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**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
SATELLITE FEED TO SENIOR POWER DAY
MAY 18, 1994**

Thank you, Sen. Riegle, for inviting me to be a part of this wonderful event, and for the concern, commitment, and leadership you have shown on health care issues for many years. And thanks to all of you who help organize Senior Power Day in Michigan. Because of your efforts, Senior Power Day is now celebrating its 20th anniversary, and you should be extremely proud of the work you have done to make that possible.

I'm really sorry I can't be with you in person, not only because you're gathered in the Midwest -- which is my neck of the woods -- but also because older Americans have so much wisdom and experience to impart on younger generations in our country.

From my travels during the past year and a half, I've seen the spirit and energy of older Americans like yourselves, who understand the complexities of the problems we face and the urgent need for solutions.

Very early on, you recognized the importance of health care reform. And I'm pleased that your platform echoes so many of the President's concerns, as well as his goals for providing health security for every American.

You understand the importance of guaranteeing coverage for every citizen -- and the importance of ensuring that every American has comprehensive benefits that can never be taken away for any reason, including a pre-existing condition.

You understand why we need to outlaw unfair insurance practices, which too often discriminate on the basis of age.

You understand that we need to preserve choice of doctors and health plans -- so that patients can maintain trusted relationships with health care providers that often last a lifetime.

You understand the value of preserving and strengthening Medicare -- so that older Americans who have worked all their lives aren't forced to decide between buying food or medicine.

You also understand that the viability of our nation economically depends on getting health care costs under control.

But most of all, you know that the integrity of one of society's most important institutions -- the family -- depends on quality health care for Americans of all ages, from zero on up.

That means providing prenatal care for pregnant women to increase the likelihood that they have healthy babies. And it means expanding options for families in which an aging parent or disabled relative needs long-term care.

Let me just say a few words about long-term care, because I know it's an issue that many of you care about.

Today, too many people are forced into nursing homes, when a little bit of help would enable them to stay with their families or in a community-based setting.

Similarly, family members who are caregivers often need a respite -- help for a few hours a week so that they can rest or get some time to themselves.

That kind of assistance is essential to all families, but particularly those bearing the emotional weight of an acute illness and the financial weight of long-term care.

The President's approach is an important start in helping to provide home and community-based care for older Americans and those with disabilities.

You shouldn't have to spend your way into poverty to take care of a family member in need. And you shouldn't only have the choice of putting your loved one in an institution, which is often the most expensive thing to do -- and the last thing you want to do.

So on this issue, sound family policy is also sound fiscal policy.

Today, we are at one of those rare defining moments in history when we have a chance to make real, substantive progress on health care reform.

But to succeed, we will need your help. In the next few months, Congress will work out details of legislation that has the potential to provide health security for all Americans and help shape the future of our nation.

For too many decades, we have thought about reform. We have talked about reform. We have read books about reform. We've read policy papers about reform. But we have failed to act. Now it's time to put away the books and policy papers and to meet the test of history, once and for all.

Health care reform is not simply an economic imperative. It's not simply a social imperative. It's a moral imperative. It requires the commitment and energy of each and every one of us who cares about the future of our own families, and our nation.

So I hope you will make your voices heard. I hope you will speak out about reform, write your members of Congress, and let them know that our nation can't afford to waste the historic opportunity before us.

Thank you very much.

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