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HEALTHY PEOPLE
LIFE

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PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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AN ADDRESS OF THE FIRST LADY
AT HEALTHRIGHT EVENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MRS. CLINTON: -- I truly enjoy HealthRight events because I always get to hear from people and meet people who I think are the real heroes and the real people of courage in America.

And all during the events of this morning, Ryan has been just smiling up a storm. He has been nodding at everything every senator has said, in obvious agreement. He has listened very carefully to all the stories that have been told about all of the children as well as the working people, the young people, the older people. And throughout all, he had the expression on his face that I can only describe as beatific. He had (inaudible) remarkable.

So when I got up to speak, and he stood up and started applauding, I thought, "Aha, Ryan. You just have to go with me for the next couple of weeks." (Inaudible.) (Applause.)

We had an event at the White House a couple of weeks ago where children stood and read the letters that they had written about health care. And there was one boy who stood up, and he talked about his brother Mike, who has some serious problems, and talked about all of the difficulties his family has in making sure that Mike has the health care that he needs.

And at the end of it, this young boy who was talking about his little brother Mike said, "I think we need a slogan to make sure we get health care reform." He said, "I think the slogan should be MIKE: Medical Insurance for Kids Everywhere." And I thought that if you can keep in mind the Mikes and the Ryans and everyone else who has spoken, those are pretty good arguments against all of the negativism

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I wanted to say just a few words about universal coverage. Because universal coverage has become properly the real cornerstone, as we heard earlier, about what it is we are trying to achieve. And the reason it is is because health care reform without universal coverage will not work. (Applause.)

For those of us who have been advocating universal coverage, we have said repeatedly, If you have a better idea, if you can solve all the problems -- not just the problems that we have heard about today of people who already have health care difficulties -- but the problems of all of us. Because as several of our speakers have said, "There but for the grace of God go any of us."

This is not just about the uninsured. It is not just about the disabled. This is about every American, every one of us. So if there is a better idea about how to achieve universal coverage, we are open to it. We have waited. We have waited 60 years. We have waited 30 years. We have waited now a year and a half for any of the opponents of universal coverage to come forward with an idea that will work.

Now, the reason it will not work is because under piecemeal reforms, working people continue to have no coverage and run the risk of losing coverage. When an employer drops coverage, or as you heard this morning, when you change jobs and you are put on a 90-day or 6-month waiting period for pre-existing condition, you are not secure, even though you have tried to do the right thing by working one job, two jobs, as many jobs as you can possibly afford to fit into a day.

The other reason piecemeal reforms that do not achieve universal coverage will not work is because those reforms will raise the cost of insurance for working people who are already insured. If you saw or heard about the Catholic Health Association Lewin (phonetic) Study on Monday, which was done because the Catholic Health Association has a long commitment to taking care of all Americans within their areas, they concluded without any possible doubt that if you only do piecemeal reform, you will actually increase costs for middle-income Americans.

Now, this was not just an abstract study. States have tried to deal with rising health care costs. Every

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piecemeal reform that has been introduced in either the House or the Senate has its roots in one of the more than 40 states which have tried to deal with this kind of health care problem.

And we know from looking at the state experiences that in the absence of national universal coverage, you will not get the results you want.

For example, take Iowa and South Carolina, two states which have tried to do what some in the House and the Senate have said we should do: Have some piecemeal reform, some insurance reform, subsidize the poor, and everything will be fine.

Well, it is not fine. Because what has happened in both Iowa and South Carolina under piecemeal, non-universal reform, is that the number of working Americans -- middle-class, working Americans -- who have lost insurance has gone up. And the cost for insurance for people who remain insured has gone up. Two results that we cannot afford to let happen any longer.

And finally, you cannot eliminate pre-existing conditions, provide portability, and guarantee real coverage to every American that can never be taken away if you do not have universal coverage.

Now, what is the problem since anyone who objectively looks at this reaches the same conclusion? The problem is that the 80 percent of Americans who want universal coverage are being drowned out by the 20 percent who do not want to pay their fair share. (Applause.)

I was raised in a conservative, Republican family. I was the kind of Republican when I was growing up who followed people like Arthur Fleming, who were basically committed to making this country what it should be by giving people opportunities to work hard, and if they played by the rules, they would be rewarded.

And where I come from, people who are freeriders and freeloaders on the system do not deserve respect. What they deserve is to be told they have to join the rest of us and pay for the best health care system in the world. And the members of Congress should be willing to stand up to those little tails that are wagging the big dog of universal

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health care coverage and reform, and say, "You, too, should have to share responsibility."

And we ought to be able from this Capitol to say that every American, not just federal employees and members of Congress and the President, not just people on Welfare, and not just people in the jails of America, ought to be guaranteed health insurance.

That's what this battle is about. It's the right thing to do. It makes economic sense for America. And it is something that needs to be done now.

Thank you very much.

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