

Transcript of Q&A at the Sydney  
Opera House 11/21/96

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

Transcript of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's Q&A at the Sydney Opera House, November 21, 1996.

BEGIN Q&A

Q: How does a woman in your busy life find the time and the discipline to write a book?

A: That is a question I asked myself every single day after I agreed to do it. I agreed to write my book in early spring of 1995 and I didn't really begin in earnest until probably June of 1995, but from June until December, that is about all I did. Even when we went on vacation, I took my manuscript with me. My husband, daughter and I went camping in the Grand Tetons of Wyoming, and there was this pathetic sight of my crouching by the fire trying to make changes in the manuscript so that I could get it to my editor and publisher. So I worked very hard on it, I made it a priority, and had a lot of good help and advice from everyone, starting with my husband on down. And it was really my major undertaking, because I felt the need to try to express in one place much of what I had been saying and thinking, so that perhaps it could help start a conversation about a lot of these issues. And it certainly did start a conversation in my country at least.

Q: With your vast knowledge of the U.S. health system, are there any tips you can give Australia as it negotiates the development of its health system?

A: Well, I had a wonderful conversation with your Minister of Health yesterday, and I enjoyed it a great deal because many of the problems that all the advanced economies are facing when it comes to health are similar: issues of supply, of technology and other advances in medicine and issues of demand and aging populations and many others that are in common. But I would certainly rather be starting to deal with these issues from Australia's position than from the United States position. You have a universal system which is essential not only because I believe it is the appropriate response in meeting people's health needs, but because I think it can create more efficiencies if handled correctly. If I'm not mistaken, Australia currently spends about 8.5% of its GDP (its gross domestic product) on health, and the United States despite some changes that have occurred because of alterations in the private health care market place in the last several years is still around 14 to 15%. So there are many, many problems that you have avoided because your system is different from our system. And I think that as you work through a lot of the questions that you'll be facing, that are facing every health care system, I believe that you will be at least looking for ways to keep universality and to come up with more emphasis on prevention and public health which are great cost savers if they can be implemented effectively. Whereas we are in the process of watching a very quickly altering private health care system in our own country and having great debates about the extent of our commitment and the manner in which it will be financed to our public health arena. And it really raises issues that I referred to in my remarks. I am a big believer as you might have gathered from my remarks in the balance of power in many settings, not just among nations. It's a concept I think that has a lot of resonance as we look at many of the problems that we confront in society today. In our own country, it is imperative that we have a sensible balance of power between the public and the private sectors when it comes to health care. And we currently have a quite significant imbalance. And if you look at what is occurring in the American health care system, there is a great debate over what we call Medicare, which is our universal system for Americans over the age

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of 65, and over Medicaid, which is our supplementary funding to very poor Americans, Americans with disabilities, and poor older Americans who are in nursing homes. And that will take up much of the emphasis in the next Congress as to how that system should be reformed in order for it to be maintained. The Medicare system in the United States has a two percent administrative cost. The private health care systems in the United States have percentages of administrative costs ranging from not-for-profit health care systems, that are not public but not private -- like our religious institutions, for example -- of 10 to 15 percent administrative cost to our for-profit health care systems which can have administrative costs as high 30 to 40 percent. So there is an enormous amount of the health care dollar in America that goes to profit, share holder return, administrative costs, salaries, benefits for those running the system, not necessarily physicians, nurses, and health care providers. So, I I think anyone who is concerned about delivering efficient quality health care would have to be concerned about the long term prognosis for the way in which our private health care market is currently operating, but that will be something that we will have to deal with and I certainly don't have enough information at all about your challenges other than based on my review of information and my conversation with the Health Minister, I think you're starting from a much better place to deal with some very difficult issues about cost containment and access and quality and I wish the Country well because I think that these problems can be dealt with if your starting from an assumption of providing universal coverage.

Q: I was told that these questions were selected as representative of the many that were put forward and we're now back to another rather personal one Ma'am. Have you been stereotyped because you're a strong woman in a powerful position rather than judged as a person you really are?

A: Well, oh I'm sure that stereotyping has something to do with every woman's perceived image and how people look at her if she is in any public position, and so I would assume there is some of that. I was saying to Senator Newman before we came in that a few months ago I was in Helsinki Finland which at that time as I recall the Foreign Minister, the Defense Minister, the head of Central Bank and one or two other extremely powerful positions were all held by women and I was visiting with all of these women and we were dissolved in laughter because the Defense Minister and the Foreign Minister and the Central Banker said that you know here they had worked their entire lives and had finally achieved the pinnacle of their political and economic careers and all that was written about them whenever they appeared, made a speech or took any decision was what they were wearing and how their hair looked. So I guess we should form some kind of organization, you know women of the world unite, against hair and costume comments and see whether that takes us anywhere. I kind of doubt that it will, but at least it's a thought. But in my own case I think there are many many factors at work, I couldn't even begin to unpack them all and part of it is the position which is such an odd position, we expect so much in our Country from the woman who is married to the President but we don't really know what it is we expect we just expect a lot of it. And I've gone back and read histories and biographies of nearly I guess now all of the women who have been in this position starting with Martha Washington and regardless of what she did, she was always criticized. There are a few notable exceptions perhaps but by and large I think they are the exceptions that prove the rule. Poor Martha Washington her husband went to the First Congress and asked that she be given a salary because she was working so hard

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and of course that was not received very well and she took the brunt for it and Dolly Madison who was an enormously popular and effective First Lady, she was the one who had the absolute calmness that I find remarkable that during our War of 1812 when the British I guess decided they wanted us back and they were marching on Washington, that never happened to you, it did, it happened to us, they were marching on Washington and President James Madison who was the last of our Presidents actually to be the Commander In Chief in the field had gone out to survey the action and Mrs. Madison was back in the White House and she prepared a wonderful dinner for her husband and all of his officers to eat when they returned and word came that the British had broken through, they were advancing on the White House and she had very few minutes to be able to leave and she had the foresight to save the wonderful Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington which hangs to this day in the East Room of the White House and many of the other treasures which she was able to escape with. The British got to the White House, they saw the dinner Mrs. Madison had prepared, they sat down, they ate it then they burnt the White House after eating the dinner. Now at about this same time shortly after Mrs. Madison was roundly criticized after having performed I think one of the most heroic feats that could have been performed in the White House, roundly criticized for buying a \$40 French mirror and so I think that there is really no way to escape the politics of ones time if you're in that position other than to just totally withdraw perhaps - I don't know, have a bag over your head when you come out into public or in some way to make it clear you have no opinions and no ideas about anything and will never express them publicly or privately and you can just follow that through our history. One of my favorite predecessors as some of you may know is Eleanor Roosevelt and actually I talked to her before I came on this trip. (INAUDIBLE) and came to Canberra. She toured the South Pacific theater. She sends greetings to all of you by the way, and if you read what she went through during those years in the White House, it was constant criticism for matters great and small. So I think that there is something about the position itself which raises in Americans' minds, concerns about hidden power, about influence behind the scenes, about unaccountability, and yet if you try to be public about your concerns and about your interests, then that is equally criticized. So, it's a kind of difficult position, and I think the only answer is to just be who you are and do what you do, and get through it and wait for the First Man to hold the position and see how that turns out.

END Q&amp;A