

3/4/94  
National Farmers Union Convention

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Internal Use Only

March 4, 1994

REMARKS OF THE FIRST LADY  
TO THE NATIONAL FARMERS UNION CONVENTION  
FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

MRS. CLINTON: I'd like to thank all of you up in Fargo for allowing me to speak to your convention today. This year marks the 92nd anniversary of the National Farmers Union and I'd like to take this opportunity to salute your organization for its contributions to American life.

Not only do you produce the food which sustains the nation, you also have shown extraordinary courage in pressing for social reforms that will benefit your fellow citizens. On behalf of the President, I'd like to thank you for your ongoing involvement and support.

I'd also like to commend you for being one of the first organizations to recognize the importance of health care reform. Your leadership in this area has been inspiring. And it is something you should be proud of. Because when we achieve real, meaningful health care reform later this year, you will have been one of the reasons why.

When I first began learning in detail about our health care system -- learning from people all across America: farm families, small business owners, older Americans, health professionals, the employed and the unemployed -- I discovered two simple truths.

First, that we have the finest doctors, hospitals, and technology anywhere in the world. And second, that we have the stupidest financing system anywhere in the world.

Over and over, I heard the same message: The system is broken. And it needs to be fixed.

So the President came up with a proposal to build on the good things in our system -- and to fix the things that don't work well enough for millions of Americans.

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

Despite what our well-financed opponents would have you believe, the President's proposal is not very complicated. In fact, it's pretty darn simple.

It starts with the premise that every American should have health security. That means guaranteed private insurance that provides comprehensive benefits, benefits that can never be taken away, not if you lose a job, not if you move, not if a member of your family gets sick, not if you're in a high-risk occupation, like farming.

Making sure that every citizen is covered is particularly important in rural areas of our nation. Today, nearly 20 percent of all farm families lack insurance. And those who do have insurance often find that it's filled with loopholes: high deductibles, limited benefits, no preventive care, and exclusions for people with serious illnesses.

Too often, farmers pay higher prices for coverage and end up getting less coverage. The problem under the current system is that farmers are competing with giant corporation in the insurance marketplace. Often, farmers purchasing health coverage generally can't get the tax deduction available to employees of large businesses.

As a result, American farm families pay -- on average -- 18 percent of their annual income on health care. And in return you get limited health care coverage that can vanish in a moment's notice.

A few things are clear about the President's proposal for reform. All farm families will be insured. The price you pay for coverage will go down. The coverage you get will be more comprehensive. And it will give you security that can never be taken away.

As you know, the President is from Arkansas, and he is acutely aware of the health needs of rural Americans. And I think his proposal reflects that.

One of the most important elements of the President's approach is that it makes sure that rural areas have enough health care practitioners nearby. After all, what good is guaranteed health care coverage if you can't use it?

The President's proposal increases the number of

MORE

**Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.**

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

primary care doctors and nurse practitioners and provides major incentives for them to work in under-served areas.

The President's proposal also will make sure that health professionals in rural areas are paid for their work. They will receive an increase in bonus payments for caring for Medicare patients in areas where there are shortages of health professionals.

In addition, the President's proposal provides support for rural clinics to integrate with regional medical centers and teaching hospitals. We will offer grants and loans to help repair or convert worn-down rural health care facilities. And, finally, we are investing in telecommunications to bring the world's best medical care into our country's most remote towns.

In all these ways, we want to make sure that rural Americans are not left out of the health care equation.

Several weeks ago, I attended a health care forum in Lennox, South Dakota. I sat next to John Thompson, a courageous and quick-thinking young man injured in a farm accident here in North Dakota. He spoke eloquently about the need for local ambulance services and for the spread of 911 emergency services in every part of this country. John Thompson had to wait for life-saving help because his area did not have 911 and ambulance services were about a half-hour away.

At a minimum, this country owes farmers like John Thompson -- and all of you who work so hard -- the security of health care coverage that can never be taken away.

With your help, I know we can achieve real, meaningful health care reform.

Thank you.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.**

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929