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MRS. CLINTON: I would just echo what has already been said. We are very optimistic. The mediators today at noon confirmed that, and we are looking forward to the debate that will take place to help to clarify the issues for the American people who remain in very large numbers in favor of universal coverage, in favor of the kind of plan that the President has put forward that would guarantee health insurance to every American, not just those who are rich and can afford it, and not just those who are poor and will be taken care of by the government, but everybody, now.

That is what this debate is about, and that's why we're looking forward to the debate taking up the (inaudible) in July.

Q Mrs. Clinton, would you comment on a proposal that's being discussed by democrats and republicans on the finance committee, part of a trigger for an individual mandate, for lack of a better way to describe it? Do you think this is a good way to move the process forward?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know the details, and so I cannot comment on it, but I am encouraged by what I hear is very substantive discussion going on in the Senate Finance Committee. And as long as the ultimate objective is universal coverage by a date certain, that meets the criteria that the President has laid out.

Q Will the President's (inaudible) establish a commitment to universal coverage that is not (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, the President has made very clear that a bill that does not result in universal coverage that guarantees every American health insurance will not be acceptable, but we're not going to comment on what might or might not be in legislative language until we have a chance

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to actually (inaudible) analyze it.

Q Mrs. Clinton, the definition of universal coverage (inaudible) stumbling block. As you know, in the (inaudible) employment act, that was (inaudible) 97 percent of what the economists now say (inaudible) 94 percent. Would you accept that sort of (inaudible) to universal coverage (inaudible) everybody (inaudible) 97 percent?

MRS. CLINTON: I'm not going to comment on that because that's one of those abstract questions that, in the absence of legislative language and financial costing and analysis, we can't answer. What we mean by universal coverage is that there is a mechanism in place that guarantees every American -- regardless of where they work, who they work for, whether they've ever been sick, where they live in this country -- guaranteed health insurance.

I think what we need to look at is what happens to individual Americans who are not represented by percentages. What we want to see is a mechanism that guarantees universal coverage, and we're not going to be satisfied unless we believe that the legislative language proposed will achieve that.

Q And access (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Access. I've said many times, we all have access to a Mercedes Benz, but it doesn't mean we have much chance of getting one. I think that we now have access to health insurance in this country, but it doesn't do you much good if you cannot afford it. It does not do you much good if you're among the now nearly 40 million uninsured Americans, the vast majority of whom work but cannot afford, in the current insurance market, to be insured. It does not do you much good if you have a preexisting condition and you're told yes, indeed, you have guaranteed insurance, but it's going to cost 30 to 50 percent of your income. That is not universal coverage.

And so we have to look very carefully. But we're encouraged that the finance committee as well as the other committees are making very good faith efforts to achieve agreement on universal coverage, which should be (inaudible).

Q Mrs. Clinton, how much time have you spent (inaudible)?

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MRS. CLINTON: (Inaudible) so I will continue doing everything I can (inaudible).

Q (Inaudible.)

MRS. CLINTON: I have been doing it. I was in Texas just a few days ago. I continue to travel. I will look forward to traveling, because what I find as I travel around the country is that once people understand what the President and the congress are trying to do, there is great approval.

Clearly, when they don't get a message that conveys accurate information, there is confusion. So anything that I and others can do to clarify the debate, point out what we're trying to achieve, we will continue to do, because this is the most important social issue we've faced in a very long time.

Q (Inaudible) debate about the American people (inaudible) structure (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: I think that once the debate is joined, as it will be, as the majority leader says, in July, and Americans are able to listen to the debate and to weigh what is being said, we already (inaudible) percentage of Americans who believe that universal coverage is essential for their own well being -- will continue to rise. It is very difficult to explain any bill that would lead to millions uninsured or leave access to insurance to a marketplace that would deny insurance, in effect, because it would be priced out of people's ability to pay.

And so once the debate really starts, as it will, I think the American people will become very (inaudible). There's never been an issue that is more personal, that people care more about. That's why I have been, from the beginning of this, optimistic that finally this country will solve this problem. And I believe it will happen this year.

(End of tape.)

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