

7/11/84
Press Availability Bonn, Germany

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Bonn, Germany)

For Immediate Release

July 11, 1994

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
TO REPORTERS

Outside the Mariim Hotel
Bonn, Germany

4:21 P.M. (L)

Q. What does the German health care system have to do with health care reform, in your opinion, in the United States?

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I think it's something that we can look at and learn from. The German system is a public-private system. They have private insurance, and people belong to large insurance pooling cooperatives. And they join the one that they're either associated with at work, or that they have some other relationship with. And the German system has been able to provide a high quality of health care at a much more cost-effective rate than we have.

And it's been interesting to me in the last months to look at how, in 1980, our costs and Germany's costs were comparable. And then Germany decided to get serious about making sure it could afford to give quality health care to all of its citizens and began to make some changes that kept their cost at a much more reasonable level, while ours continued to go up.

So I do think people who are serious about health care reform in our country could look and see some things. It's not perfect; there are changes they would like to make. In fact, I talked about some of that with some of the people that I have met. But there are features that I think would be useful for us to consider.

Q They have universal coverage.

Mrs. Clinton: That's right, they do.

Q And their economy has survived.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, they have an employer-employee based system, too, Wolf. They have a system where the insurance

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for the vast majority of people is available through the workplace. And the individual and the employer each contribute to the private insurance that the employee buys.

And that is the model that we think would work best in our country because it is the closest to what we already do, which is employer-employee-based health insurance.

And the same arguments against universal coverage were made against Social Security, which is an employer-employee contribution; against Medicare, which is paid for with an employer-employee contribution; against every minimum wage increase. And our economy is doing very well. We are the envy of the rest of the world because the last year and a half has produced so many jobs and our recovery seems to be going along so well.

I certainly think that the next stage for our country to take economically is to achieve universal coverage, which is the only way we can control costs for the long run.

Q What's the strategy now that you're heading back home? You have a month before Congress goes to recess. What are you going to do?

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I don't know. We'll have to get back and see what the members of Congress think. And the President will be making those decisions.

But I think the more people realize what the President really wants, which is universal coverage -- which means everybody is guaranteed private health insurance -- maintain our quality, guaranteed choice, and do it through the workplace, I think then people are going to be very responsive and support that.

Q If it's so successful here, why is it having such a hard time being accepted in Congress?

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I think every country has its own culture, politically, and socially. And I don't know that we ever in America look at any other country and say, we want to do that. We need American solutions to American problems.

And I think it's only now in our country that we're really taking health care and its quality and cost seriously. It's a problem that we know we've had for 60 years. But it's really only in the last year and a half, since the President's been pushing this relentlessly, that we've had the kind of national attention paid to it. That's what it takes to get reform through. And it took a while for Social Security, it took a while for Medicare; these things are difficult. But I'm very confident eventually we will have universal coverage. And

that's very essential to continuing to afford the kind of high-quality health care that we in America take for granted.

Thank you very much.

Q Are you having a fun on the trip?

Mrs. Clinton: I'm having a great time. It's wonderful. I mean, it's been such a wonderful experience for us.

Q What's been the highlight so far?

Mrs. Clinton: You know, everything has been really special, because -- well, first of all, my mother and my daughter are with me. So that makes it special to start with. And then the countries we've gone to, we've been received so beautifully and everybody has been so enthusiastic in their feelings about America and the new kind of partnership that we have "partnership for peace," if you will. People seem to be very excited about it, so it's been a great trip.

Thank you.

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4:30 P.M.