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American Dietetic Association

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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March 3, 1994

REMARKS OF THE FIRST LADY  
TO THE AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION,  
FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

MRS. CLINTON: Today our nation is engaged in a historic discussion about health care reform. It is a discussion that has involved millions of Americans, Americans who are concerned about their own health and about the health of their nation. I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage you, the members of the American Dietetic Association, to participate as fully as you can, as we work toward reform in the months ahead.

As dietitians, you know better than most why we need reform in hospitals, clinics, schools, nursing homes and other health care facilities. You have seen the wonders of our health care system as well as its problems. You've seen heroic doctors and nurses, as well as extraordinary technology, save lives.

You've also seen a system that is broken and needs to be fixed. No doubt you have heard many personal stories as I have of Americans who fall victim to our current health care system. Today 39.5 million Americans are uninsured, and each month 2 million Americans lose their insurance for some period of time, often just when they need it most.

Right now we are paying more and more money for less and less care. Right now patients and health care providers are losing their ability to choose their doctors and health plans as employers and insurance companies attempt to reduce services and rein in costs. Right now health care professionals spend less time with patients and more time navigating through the paperwork jungle that our present system has become.

And as you know all too well, the incentives in our current system are not sufficiently geared toward keeping people healthy. Rather, they are geared toward treating

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people once they are sick, often at a much greater cost both in human and economic terms.

For too long, efforts to bring health care reform to our country have failed because of the strength of special interests. But today we do have this opportunity to reform our health care system in ways that make economic and social sense, and we do have people like you who understand why it needs to be done.

With reform we can build on what is right with our system and fix what is broken. The President's goal is to provide every American with real health security. None of us has it now. Not one of you watching me, not I, can be sure that this time next year we will be insured at the same cost that we are insured at today. We do not have health security, even if we are secure at this moment.

The President wants to insure that every American has guaranteed private health insurance and a comprehensive package of benefits that can never be taken away, not ever, not if you have a preexisting illness or condition, not if you move, not if you change or lose your job, not if you divorce. Real health security means comprehensive benefits that never run out, not having a lifetime limit that stops you from getting insurance just when you are under the most stress.

Under the President's approach to reform, insurance companies will no longer be able to discriminate or place a financial ceiling on your lifetime coverage. The President's approach is not just for the good of those without insurance. It's good for all of us.

One of the most critical components of reform is encouraging preventive care and fostering a new attitude about our individual and collective health. You can help us do that. As specialists in nutrition, you are on the front lines of the battle for better health. Eating properly is a key to staying healthy, staying happy and being a productive, energetic citizen.

I don't need to tell you or any group of dieticians that our current health care system has it backwards. Health insurance policies too often pay to treat the disease instead of to prevent it from occurring in the first place. The President wants to change that. He wants to shift the focus

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of our health care system toward keeping people healthy by truly investing in prevention.

Part of preventing disease is taking personal responsibility for one's own health. While health care reform can solve structural and financial problems in the health care system, individual citizens cannot rely on the government to make them eat properly and exercise.

As you well know, a nutritious diet is like a dose of preventive medicine each of us should take every day. Diet is something that we as individuals can control, and it is critical that we educate the nation about the power of nutrition to prevent and reverse disease.

That is why at the National Institutes of Health scientists are expanding their research efforts on health promotion and prevention, and that's why the President's proposal creates a comprehensive school health education program that focuses on nutritional health. And that is why under the President's plan period checkups include health advice and counseling, including nutrition counseling. In addition, when it is medically necessary or appropriate, a health care provider may make nutrition counseling available.

Today our nation has an historic opportunity to improve our health care system. We can insure that for the first time every American has health care security that is real and solid, and can never be taken away.

As we begin to change our behaviors in this country, as we move more toward a system of preventive health, your role and contributions as our nation's experts on diet, will be even more important than they are today. With your help we can reform our health care system and teach our fellow citizens about the importance of good health.

In the months ahead, I hope you will join us as we all seek to make our nation healthier and happier. Please, become involved in this congressional debate about health care reform. Go to meetings where your members of congress will appear. Talk about the importance of preventive health care. Talk about the importance of nutrition, and talk about how everyone needs to be responsible.

The President's plan does what you have often preached about needing to be done where each of us started

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taking better care of ourselves, where each of us is responsible for contributing both financially and in other ways to keeping ourselves healthy. We will have healthier individuals and a healthier nation if you help us get this done.

Thank you all very much.

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