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DR. KOOP NATIONAL  
HEALTH AWARDS

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PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

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REMARKS OF THE FIRST LADY  
DR. C. EVERETT KOOP  
NATIONAL HEALTH CARE AWARDS  
WASHINGTON D.C.

DR. KOOP: -- as a result of her leadership and what's really the interweaving of two themes. The first of those was a diagnosis and assessment of what is wrong with our health care system.

And then there was a series of remedies, therefore, known as (inaudible) the diagnosis. However, there was no consensus on the remedies. This kind of leadership, that Mrs. Clinton has provided, takes extraordinary courage because it's a (inaudible) task to face not only health costs on the one hand, but also the vexing issue of universal access.

Then there is the malpractice mess that had to be dealt with, the mounting problems of Medicare and Medicaid, the application of outcomes research, the sweeping reassessment of medical ethics which was severely affected by some of the changes. And that says nothing about moving out fraud and waste and abuse.

Let me read to you what I said at the White House to an audience composed largely of movers and shakers in the health care world. This was on September 20th 1993. Referring to the President's Health Care Bill, I said this:

"There are proposals offered in trust that an honest congressional and national debate will bring out the best in health care reform for the American people."

And so they were. But that did not happen. There were, of course, all shades of disappointment, the First Lady's included. But I can tell you that there was no bitterness of defeat as you read about in the press.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, like many of us, has the determination to finish this task. It must be done. And the American people are well aware of that.

It has been for me a tremendous privilege to get to know the First Lady in these travels we had together, and I have come to appreciate her thoroughness, her compassion, her understanding of all sides of issues. And I want to say, indeed, to understand the integrity that is so much a part of this woman's personality.

Ladies and gentlemen, the First Lady.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much, Dr. Koop.

He has been such an inspiration and wise counsellor during these past 20 months. And I am so grateful to him. He has more good ideas every day than most of us have in a year. It takes a lot of energy to keep up with him.

And what we are doing here today is celebrating another one of his very good and important ideas that has taken shape as in C. Everett Koop National Health Awards.

I also want to thank Carson Beadle, the President of the Health Project; and Dr. Mary Jane England, the chair of the worksite programs for the Health Project and President of the Washington Business Group on Health, which was one of the groups that was very helpful to us as we tried to shape the direction of health care reform.

I also want to acknowledge all of you who have been involved in this movement, for health awareness, for prevention awareness.

And then for all of you who are involved in day-to-day way with the management of disabilities in the workplace and the kind of practical problems that you encounter in the work that you must do in order to assist your employees and try to do the best you can with your employers' challenges in the health care field.

I think it's so important that groups such as this, and groups that are represented here, continue to recognize that changing and improving the health care system is a shared responsibility at all levels of our society.

There are obviously things that we as individuals can and should do to take better care of ourselves. And things that we can and should do together and collectively to improve our health and well-being. We also need to continue efforts to reform our health care system.

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Many of the companies honored here today, and represented here, have been leading the way in attempting both to encourage individual responsibility and to work out ways collectively to manage many of the health care challenges that we know so well.

And we have proven that there are ways that costs can be cut and people's health can be improved. They are not mutually exclusive goals.

One of the hardest issues that I felt we confronted during the last 20 months in our efforts to educate the public about health care, was presenting what intuitively to too many people seemed like an inherent contradiction. And that is that we can make better, more efficient use of our health care dollars, not only without sacrificing the quality of health care, but in many instances actually improving the quality of health care.

I know Dr. Koop and others said that at least a million times. I felt like I have said it at least a trillion times. But it still is very difficult for people to grasp. Because in our system we have spent so much money. And we have spent it in ways that have not enhanced the quality of health care, but have instead (inaudible) the paperwork hospital, and the bureaucracy of our financing system. And many people could not recognize what it would mean to more efficiently deliver the health care dollar.

But that's why the President and I are so grateful to groups like the Health Care Project and the companies that are represented and honored. They do in many important ways stand not only for bringing together what appear to be mutually inconsistent goals in our efforts for health care reform, but they also urge greater cooperation and understanding between the public and private sectors and emphasize the importance of preventive health care.

We have tried very hard, and will continue to do so, to make the point that the government is already involved in the health care system. You all know that. You are on the front line.

I must confess I was continually amazed that so many of our fellow citizens did not know that. I would be asked often -- occasionally with Dr. Koop at my side -- why

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the President wanted the government to run the health care system.

And I would say, well, that's not at all what he is recommending. He wants there to be better incentives in the private sector and a more efficient marketplace so that health care can be delivered better and at a higher quality to all Americans.

And someone then would usually follow up and say, well, that's not what I heard, that's not what I read, and we don't want the government in health care.

And I would say, well, let me ask you this: Do you know anything about Medicare? And they would say, "What does that have to do with anything?" And I would say, well, Medicare is a government-financed health care system, but the government doesn't tell you what doctor to go to.

And that was just one of the many examples of how there is this confusion about what the government already does and what the possibilities for better cooperation and more efficient allocation of resources might be.

We are particularly pleased that companies, such as the ones that were honored here today, are making it clear that there are many things we can do within this system even absent reform, that will make a difference in people's lives and will make a difference in the cost of health care.

So I hope that as you continue this conference, and as you learn more about what you need to be able to do in the work place, and how you can contend with the challenges that you are facing, you will also continue to focus some part of your energies on what we can do to improve the system and solve the problems that are not going away.

Individual companies will be able to attain and sustain for some period of time, perhaps, some kind of competitive edge within the existing system.

But the underlying problems of the way we finance health care are not only cost-shifting, and misallocation of literally billions of dollars that do not go directly to health care, but instead to the paperwork health care system. These will continue to plague us and undermine your best efforts and the rest of our country's best efforts to have a

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health care system that provides high quality health care at an affordable cost to every American. That I believe should continue to be our goal.

It ought to be what we work for both on the individual and business and government levels. And I hope that you will bring your ideas and suggestions to the forefront in your place of employment, and your place of practice, and with those who will make decisions for the future about how we can actually achieve the kind of health care reform that will be good for all of us. Thank you very much.

(End of Speech)

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