

9/21/94
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL IN
MASSACHUSETTS

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL IN MASSACHUSETTS

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much, Senator, and thank you David Wyner (phonetic), for your invitation and for your deep concern on behalf of this hospital and all Children's Hospitals. I want to thank Helen Spalding (phonetic) and the board members, Dr. Lovejoy and the medical staff, the nursing staff, and the entire staff that make this hospital such an extraordinarily place.

I have been very privileged in my life because I've been associated with Children's Hospitals, one in particular in my state of Arkansas where I served on the board, where I helped raise money and where I also had my daughter, luckily, for a very short stay. So I experienced it as a parent, and there is something that undeniably is special about Children's Hospitals, but this particular hospital, as Senator Kennedy never tires of telling me, is the most special place of all when it comes to the universe of Children's Hospitals because you are the biggest.

You have had the most extensive experience in many forms of treatment, and you have a research capacity that is unmatched by any others. As I was walking through the hallway and having a chance to talk to Mr. Wyner, I realized that much of what this hospital stands for and much of which it can be proud is directly related to the partnership between the public and private sector.

As a former board member of Children's Hospital in Arkansas, I know what it takes to raise private funds through private philanthropy, but I also know how essential it is and absolutely the basis of our continued existence as Children's Hospitals to have government support that understands there is a difference between treating children and treating adults.

There is a need for the kind of entertainment center and the child-like work and the family support, and those differences are just a few of what it takes to make sure that

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not only the child but the entire family is supported.

I remember very well when one of my brothers was in a Children's Hospital in Chicago in the days before parents were permitted to do anything other than show up for that one hour of visiting time 8 o'clock at night. So children would wait all day long scared, lonely, confused, and then their mother or their father, because siblings were not permitted, would come in and then be told to leave.

I know what that did to my parents and my brother and the rest of us while he stayed in the hospital. Contrast that with my own experience when my daughter had to go in overnight. I was there in the room. My husband was in and out. Finally, the nurse came in, took one look at me and said, "One thing about Children's Hospital is we take care of parents as well. You need some sleep."

It was that kind of family center care that has made the difference, but there have also been a number of other changes in the last several years that have made a difference for this hospital, for Children's Hospital and for academic health centers.

Senator Kennedy talked about research. What he didn't say is we would not have the NIH budget and the research capacity that this country now enjoys that permits the sort of breakthroughs that enable you on the medical and nursing staff to give the quality of care to our children were it not for Senator Ted Kennedy and the tireless work he has done over the years to promote medical research, and he did it not just because of his own personal experience; he did it because he wanted every single child to have the same aspects of quality care that his children had, and that's the kind of leadership that he has shown when it comes to the health care of our children. (Applause)

I also think as I walk around this hospital of those specialists who are here, pediatric cardiologists, nephrologists, oncologists, and in large measure the training that you have received is because the federal government supported that specialist training. Training of positions is not done in the marketplace without any government support. It is done because the federal government decided 20 years ago or more that we needed certain specialists, and we had to pay for their training because no institution alone could absorb the cost.

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Again, as I look at the medical staff, the nursing specialties, I think of the role that Senator Kennedy has played in his Senate career and his chairing of the important committee through which health legislation passes in the United States Senate and so many other ways.

Now, I say that not as a paid political advertisement, because I'd be glad to say it anywhere, anytime, but as a reminder about what it takes to build great institutions. It takes common purpose, a sense of mission, and resources from both the public and the private sector in order to make the difference, and over and over again I have seen this senator be the only one who would break a logjam, the only one who could talk to both democrats and republicans, who would bring them together. Over and over out of his committee bipartisan solutions emerged because he always talked about what we were trying to do for others and particularly for children.

We are at a kind of funny point in our history right now as a country because we are struggling with how we want to target our resources, what kinds of policies we want to follow, how we feel about our government, what we want to do for all of the needs that exist.

To me, a lot of that is, frankly, just rhetoric. I hear the arguments on the talk shows. I see all of the back and forth in the political game. What matters to me is have we done something today, this week, this month that makes the lives of children better?

That's how I try to measure every single -- (Applause) and every day those of you who work here and those of you who support the work here, you can answer the question, "Yes, I have. I have. I've done something not only to help cure a child or fix a problem but to help with a parent's anxiety or to solve a financial issue that they confront in order to get the care that they need. I've done something to help at least one child."

I wish that is the way we would measure all of our political leaders in America today because, when it is all said and done, what will really count in a lifetime, whether it be of an individual or of a nation, is what have we done to set the groundwork and to make it possible for every child to live up to his or her God-given potential. If we can answer the question positively about that, then I think we have fulfilled our responsibilities as adults and as leaders.

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Based on my work and my long-time observation of Senator Kennedy, he can say that, but we need to work together in partnership to make sure that all of us can say that, because I love coming to Children's Hospitals.

I cannot bear looking into the eyes of parents who don't know whether they will be able to afford to keep coming or whether they will have lifetime limits on their insurance policy coverage cut just when they need it most or who look at me, as a couple did in Cleveland at the Children's Hospital there with two chronically ill children and say, "We can't get insurance. We make too much money to qualify for Medicaid. We've gone from place to place to try to get financial help. The hospital carries us as a charity case, which is not what we think is right, but finally I knew I would never get help in our current system, because after hearing about our children's illnesses and have insurance companies say, 'You just don't understand. We don't insure burning houses.'"

I could not imagine how I would have felt had anyone said that to me about my daughter. I don't want to live in a society where we can say it about anyone's child. (Applause) All of you every day, from those who are in the operating rooms to those who clean the floors and make this place shine, every day you are doing what you can to make it possible that parents with sick children know that they will be taken care of, and I hope that you will speak out to your friends and neighbors about what you see here, what you know are the needs and demand the kind of leadership from the public and private sector in our country that puts our children first. That is the way to maintain a great America for the 21st Century. Thank you all very much.

(End of tape.)

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