insurance for this nation of ours that covers everybody. And if we do, it will be due very, very largely to the efforts of Hillary Rodham Clinton. (Applause)

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CONGRESSMAN STOKES: Mrs. Clinton, there are a number of public officials who are here in this audience this morning, too numerous for me to introduce them individually. But I think that it would be appropriate for you to see how many of our distinguished public officials have come out here this morning to share this very special occasion with you.

Included in the group also would be -- I see Peggy Fisher, the wife of Lee Fisher, our Attorney General, who ran your husband's campaign in this state. And along with them, seated in the first row, I see a young man who a few weeks ago when President Clinton was in the city, went up to the President and told him he'd like to get some advice from him about playing the saxophone. (Laughter)

And the President was nice enough to take some time with him and talk to him about playing the saxophone, along with some other good advice he gave him.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to ask all of our public officials if they would please stand and be recognized. (Applause)

And on the podium with me is one of our former elected officials in this state, a gentleman who has had a very distinguished public career. He's a former legislator in the state, former governor of this state, former head of the Peace Corps for the nation, and he is now lending his talents and his time to being the President's personal emissary to carry out the national campaign for health care reform. Former Governor Dick Celeste. (Applause)

GOVERNOR CELESTE: It is not every day that we have in our city either the President of the United States or the First Lady of the United States. We have been very fortunate. The President of the United States has on two occasions since being President come here into the 11th Congressional District of Ohio.

And on this morning we have, for the first time as the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton. (Applause)

I want to say to you that being in Washington, D.C., and serving in the Congress and having the opportunity to work with this administration has for me been a great experience. I've worked with many administrations since

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being in the Congress, but none that have been as responsive, as sensitive, and as caring as this administrative has been.

Both in the President and the First Lady we have two people who have dedicated their lives to people, and to changing people's lives for the better. In terms of the health care legislation that the First Lady has just designed for this nation, as a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and the chairman of its health brain trust, I've had the opportunity to work closely with her and with those who are helping put together this National Health Care Reform package for the nation.

Of all the honors that have come to me over the years, no greater honor came to me than that that occurred about 10 days ago when the First Lady herself called me and asked me if I would be one of the original cosigners of the health care reform package that she and the President are going to introduce in Congress. (Applause)

And I have to share with you, I've been in the United States Congress 25 years and served with six presidents, and this is the first President who has ever asked me to cosponsor a piece of legislation he was introducing in the Congress. And I want you to know, I was not going to turn this President down. (Applause)

And I was present, by invitation of the President and the First Lady, as one of the special members of Congress at the time that they appeared in the Rotunda of the Capitol last week and introduced this historic piece of legislation.

It was the type of an occasion that it had to have been when President Roosevelt introduced the Social Security legislation for the nation. It was the type of a day it had to have been when John F. Kennedy introduced the Peace Corps legislation. This was a landmark occasion -- the introduction of legislation that's going to affect every American from birth to death.

And on that day, nothing but accolades were given to the lady who sits on this stage for having designed and done the major part of the work in order to present to this country the type of national health care reform that is needed at this time in our history.

We are so proud of her. All of us in the Congress

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are proud of her, no matter what side of the aisle we sit on, because of the dignified, intelligent way that she has served this nation in this very important and unique role.

Nothing could give me greater pleasure than to stand here this morning, in the heart of the 11th Congressional District of Ohio -- the best Congressional district in America -- (applause) -- and present to you the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton. (Applause)

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you, Congressman, for that warm welcome back to the best congressional district in the nation. (Applause)

I've had some good times here before. I've learned a lot about what was really going on right here before. And I have been grateful for your leadership and personal support of the President and me in the last year. It has meant a great deal to us and I am very grateful to you. Thank you very much.

I am also delighted to be here with Senator Glenn, who has been a stalwart supporter of so many important issues in his distinguished career and has been very helpful, again, to me personally, as I have worked with the members of Congress and have consulted with them over the last months.

I am delighted that in addition to Congressman Stokes' sponsorship of the Health Care Reform Act in the House, that Senator Glenn is also sponsoring it in the Senate, and I am very pleased by that. (Applause)

And you all know what a prize we got when we convinced Dick Celeste to come and champion health care reform around the country. (Applause) There was really only one person the President wanted to do it.

I don't know what we would have done if the governor had said no. But I don't think the President thought he would, because he had served with Dick Celeste, and he knew that, unlike some folks, Dick Celeste is passionate about issues. He doesn't just want to hold the job; he wants to get the job done.

And so when it came time to have someone chair the health care campaign, he was the unanimous hands-down choice.

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And he is doing a terrific job. And we will, in large measure, see a successful piece of legislation passed and the President sign it because of Governor Celeste's leadership. So Ohio is deep into health care reform everywhere we look. (Applause)

As both the Congressman and the Senator said, health care reform is a big issue, and it deserves the attention of every American because we have to do it right. We need to preserve what works in the American health care system and change what doesn't. And that's been the motivation behind the President's push for health care reform.

We have the best medical care in the world, if you can afford it. I was just over at Rainbow Hospital with the Senator and the Congressman and the Governor, listening to families who are -- there but for the grace of God go you and I -- listening to them tell me what it feels like to have a beautiful daughter with a very serious disease, and be told by insurance companies they are not going to insure that child because, as one told this mother who told me, "You don't insure a burning house."

Think of what that must feel like. At the very moment when you need all of the reserves God can give you to take care of your child, you have to worry about whether or not you are going to be able to pay to give that child the health care she deserves.

We have come to a point in our country where for a variety of reasons we need to reform our health care system. And we will have a big discussion in the next months. And it is absolutely imperative that every American take part in that discussion, because the more we understand about the way our health care system works now, and the more we understand about how the President wants to reform it, the more vigorous we will be in making sure we get the job done.

And so what we have put together is this book. It is called "Health Security: the President's Report to the American People." And in very straightforward language, it explains how our current system works. How did we get into the position where when you need health care insurance the most, you are least likely to be able to afford to get it?

How did that develop? And what can we do about

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some of the problems that we have -- problems like preexisting conditions where you're told, "I'm not going to insure you because you've been sick." I always thought insurance was to help you when you got sick, not to eliminate you from being taken care of. Or something called lifetime limits. You know, if you hit that limit, you've spent all the money you can spend whether you're still sick or not.

This explains how we got to where we are today. And then it explains what the President wants to do to fix our system. We are taking these books and distributing them to libraries all across our nation, because, you know, libraries have a lot of good information in them.

And I did some looking and discovered that many Americans get their information about health from their libraries. In fact, I talked to a number of librarians who tell me that if you go and look at the books that have something to do about jobs and health, you'll find those are the most used books in any public library.

Many people come to the library to learn about a particular ailment or problem they might have. I have a friend who, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, she went to the public library and read everything she could find, so she could talk to her doctor about what the best thing for her to do was.

I have another friend who's a physician who was always using the library to try to figure out what the best way to help his patients is. And I even read about the case of a family that saved the life of their son through CPR because they read a book about it in the library.

So we want to encourage people to come to their libraries, to go to their local book stores, and to buy this book and to read it and to understand it and to participate in the debate that will take place in our country.

Because, you know, the President and I, and Governor Celeste and Congressman Stokes and Senator Glenn, we have this old-fashioned idea that the more people know about a problem in America, the more likely they will be to act to solve it, and the less likely they will be to be moved by false advertising and the millions of dollars that will be spent to try to defeat change in the health care system.

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You are the best possible advocates for change that any of us have anywhere in the country. (Applause) You know, we've tried this before in America. When President Roosevelt came forward with Social Security, he wanted Health Security to be the second half. But there was too much opposition and he could not get it done.

President Truman in 1945 proposed a comprehensive health care reform bill, and all of a sudden every special interest stood up against him and just beat him back. And, you know, Harry Truman was a pretty hard fellow to beat back. But they came at him, and they came at him hard. And he tried again in 1948 and could not overcome the opposition of special interest groups.

We finally got Medicare and Medicaid in the 1960s, so at least our elderly and our very poorest citizens have some health security. But that left everybody else pretty much on our own. And what we have got to recognize is that, until every American has health security, no American is secure. (Applause)

There is no guarantee that any one of us -- none of us sitting in this audience, none of the journalists covering this program this morning -- there is no guarantee that any one of us will have the same health care insurance next year at this time at the same price as we do this year.

There is no guarantee that one of us may not get sick next week and all of a sudden be told, we are a burning house that nobody wants to insure. There's no guarantee that you may not have a car accident in two months which all of a sudden drives your health costs up as high as you could ever imagine.

Or that as Senator Glenn told us about his parents, you can work for a lifetime only to see everything you've built wiped out because you can't afford your health care coverage. Until all of us are secure, none of us is secure.

This plan that the President proposes absolutely requires every single American to have health care coverage with comprehensive benefits that can never be taken away. That is what we have to fight for. And there isn't any compromise on that basic principle.

The health care bill this President will sign must

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have universal coverage with comprehensive benefits for every single American. And if you stand for that, we will get it done in 1994. But you have to fight for it or we will not be successful. (Applause)

I think we are at an exciting moment in American history, because for all of the efforts in the past, Presidents -- both Democrat and Republican, because let's not forget, even Richard Nixon proposed comprehensive health care reform funded by employers and employees, just like this President is proposing -- we have never gotten it done.

But the costs have never seemed as high as they do today. The number of the uninsured is continuing to rise. The number of the insured who cannot really afford the deductibles and the copays and understand the fine print continues to rise. We know we have to act now. And on behalf of this great national effort, I'm going to be giving these books to this library, and some more, so they can be distributed to the branch libraries around Cleveland.

And what I hope is that -- just as on this book, we have a picture of what the President held up when he gave his speech to Congress, the Health Security Card -- I hope by this time next year we will have every American -- I hope every American with a library card in his pocket -- (Laughter) -- but next to that library card, we know, every American with a Health Security Card in his pocket that represents comprehensive health care benefits that can never be taken away.

If you help us, if you stand with your members of Congress as we work through this bill and make whatever changes are appropriate without in any way compromising universal coverage with comprehensive benefits, that this is not just a dream or a vision. This is a reality. And that's worth fighting for as Americans.

Thank you all very much. (Applause)

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