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THE WHITE HOUSE

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT CDF/HEALTHRIGHT EVENT

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. Thank you, Senator Dodd, and I particularly want to thank Senator Dodd for making children's health the first issue that the Senate addressed. And Senator Riegle -- I want to thank Senator Riegle for making it an issue when the Senate Finance Committee was doing its deliberations. Both of these Senators have consistently spoken out on behalf of children, and I am very grateful to both of them and want to thank them.

I know we've already heard from five wonderful witnesses about what is happening with children in their families. And I see before me many others who could stand and tell their stories as well. I would like, though, to introduce and to have stand the mothers of the children who are here.

I know we've already been able to meet Kathy and had a chance for her to talk about all of Jennifer's needs and how wonderfully Jennifer is doing in the face of all of those health problems and those 2 million dollars' worth of bills.

But I also would like Rakeia's (phonetic) mother to stand, if she would. And I also -- I cannot resist adding to Rakeia's story that -- what a state we have come to when a child, playing in one of our parks during a summer day, goes to play with sand and is hit by a bullet that strikes the glass that -- I don't know how many of you, as children, played -- but we used to spend hours with containers, filling them with sand and dumping them and making different objects with them.

And I think about all of the time that I spent in parks and around sandboxes, and it is just extraordinary -- unbelievably unacceptable -- that any child, anywhere in our country, would be playing in a park and have to cope with a

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stray bullet, and then be left with medical needs that cannot be met in a society that permits that to go on.

So I certainly hope that -- in addition to your sharing your story about the needs for continuing health care that you're not receiving, I hope your story will stiffen the spine of those of us in this country and in this Congress who want to do something about crimes like that.

And Asha (phonetic), your mother is here, too, isn't she? Would you stand up, as well? Thank you very much.

Now, one of the great challenges that parents face when they have beautiful children, like Asha or Jennifer, with chronic conditions, is how they're going to meet their health needs on a daily, weekly, yearly basis.

But particularly with something like diabetes -- and I understand several of your other children have some ongoing health problems -- any possible economic change, any loss of a job, any layoff strikes terror much deeper than what is usually struck in most families, because the loss of health benefits is a matter, often, of life or death. And it's also a problem when you have a disease like diabetes, that when a child gets older and is uninsurable, parents have to worry about that as well.

I just don't understand why we add to the emotional trauma that comes with caring for a child who is ill the financial trauma and challenge that we often layer on top of that because of the insecurity about health care.

As both Senators have said, and as Secretary Benson so well said, "It is not only the right thing to do to take care of health care problems, it is the economically smart thing to do as well."

I have been in hospitals where adults with diabetes have not had the proper care. They end up becoming very sick. They sometimes have to face amputation of one of their limbs, usually a foot or a leg. They then become much more expensive than if we had been able to take care of their health needs as they had gone along. So this is a classic case where we are not investing in what we need to by taking care of children's needs.

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And I want to thank you and your mother for coming here to help explain that to people. Thank you very much. And I bet Jessica's mother is here, too.

And I hope everyone could hear Jessica, because she was so soft-spoken and so eloquent in what she had to say about her mother and her brother. Because what Jessica was really saying is that if you're uninsured in this country, which means you are working, because, as she said, her mother is trying to support herself and Jessica and her brother on her own and not go on welfare, which would give her medical insurance.

But if you are on your own, very often -- more often than we care to admit -- as Jessica said, sometimes people in hospitals are ugly to you because you don't have insurance. Nobody likes to talk about this, but it needs to be talked about.

There are too many people, and there are far too many children who do not get the care they need to have. Because when they show up at the emergency room, the first thing they're asked is, "How are you going to pay for your medical care?" And if they cannot answer that with, "Insurance," or with a Medicaid or a Medicare card, they often go to the end of the line.

And Dr. Koop, with whom I have traveled around the country talking about health care, frequently says, "If you are uninsured in America, you are three times more likely to die from the same medical problem as someone who is insured."

And I have had the painful experience of talking to parents and grandparents whose children were turned away at emergency rooms, sent from hospital to hospital because they did not have insurance, and who either got much sicker or, in several instances, died because of that. So Jessica's story about what happened to her brother because her mother chooses to work, chooses to pay taxes, chooses to try to be independent to take care of her children, puts her and her children at a disadvantage.

There cannot be a worse indictment of a country than to say parents who work are going to be penalized when others who don't work will have their children's health needs taken care of. That needs to be fixed, and it needs to be fixed now.

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And finally, Ian, is your mother here, too? Would you stand? Thank you very much.

What Ian talked about, with the kinds of medication that he needs, and the blood tests that he needs, and the costs of all of that, is a very frequent problem. Because he can be kept functioning well and performing in school and doing what he needs to do as long as he is properly medicated and that medication is properly supervised.

And what we find so often with children who have the kind of medical situation Ian does or children with asthma -- children with other problems that can be maintained -- is if they get proper medical care, they're fine. They can function well. They can be absolutely involved in all sorts of activities.

But so many of them, if they're either uninsured or if they're parents' insurance don't cover all of the costs, then the chances are that they will go without the kind of regular care that they need, which causes problems, then, in the conditions that they have.

If we stop and think about Senator Riegle's story or the stories that any of us could tell, I think that it's absolutely clear there is not one of us in this room, who's a mother or a father, who would not want to do everything we could for our own child and to make sure that child had whatever medical care was needed. And yet we make the job of being a mother or a father very, very hard for too many parents today.

And it is my hope that, finally, the United States can join the ranks of other countries, because every problem you heard about -- every problem you heard about -- would be taken care of without the anguish and the cost to parents in most of the advanced countries that we compete with every single day. They have figured out how to take care of juvenile diabetes, how to monitor chronic conditions, how to deal with the problems of making sure every child gets the health care that is needed.

So I hope that our country will make good on its primary obligation, and that is to take care of our children. And I'm proud to be with two United States Senators who understand that we should treat every child as though that child were our own, because none of us knows what may happen

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to our own children. And we owe it to ourselves, as well as every parent, to make sure that every child has the kind of health care they need. So please help us achieve health care reform this year.

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