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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 31, 1994

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
HEALTH SECURITY EXPRESS RALLY
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

MS. CLINTON: Thank you all. Thank you so much for your enthusiastic support of universal health care coverage for every American. Thank you for being here today.

This hall, which has been part of our history for hundreds of years, is filled to overflowing, and I was just handed a note that sound is being piped out outside. And there are television monitors and there are over 1500 people who are supporting universal health care (inaudible.) (Applause.)

We're grateful that they are, sorry they cannot be inside, but I think several of us who are on the stage will come outside and talk with all of you who are out there as well. (Applause.)

I want to thank Senator Kennedy for his stalwart support of those who are often without a voice, who may not be heard over the din of negativism and opposition, and who, because of his leadership, has enabled this country to provide more decency and support for millions and millions of working Americans. (Applause.)

I'm grateful for Congressman Moakley, who is here and will and has played a pivotal role in the health care debate. I want to thank the mayor for speaking out on behalf of this city and its residents. I want to thank John Sweeney. I never thought I'd see John quoting The Who, but I thought that was remarkable. (Laughter.)

I am also grateful for all who are here, and a particular word to Dr. Rafkin (phonetic), who is here, who

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spoke earlier, who stands for those men and women who are at the forefront of the health care system in America, the people who run the fine research hospitals and medical schools and academic health centers. They know that the future of what is best about American medicine rests on our obtaining universal coverage. And I want to thank them. (Applause.)

And as well, we've already heard from Jerry McKinty (phonetic) and the others who are on the stage who have given great support to this. I also want to thank, for his courage and vision in promoting universal health care years ago, former Governor Dukakis and I'm grateful that he is here tonight. (Applause.)

But I think that all of you would join me in reserving our greatest thanks to the two women who spoke earlier. These two women shared their stories.

Both Cheryl and Sandy came here to talk about what is ordinarily very personal matters, the condition of the health of their children or themselves, to talk in a very public forum about what it means to work hard in America but not be secure, that if the unexpected illness or accident occurs, you will be able financially to manage.

Cheryl and Sandy represent millions of Americans. I have been privileged over the last year and a half to share many of their stories with them. And I know, in looking out at this crowd, that I see people of all ages, various ethnic and racial backgrounds. I assume that there are Republicans, Democrats, Independents; I can recognize some of you in this crowd and know that.

But what I see goes far beyond what is usually used to define us so narrowly. I see people united in a common cause because they know that what we are attempting to do in guaranteeing health care coverage to all Americans is not only the right thing for our country but is the best thing for all of us and our own families. (Applause.)

All too often this health care debate divides along lines not of party or background or region of country but of experience. Have you or someone you know, someone you love, had an experience that makes you now know that you are no longer secure were you to be facing a medical crisis?

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Because as I've traveled around the country, I've had many people come to me and say, "I didn't really know what your husband was talking about when he first started saying we needed to have universal health care coverage. I really didn't know who these people were who were the uninsured. I didn't have any idea."

And what I hope, as we move forward in the next few weeks, is that the faces and the stories of people like Cheryl and Sandy, the experiences of those of you who will ride the buses to Washington, that they will be kept at the forefront of this debate.

I have to confess that, unless I had become immersed in it, I'm not sure I would be one of those who really understands what's at stake. My husband and daughter and I have been blessed by good health. And I have not had the personal experience that many of you have had.

But I have tried, over the last year and a half, always to put myself in the other person's position. That is what I was raised to believe when I would go to Sunday school. That is what my parents taught me. That is what I believe politics should really be about. (Applause.) That every one of us say, "There but for the grace of God go I or someone whom I love."

But if we look at this debate that is about to occur, it will take place on many levels, and the danger is we will lose the faces and the stories. So you must, all of us must, work to make sure that does not happen. But at the same time, we can also argue very convincingly that there are many reasons, even beyond the stories, to do what we know must be done.

There are economic reasons why this country needs to have universal health care coverage. Those economic reasons are at the base of what the President has said over and over again, when he has pointed out that our country spends more money than any other country that guarantees health insurance to its citizens, but we don't.

We are not getting good value for our dollar. We are not being able to use the money that you and I pay for private insurance or the tax dollars we pay to make sure people do get some kind of care. We are not using that money as effectively and efficiently as we should. And just think

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of the many reasons why we are not.

Most insurance policies, still today, do not cover preventive health care. We are penny-wise and pound-foolish. When are we going to start changing that? (Applause.)

If we would insure for preventive care the way Hawaii does, we would have, as Hawaiians do, more people going to the doctor more often than in the rest of America but paying less in health care. Why? Because if you give prenatal care to a pregnant woman, you will avoid problems that could otherwise cost us a lot of money. (Applause.)

I don't know how many of you have ever visited the rehabilitative unit of a large hospital. Many of you, as I see, have been in such units. I have gone into them. I have walked up and down. I have spoken to the people who are there. And time and time again what I hear just infuriates me.

Because what people tell me is they had a problem which they postponed taking care of because they didn't have insurance which would cover the problem. When you stand at the side of a man who has just had his feet amputated because of advanced diabetes and you ask him, "When was the last time you had a checkup to determine whether you had diabetes and how it was progressing?"

And he looks at you and says, "I never had insurance on any of the jobs I worked. The last checkup I had was when I got out of the Navy in 1947."

You sit there and you think, well, yes, we are a charitable country, and this man who is in the hospital will be taken care of. But why not take care of him before the problem develops and save us all the anguish and the money (inaudible)? (Applause.)

You all know a million stories like that which stress how important and how cost effective preventive care can be. But there are other economic issues at stake. You heard Cheryl.

Her husband and her father have small businesses. They pay for insurance. They not only pay for insurance for their workers and their families, they pay for the insurance and the medical costs of those people who will not take care

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of themselves and will not make a contribution to the health care cost.

So every time somebody goes into Cheryl's husband's restaurant and pays for the meal he has, which goes into the amount of money that that small business makes, that, in effect, is penalizing that responsible business because the competitor down the street, in the minority of businesses, refuses to do what is responsible.

So that when the worker of the second business gets sick and goes to the hospital and gets taken care of, guess who pays for it? All the rest of us. Because our premiums go up, our taxes go up. (Applause.)

You know, in politics they always say, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." Well, the folks who don't want to pay their fair share, who want to continue freeloading off the system, have been awfully squeaky the last year. I think it's time they hear from some other folks who are doing what is responsible and are paying the bills of this health care system in our country.

If you look at what universal coverage will mean, it will mean that businesses who currently insure will save money. And businesses that don't insure, that minority, that squeaky wheel or that little tail wagging the big dog that is all the rest of us, they will have to contribute as well.

And what everyone, the President and members of Congress, have tried to do is to establish a system so that small businesses with legitimate problems will get the kind of financial help they need to be able to afford insurance.

But again, if you look at Hawaii, 20 years ago they made a brave decision that every business would insure their workers. And what happened? Costs went down, particularly for small businesses, who in Hawaii pay 30 percent less than small businesses in the rest of America.

And, in addition, what we have seen from the Hawaiian example is that if everybody is in the system, then the cost can be contained. Because it's like holding on to a balloon. If you only try to squeeze cost in one part of it, it balloons out somewhere else. This is good for business.

It may not be good for some of the businesses that

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Senator Kennedy has exposed, who are very large businesses, who operate in many countries where they pay for insurance for French or German or Japanese workers, and in Hawaii, where they pay for Hawaiian workers, where they want to compete with everybody else on an unfair playing field. But it will be good for everybody else.

Because we will finally get health care costs to a manageable level, and every American business and every American worker will be able to afford the kind of health security that now is denied to too many of us. That is what is really at stake in the economics (inaudible.) (Applause.)

But in addition to the economic reasons, there are social reasons and political reasons. You know, I don't know how you feel, but when I listen to somebody like Sandy, who's on the front line, sitting in an emergency room, knowing that the people who are coming in are there because they don't have anywhere else to go, often finding that if they're not uninsured, they are underinsured and they cannot afford the care that they need, I don't think that's right in our country.

Now, that may be a real old-fashioned view in some circles. There are, hard as it is to believe, some people who say, "Health care is a privilege. You can either afford it or you can't. It's nobody else's business." I have yet to meet anybody who says that who is not insured. And I think it's time to call that.

But what is so sad is that the people who say that have no more security than the rest of us. In 1980, 88 percent of Americans who worked for a living full time had health insurance. Now it's down to 83 percent and we're going in the wrong direction.

So these folks who are against providing insurance for everyone for ideological reasons had better watch what happens to them and people they know. But there are also political reasons why we need to do this.

Our country is at a turning point. Are we going to be able to make government work? That's what this president pledged when he ran for office because he said he was tired of seeing the government fail to work for the people who paid the bills and who worked hard for a living and played by the rules. He was tired of seeing all of the breaks and all of

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the other activities go in the direction of those who could pull the strings and influence people in Washington.

Well, you know, two years ago, when he was running for office, if he had said to you or if I, on his behalf, had said to you, "Elect Bill Clinton and within 18 months here's what you'll have. Finally, after years of talk and no action, you'll have a President who actually presents an economic recovery plan that actually gets by the Congress with the result that instead of just talking about it the deficit is going down for a change.

"And because he believes that will help spur investments, that President will push for that against great political odds with the result we will have, within 18 months, 3.8 million new jobs that were not there before he became President. And despite all the rhetoric on the other side, we'll have a political system that is actually working for people."

Now some folks didn't like it in Washington when the President said, "Here's the kind of exchange I want. Raise taxes on the richest 1 1/2 percent of Americans and lower them on 17 million Americans who work every day and shouldn't have to pay taxes on their wages." (Applause.)

You know, and then, if he had said, "Well, not only are we going to have an economic recovery that's going to put us back on our feet. We're going to expand trade. We're going to pass the best educational legislation that has been passed in a generation, so that young people who don't go on to four-year colleges are going to be given chances for apprenticeship and lifetime learning and are going to be treated with the dignity and respect that working class kids deserve to have in this country." (Applause.)

And for all of those youngsters who want to go to college, don't you think it would be a good idea to lower the amount of interest they have to pay on their college loans, which is now going to happen to 20 million college students? (Applause.)

And wouldn't it be great to have a president who stood up to the National Rifle Association (inaudible)? (Applause.) Not only stood up against them, but beat them twice by getting the Brady bill turned into law and taking assault weapons off the streets and out of the hands of

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(inaudible.) (Applause.)

And wouldn't it be great to have a President who, for a change, didn't just talk tough about crime while the crime rate kept going up and up and all of us felt less secure? Well, thanks to this President and this leadership of this Congress, we are now going to have a crime bill.

And do you know what it does? It is going to put 100,000 more police on the streets so that mayors like this mayor can actually keep you safer all over America.

And it's going to say, "If you've committed three violent crimes, we're sick and tired of you. Three strikes and you're out. We don't want to see you on our streets anywhere in America again.

Now, in addition, we will also be trying to say something can be positive about this because, you know, we cannot build enough prisons for everybody in America, which is what some people want. We've got to build some more and we are, but we also have to start giving young people something to say yes to: more recreation, more jobs, drug treatment, education (inaudible.) (Applause.)

Now, and if the President, when he was running two years ago, had also said, "And not only that, we're going to have health care reform and welfare reform, I think a lot of you would have said, "Wait a minute. This doesn't seem likely." Some of you might say, if I were to say that, "What is she smoking and did she inhale (inaudible)?" (Laughter.) I mean, you know.

But all of that has happened. Every bit of it has happened, and health care reform and welfare reform are about to happen. And why has it happened? It's happened because, for the first time in years, we have a President who is unwilling to deny the problems of America for his own political advantage. And that's what is at stake. (Applause.)

It is very interesting to me, all the opposition to every one of these steps forward, and there are many more you probably haven't even heard about. They've been working so hard there. Because the opposition, the defenders of the status quo, don't want any of this to happen.

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I mean, it is so much easier just to prevent things than to try to make things happen. So it is important to our political system that this Congress act on health care reform.

But there is a final reason. And every one of you, I think, know what that is. And it is a moral reason. This is the richest country in the world. We are all, every one of us, blessed every morning because we wake up as Americans. We owe something, both to the generations to come and the generations that came before.

When my husband was at Normandy for the D-Day celebrations he said, clearly, to our parents and to some of your grandparents, "We are the children of your sacrifice." We are today enjoying this country because before people stood up and accepted responsibility for the problems and the challenges that were faced. It is now our turn to do the same.

When Social Security was passed, we heard the same opposition as you're hearing now. When Medicare was passed, we heard the same thing. In fact, many of the people who say that what the President and the senator and the congressman stand for is socialized medicine are happy to take Medicare benefits paid for with payroll deductions from workers and businesses.

But that decision for Medicare was not just economically right or socially right or politically right. It was morally right. And because of it, we have rescued millions of older Americans from the indignity and the fear of their health care being gone because they could not afford to pay for it.

We have taken care of Americans over 65. We have taken care of the poorest among us. But for middle income, working Americans, we have left all of us in a state of insecurity.

And what we need to do is to make our voices loud and clear. That this is not a debate about government. This is not a debate about having doctors told who will take care of whom. That doesn't happen under Medicare. It's not going to happen under the kind of private insurance that is being debated here. This is a debate about whether we will live up to our better instincts, whether we will take care of each

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other.

And I want to end with just one story. I finished making a speech in Washington and, as I was leaving the podium and the stage, a middle aged white man, very well dressed, took my hand and he said, "I never understood what you and your husband were talking about. I've always had health insurance and it's always been very good."

He said, "But I have a woman who works in my office and she has two children and they have children. And to share expenses, they live together."

Three little children, one of them got very sick, had a high temperature, 104 degrees, was rushed to the hospital. The hospital inquired what kind of insurance the family had. The father was able to show the insurance card. The child was admitted, diagnosed with meningitis, stayed in the hospital for quite some period of time.

A few days later, the cousin of the first child had a high fever, was rushed to the same hospital where the other child was being treated. The mother of this child, recently divorced, no health insurance, working every day, was asked the same question, "What kind of insurance do you have?" She said, "None." She was then referred to another hospital.

She takes her baby to another hospital, waits again when they find out she has no insurance. Somebody finally gets to them. They give her two baby Tylenol and they send her home. On the day that the cousin who was admitted to the hospital was released, the other child died.

And the little brother of the child who died came down with the same kind of high fever, was rushed to the hospital. The hospital that had turned away the first child then said, "We will take the brother as a charity case."

When the man finished telling me this story and then when we called and verified the details with the grandparents and the parents, I thought to myself, that is just what Dr. Koop, who had traveled with me, told me months ago when he said, "If you are uninsured in America, you have three times more likely the chance of dying from the same ailment of an insured person."

I found it hard to believe when I first heard it.

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I no longer do. And I don't want to spend another year, in the country we all love so much, worrying about another child who might be turned away or not given the treatment he or she needs.

I want to live in a country like the one that I love and that I've committed many years of my life trying to make a contribution to, which, once and for all, says, "Every person is not only equal in the eyes of God, but every person will be given the same rights to have health care, to live up to their God-given potential."

So let's go and spread the message to all those (inaudible.) (Applause.)

Thank you.

(End of speech.)

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But I have tried, over the last year and a half, always to put myself in the other person's position. That is what I was raised to believe when I would go to Sunday school. That is what my parents taught me. That is what I believe politics should really be about. (Applause.) That every one of us say, "There but for the grace of God go I or someone whom I love."

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how you feel, but when I listen to somebody like Sandy, who's on the front line, sitting in an emergency room, knowing that the people who are coming in are there because they don't have anywhere else to go, often finding that if they're not uninsured, they are underinsured and they cannot afford the care that they need, I don't think that's right in our country.

Now, that may be a real old-fashioned view in some circles. There are, hard as it is to believe, some people who say, "Health care is a privilege. You can either afford it or you can't. It's nobody else's business." I have yet to meet anybody who says that who is not insured. And I think it's time to call that.

But what is so sad is that the people who say that have no more security than the rest of us. In 1980, 88 percent of Americans who worked for a living full time had health insurance. Now it's down to 83 percent and we're going in the wrong direction.

So these folks who are against providing insurance for everyone for ideological reasons had better watch what happens to them and people they know. But there are also political reasons why we need to do this.

Our country is at a turning point. Are we going to be able to make government work? That's what this president pledged when he ran for office because he said he was tired of seeing the government fail to work for the people who paid the bills and who worked hard for a living and played by the rules. He was tired of seeing all of the breaks and all of the other activities go in the direction of those who could pull the strings and influence people in Washington.

Well, you know, two years ago, when he was running for office, if he had said to you or if I, on his behalf, had said to you, "Elect Bill Clinton and within 18 months here's what you'll have. Finally, after years of talk and no action, you'll have a President who actually presents an economic recovery plan that actually gets by the Congress with the result that instead of just talking about it the deficit is going down for a change.

"And because he believes that will help spur investments, that President will push for that against great political odds with the result we will have, within 18

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months, 3.8 million new jobs that were not there before he became President. And despite all the rhetoric on the other side, we'll have a political system that is actually working for people."

Now some folks didn't like it in Washington when the President said, "Here's the kind of exchange I want. Raise taxes on the richest 1 1/2 percent of Americans and lower them on 17 million Americans who work every day and shouldn't have to pay taxes on their wages." (Applause.)

You know, and then, if he had said, "Well, not only are we going to have an economic recovery that's going to put us back on our feet. We're going to expand trade. We're going to pass the best educational legislation that has been passed in a generation, so that young people who don't go on to four-year colleges are going to be given chances for apprenticeship and lifetime learning and are going to be treated with the dignity and respect that working class kids deserve to have in this country." (Applause.)

And for all of those youngsters who want to go to college, don't you think it would be a good idea to lower the amount of interest they have to pay on their college loans, which is now going to happen to 20 million college students? (Applause.)

And wouldn't it be great to have a president who stood up to the National Rifle Association (inaudible)? (Applause.) Not only stood up against them, but beat them twice by getting the Brady bill turned into law and taking assault weapons off the streets and out of the hands of (inaudible.) (Applause.)

And wouldn't it be great to have a President who, for a change, didn't just talk tough about crime while the crime rate kept going up and up and all of us felt less secure? Well, thanks to this President and this leadership of this Congress, we are now going to have a crime bill.

And do you know what it does? It is going to put 100,000 more police on the streets so that mayors like this mayor can actually keep you safer all over America.

And it's going to say, "If you've committed three violent crimes, we're sick and tired of you. Three strikes and you're out. We don't want to see you on our streets

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anywhere in America again.

Now, in addition, we will also be trying to say something can be positive about this because, you know, we cannot build enough prisons for everybody in America, which is what some people want. We've got to build some more and we are, but we also have to start giving young people something to say yes to: more recreation, more jobs, drug treatment, education (inaudible.) (Applause.)

Now, and if the President, when he was running two years ago, had also said, "And not only that, we're going to have health care reform and welfare reform, I think a lot of you would have said, "Wait a minute. This doesn't seem likely." Some of you might say, if I were to say that, "What is she smoking and did she inhale (inaudible)?" (Laughter.) I mean, you know.

But all of that has happened. Every bit of it has happened, and health care reform and welfare reform are about to happen. And why has it happened? It's happened because, for the first time in years, we have a President who is unwilling to deny the problems of America for his own political advantage. And that's what is at stake. (Applause.)

It is very interesting to me, all the opposition to every one of these steps forward, and there are many more you probably haven't even heard about. They've been working so hard there. Because the opposition, the defenders of the status quo, don't want any of this to happen.

I mean, it is so much easier just to prevent things than to try to make things happen. So it is important to our political system that this Congress act on health care reform.

But there is a final reason. And every one of you, I think, know what that is. And it is a moral reason. This is the richest country in the world. We are all, every one of us, blessed every morning because we wake up as Americans. We owe something, both to the generations to come and the generations that came before.

When my husband was at Normandy for the D-Day celebrations he said, clearly, to our parents and to some of your grandparents, "We are the children of your sacrifice."

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We are today enjoying this country because before people stood up and accepted responsibility for the problems and the challenges that were faced. It is now our turn to do the same.

When Social Security was passed, we heard the same opposition as you're hearing now. When Medicare was passed, we heard the same thing. In fact, many of the people who say that what the President and the senator and the congressman stand for is socialized medicine are happy to take Medicare benefits paid for with payroll deductions from workers and businesses.

But that decision for Medicare was not just economically right or socially right or politically right. It was morally right. And because of it, we have rescued millions of older Americans from the indignity and the fear of their health care being gone because they could not afford to pay for it.

We have taken care of Americans over 65. We have taken care of the poorest among us. But for middle income, working Americans, we have left all of us in a state of insecurity.

And what we need to do is to make our voices loud and clear. That this is not a debate about government. This is not a debate about having doctors told who will take care of whom. That doesn't happen under Medicare. It's not going to happen under the kind of private insurance that is being debated here. This is a debate about whether we will live up to our better instincts, whether we will take care of each other.

And I want to end with just one story. I finished making a speech in Washington and, as I was leaving the podium and the stage, a middle aged white man, very well dressed, took my hand and he said, "I never understood what you and your husband were talking about. I've always had health insurance and it's always been very good."

He said, "But I have a woman who works in my office and she has two children and they have children. And to share expenses, they live together."

Three little children, one of them got very sick, had a high temperature, 104 degrees, was rushed to the

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hospital. The hospital inquired what kind of insurance the family had. The father was able to show the insurance card. The child was admitted, diagnosed with meningitis, stayed in the hospital for quite some period of time.

A few days later, the cousin of the first child had a high fever, was rushed to the same hospital where the other child was being treated. The mother of this child, recently divorced, no health insurance, working every day, was asked the same question, "What kind of insurance do you have?" She said, "None." She was then referred to another hospital.

She takes her baby to another hospital, waits again when they find out she has no insurance. Somebody finally gets to them. They give her two baby Tylenol and they send her home. On the day that the cousin who was admitted to the hospital was released, the other child died.

And the little brother of the child who died came down with the same kind of high fever, was rushed to the hospital. The hospital that had turned away the first child then said, "We will take the brother as a charity case."

When the man finished telling me this story and then when we called and verified the details with the grandparents and the parents, I thought to myself, that is just what Dr. Koop, who had traveled with me, told me months ago when he said, "If you are uninsured in America, you have three times more likely the chance of dying from the same ailment of an insured person."

I found it hard to believe when I first heard it. I no longer do. And I don't want to spend another year, in the country we all love so much, worrying about another child who might be turned away or not given the treatment he or she needs.

I want to live in a country like the one that I love and that I've committed many years of my life trying to make a contribution to, which, once and for all, says, "Every person is not only equal in the eyes of God, but every person will be given the same rights to have health care, to live up to their God-given potential."

So let's go and spread the message to all those
(inaudible.) (Applause.)

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Thank you.

(End of speech.)

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