

11/3/95
KEEP PATIENTS FIRST

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

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**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR "KEEP PATIENTS FIRST" RALLY
NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. I want to thank the sponsors for organizing this event and all of you for the work you do. You provide the highest quality health care in the world. You represent the most vulnerable of all Americans -- the people who too often are left out and forgotten. You are here being their arms, their legs, their eyes, their ears, because you like me, are very concerned about the proposed Republican budget cuts -- that has stripped more than \$440 billion dollars for Medicaid and Medicare.

This debate, no matter what you hear, is not about balancing the budget. The President has said for a long time -- yes we do need to balance the budget so we can lift the burden of debt off our children and strengthen our economy. In fact, the Democratic members of Congress you see on this stage, and this President have already begun to do that.

For the first time since Harry Truman was President, the budget has been cut three years in a row. We do not have to argue about balancing the budget, it is moving towards balance.

The real issue is -- will we balance the budget by making health care unaffordable for Medicare beneficiaries?

Will we forget that three out of all of the people on Medicare earn less than \$25,000 a year?

We do not have to cut Medicare and raise costs to beneficiaries to balance the budget.

We do not have to cut Medicare spending in New York alone by over \$18 billion.

We do not have to cut Medicaid spending by over \$21 billion.

We do not have to force states to cut coverage under Medicaid for over 8 million children, older Americans and people with disabilities.

This is not just about balancing the budget. It is not just about billions of dollars. It is not just about what we will do to our hospitals here in New York, to medical schools, to the people who take care of the sick and the ill and the dying. It is even more important than all of those significant issues. This debate is about what kind of country we are, what kind of people we are, and what values we still do have.

There are many people who claim to promote family values, but then propose policies that do not value families. We need to stand up for the value of all Americans. We need to be sure that when we go into the budget debate of the weeks ahead, that there will be people who make it very clear that we will stand up for those who do not have a voice or a vote in Washington. Who do not have a lobbyist or a special interest representing them.

And I would like to say a special word about what will happen to children. Eleanor and others have talked eloquently about their families and what the cuts in Medicare will be in older Americans.

Will the cuts in Medicare also affect younger Americans too? Because families trying to raise children will find that they can not afford to do for their children what they want to do, because of the cuts in Medicare.

The Republican budget is an attack on children -- and we are not talking only about poor children -- we are talking about all children. The budget cuts that the Republicans propose will deny millions of children basic health care, schooling opportunities, proper food, a safe place to live -- even the clean air and water they need, and the food that they expect them to have to grow to be healthy.

Just last week when I was at Babies and Children's Hospital I talked with parents who were there because their children were sick. And the children were so sick, that even for families that made a good living they could not afford the medical expenses, and so their children were on Medicaid.

I was very struck by how those parents had given up everything to take care of their children. They knew there is nothing more important in their lives than taking care of children. Why would we as a country begin to deny the most basic and fundamental obligations we have to care for our children -- and that is exactly what this Republican budget does.

Let me just give you a few examples: the Republican budget would eliminate Head Start -- the program that helps young children get ready to learn for 180,000 children. And the cut in nutrition assistance for 14 million children, and reduce funding

to keep our drinking water clean. It would do away with national service, the program known as Americorps.

But what in particular proves that we have to stand up and speak against, is what the Republican budget proposal would do to health care. They are dismantling the social safety net known as Medicaid. The primary source of health coverage for one out of four children in America.

Medicaid pays for the coverage for millions of children who are disabled, and who suffer from chronic illness. It is the primary source of health coverage for nine out of ten children with HIV and AIDS. Medicaid is the primary source of pre-natal and maternal health care for low income pregnant women. And Medicaid is also an important source of funding for long term care for older Americans. Over two thirds of all nursing home residents are there because of Medicaid support.

Medicaid is not for somebody else, Medicaid is for all of us -- it is there in case we need it, it's there so if Americans need it, it's there if your child needs it.

If the Republican budget cuts went through they would eliminate health care coverage through Medicaid for half a million children in New York alone.

I have to ask, as I ask myself, I have to ask all of you. Do you think it is the American way to deny infants the preventive health care they need to stay healthy? I don't think so.

I don't think it is the American way to deny treatment to children who are disabled or desperately ill, or to punish hard working parents whose family health care coverage vanishes with a job loss, or a job change. It is certainly not the American way that I know, to make the oldest among us give up their possessions, sell their house, sell their car, live in poverty if a spouse has to go into a nursing home.

The America I grew up in, the America I want my daughter to grow up in, is better than that.

And every time, every time, I look out to a crowd like this I think of all the stories that appear, all the people who have worked so hard and given so much, who have tried to keep their body and soul and their families together. I do think of us as a great extended American family, whose top priority has always been our children.

Now, whenever I make a speech like this, somebody invariably either writes or says, "Well, you can't expect the government to take care of children -- that is the family's responsibility."

Well0 who argues with that? Of course it's the parents primary responsibility.

But let's not fool ourselves. National policies, whether they are about education or health care or taxes or the environment, affect every family and child. This debate is not about some abstract government program. This debate is about whether or not we will take care of our children. And I would like to ask all of the policy makers in Washington to start thinking about these issues -- not as Republicans or Democrats, not as partisans, but as parents. As parents we know what our children need and who do everything we can to meet those needs.

We know if all our children are healthy, we feel better, but if one of them gets sick we will do everything to take care of that sick child. But when it comes to legislating for other people, parents can turn into partisans, and parental instincts disappear.

Let's start considering ourselves when it comes to our children, that each of us has an obligation to take care of the children around us. Think about it as parents.

Think about it as the children of parents who might need medical care or health care in the future.

Now we already know that the budget that the Republicans have passed are dead on arrival when they arrive in the Oval office. We already know that the President will veto those budgets. But after those vetoes are signed, the hard work will begin. Which is why we need all your voices -- not just for a parade and at a rally -- but in the days and weeks ahead, we need your voices to speak out.

We need you to write letters.

We need you to attend meetings and rallies.

We need you to talk to your friends and neighbors.

We need you to call radio talk shows.

We need your voices heard, so that everyone in Washington has the chance to put aside partisan political agendas and to think like parents, to think like family members, to think like citizens who care about each other and have obligations towards one another. That's the America that I know is waiting there for us, that's the America that we have to fight for -- it is the American way to stand up for each other -- that's what your duty is today. Thank you for being here, but stay in this debate.

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