

5/2/94
Salisbury Supermarket

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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SPEECH BY THE FIRST LADY
AT SAFEWAY SUPERMARKET
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MS. CLINTON: Thank you all. I am delighted to be here. I'm delighted to have the chance to come talk about health care, but I'm just delighted to be in a store. It sounds funny but even when my husband was Governor, I'd go to the store and I felt like a normal person. My daughter and I would go up and down the aisles and we'd buy things, and we'd take it home and cook it.

You have no idea -- I know this sounds funny, especially for the women in the audience -- that you would ever miss going to the store, buying things, taking them home and cooking them, but trust me, you would. So I'm glad to be here and I hope I'll have time to get a little shopping in before I leave if that's okay with everybody.

I want to thank Mr. Donald for being here with us and for the support that Safeway has given to health care, to its employees, and to this effort to try to bring health care reform to the entire country. I want to thank Mr. Dougherty because UFCW has been a leader in making sure that workers were protected so that they could have the health care benefits that we heard Mr. Michener talk about, that they didn't have to worry about what might happen to their children or themselves because they knew they would be taken care of. I'm grateful that there's been this kind of partnership between this company and this union over these years which has resulted in these health care benefits.

I want to thank my friend, Eleanor Holmes Norton, for being here and for being such a great leader on the issues that matter to the District and really to the country.

I want to tell you two stories which, for me, help explain why we need health care reform and what it will do, how it will work, and why it's important that people all over the country let members of Congress know that now is the

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time.

People have tried to get national health care reform for many years. When Franklin Roosevelt was President, he really thought that health security would be the second part of social security, but he never could get that done. When President Truman was President, he worked very hard two different times to try to convince the Congress to pass national health care. Both times he was beaten by those groups that were against giving everybody health care.

President Eisenhower ran into some of the same problems. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson worked very hard until finally we were able to do something which I think as a country we should be very proud of and that was passed Medicare so at least people over 65 had some basic security about their health care needs.

But we've never, as a country, been able to do what so many other countries we compete with around the world in Europe, in Asia, and north to Canada have been able to do and that is to guarantee every citizen the right to health care when they need it. I think it is high time that America, the greatest country in the world, make good on that promise to our own people here at home.

Let me tell you these two stories. Let's imagine that in addition to this wonderful store here, there's an other store just like it with all of the produce and all of the products and the good smells coming from the bakery, but it doesn't provide any health care benefits to its workers. Let's compare these two stores.

This one store, which as I look around, you could eat off the floor, the workers here are working very hard, I can tell that. I know the kind of efforts that you make to run an operation like this 7 days a week, 24 hours a day to take care of your customers and satisfy them. In order to do that, you really have to work a little bit harder because in addition to your wages, you get something that this other store just like this doesn't provide, namely health care benefits.

As both Mr. Donald and Mr. Dougherty pointed out, you have fought hard to get those benefits with the result that you have them and you are insured, but you are paying for the workers at the other store who are not insured. This

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debate about health care is not just about those who are uninsured; it is about the future for health care benefits of all of us who are insured because everytime somebody at that other store gets sick or has an accident, they go to the hospital or the doctor and thank goodness, they do eventually get taken care of in our country, but if they can't pay, and if their employer hasn't contributed, then guess who pays? You do and Safeway does.

Part of the reason why health care is such an important economic issue for our country is that for too long, those of us who have been insured have paid higher and higher premiums, have given up wage increases so that premiums could be paid for benefits because other people who are competing with you have not paid for health insurance. You heard what Mr. Donald said, this is a company that has tried to do right, working with the union, but at a certain point, you can't keep giving benefits that you're not only giving to your employees, but indirectly paying for other people without starting to lose business.

We now have a higher percentage of workers in America who are uninsured than we've ever had. We have nearly 40 million Americans who are uninsured and every month that goes by more insured people lose their insurance. Some of the reason for that is because all of the people who are uninsured are riding on the costs that you pay.

Part of what the President wants to do is level the playing field. I want you to be able to compete on how good a job you do, what kind of products you sell. It is not fair for you to be competing with one hand tied behind your back against companies that don't provide health benefits and you essentially pay for their workers. It is time everybody paid.

You know, all these folks who say they can't afford it, well, we're going to help them. If they genuinely can't afford it, they'll get discounts, they will get the lowest price available because they will be able to pool their purchasing power and be able to buy insurance at an affordable cost, but you all are affording it, Safeway is opening its doors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and you provide health insurance. It is time we said that everybody should share responsibility. It is not fair, either that you who are insured are paying for the insurance of others, and it is not fair that you who are insured and those who are

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uninsured and working are paying taxes for people on welfare to have benefits that they don't have themselves. It is time every American had the same right to health care benefits.

That's the economics of it; that's how it will work. If everybody is insured, everybody's prices actually can go down and everybody will be taken care of. That's a real important reason why we're doing this because economically, it's the smart thing to do and it will reward companies that have already paid the price for health care.

But, you know, there is another reason why we need to do that and that's because it's just the right thing to do. You know? You all have heard of the do right rule? Well, the do right rule applies to health care. I want to tell you my second story to illustrate this.

I recently gave a speech here in Washington and as I was leaving a man grabbed my hand and he said, I want to tell you why I am such a supporter of what you're trying to do. He said, I've always had good insurance, I've never had to worry about it, I've always worked for people who helped pay for it, but, he said, a woman in my office, a secretary, had two grandchildren and those two grandchildren lived with their parents in the same house -- they were all related -- and one of the children's family worked and had insurance; the other worked but did not have insurance.

Both of these children came down with meningitis. One of them was taken to the hospital and because she had insurance, she was admitted and she was there for a couple of days and had all of the help that she needed, recovered, went back home. The other child showed up at the same hospital in the emergency room because, you know, when you don't have insurance that's your doctor -- you don't have a doctor, you go to the emergency room. She waited and somebody finally looked at her but she didn't have insurance, so they gave her some Baby Tylenol and they sent her on home. Just about the time that her cousin was getting out of the hospital, she died.

I've heard a lot of people talk about how we cannot afford insurance for everybody and I've heard people say, you know, all this stuff that the Clintons are saying, that doesn't really happen, everybody gets taken care of. Well, let me tell you something. If you are uninsured in America, even if it's just temporary, you're just between jobs or your

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employer dropped you, you can get sick and if you do get sick, you are three times more likely to die than somebody who is insured who has the same problem. This one family saw it in their own lives. It is not worth the life of one child, in my opinion, for us to be shutting the doors of our medical facilities to people because they don't have insurance. Everybody should be able to take care of their children when they need to, regardless of who they are, where they work, or anything else about them.

So we need to do this because it's the right thing to do for America. We can only do it if people like you will stand up and say, I'm insured, but I'm tired of paying the bill. I'm insured, I'm tired of seeing people who are not who are also working hard for a living not get the medical care they need to have to take care of themselves and their families. I want to live in a country where everybody is taken care of. That's what this is about. We can get it done. Let's do it. Let's make it happen here at the workplace where everybody can get insured just like you are now. So help us and we will be able to have health care reform in America.

Thank you all very much.

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