

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

CNN Town Hall Meeting
Buffalo, NY
4/26/00

**CNN Town Hall Meeting with
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
April 26, 2000**

**SPEAKERS: WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR
FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON,
DEMOCRATIC SENATORIAL CANDIDATE**

BLITZER: She's the first lady of the United States.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON (D), NEW YORK SENATE CANDIDATE: We do not need anymore Republicans in the United States Senate. We have too many as it is.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: He's the mayor of New York City.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MAYOR RUDY GIULIANI (R), NEW YORK: I think I've turned the city in the direction that you agree with, and I'm going to be doing that same thing for the state of New York.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: Short of a presidential race, their battle for the United States Senate may be the most watched political contest in U.S. history.

Tonight, the first nationally televised town meeting of the New York Senate race: Hillary Rodham Clinton faces the voters of New York.

ANNOUNCER: Live from the University of Buffalo, "The New York Senate Race: A LATE EDITION Town Meeting." Now, here's CNN's Wolf Blitzer.

BLITZER: Good evening and welcome to this town meeting, sponsored by CNN and the University of Buffalo.

We're here in the Katharine Cornell Theater on the university campus. This is the first of two town meeting we're planning in New York. Republican candidate Rudy Giuliani has agreed to participate in a similar meeting down the road.

Our audience tonight is made up of students, faculty and staff members of the university, as well as other residents of the greater Buffalo area. All are registered New York state voters.

Ms. Clinton, welcome to my alma mater and my hometown of Buffalo, New York.

CLINTON: I'm glad to be here with you.

BLITZER: We're very excited that you're here.

Mrs. Clinton, I'm going to open the meeting up to questions from the floor in a second, but let me ask you a few questions directly.

A lot of New Yorkers are still not convinced that you are a New Yorker. Many of them still see you as someone who is coming in from the outside--a carpetbagger, if you will--someone who really is primarily seeking to advance your own personal agenda, political ambitions.

What makes you--how can you convince New Yorkers that you really are one of them?

CLINTON: Well, you know, Wolf, for more than 30 years I've worked on issues concerning children and families and trying to improve education and expand health care, and

those are the concerns of my lifetime. And as I've visited with now thousands of New Yorkers, those are the concerns that people talk to me about. And I'd like to take those concerns and the work that I've done and the passion I feel about them to the Senate and work on behalf of the children and families of New York.

To me, it's a commitment to continue a life's work and to put it to work for people who I think are concerned about the same matters that most of us worry about: the kind of futures we're going to have, especially for our children.

BLITZER: And if you don't win this race, will you stay in New York state?

CLINTON: Oh, absolutely. You know, I had planned on living in New York after the White House years. Bill and I talked about that, because for me it's always been something that I've wanted to do.

Now, I didn't think I'd be running for the Senate when I first started thinking about it. But when I was invited to consider it and when I talked to so many New Yorkers and really thought that if New Yorkers wanted me to, I would work my heart out for them, and I intend to make this my home.

BLITZER: Let's talk a little bit about an issue that is in the news right now, the Elian Gonzalez case. You've always been an advocate of children, yet this child--and a lot of Cuban-Americans firmly believe this in their heart and many other Americans believe it as well--this child if forced to go back to Cuba, this 6-year-old, will forever be a pawn, if you will, of Fidel Castro, a propaganda tool, sit on Fidel Castro's lap. He will never have a normal life in Cuba.

Is this what you want for this little boy?

CLINTON: Well, you know, Wolf, I have ever since I was in law school been a children's advocate. I have represented children. I've worked on behalf of child abuse and neglect cases, and tried to reform the foster care and adoption systems. And I approach this primarily as a mother and as a child advocate, and I try to keep my thoughts on what is best for this little boy.

And I know these are very tough issues for a lot of people to think about. I don't have any liking for Fidel Castro or for the Cuban government. I deplore their denial of human rights and the mistreatment of so many people who have fled in order to find freedom in our country.

But on the balance, I think this child belongs with his remaining parent. I think that that is what is in his best interests. And I hope that this reunited family can really work to make sure that he overcomes the trauma of losing his mother, the incredible media circus that he's been part of for the last five months, the political exploitation he's been subjected to by people on all sides of the political spectrum.

I think he deserves the chance to be with his father, and I hope that, you know, we can make the right decision for him as expeditiously as possible.

BLITZER: Would it be appropriate for you, for the president to encourage Juan Miguel Gonzalez, his father, to remain in the United States with Elian?

CLINTON: Well, of course, I think that that's his decision to make. I believe if he were to express such an interest, he's got lawyers and others who represent him who meet with him. Certainly, if that were to come to the attention, I know that people would be more than happy to accommodate that.

But I think that we have to let it be his decision. And I hope that this taste of freedom and the opportunity to be with his son and to have this time perhaps would lead to that. But at the end of the day, this has to be the father's decision, just as we would want it to be your decision, you know, if heaven forbid, something, you know, were to happen and you had been in some way deprived of your child.

And I just think we have to respect the family bonds and we have to do more than give lip service to family values. We have to value families even if those families may live under a regime that we don't value. We have to keep that family bond first and foremost, because I think that's what's in the best interests of most children.

BLITZER: I'm going to a question from the audience in a moment, but on the tactics that were used, the heavily armed force that went in Saturday morning to seize Elian--we've all seen that very dramatic picture, Elian in the closet--he looks terrorized by what is going on. Can you condone that kind of tactic?

CLINTON: Well, I think everyone would agree that it was unfortunate that that kind of activity had to take place, but I understand the concern and frustration of the Justice Department and the attorney general when faced with continuing recalcitrance and opposition to obeying the rule of law, to turning the boy over to the custody of his father, especially when there were court orders and an agreement that they would not leave the country. So it was, I think, on everyone's mind regrettable, but I understand the necessity for it.

You know, at a certain point the rule of law and the rights of a parent to his natural child, who is not in any way proven unfit, have to be respected. So of course, we wish that it hadn't have happened. We wish that the relatives in Miami had cooperated and turned the boy over voluntarily.

BLITZER: All right. Let's take a question from the audience. Please mention your name and your home town.

QUESTION: My name is Jill (UNINTELLIGIBLE). I grew up in Buffalo, New York.

I'm concerned about the fact that young people feel they need to leave Western New York in order to find good jobs, and I was wondering if you might have some ideas about how to reverse that trend.

CLINTON: I'm concerned about that too, and I have given a lot of thought to it and I've talked with so many people here in Western New York, and I have some ideas about it, because I think that we have to look at the obstacles to economic growth here in upstate New York, particularly in Western New York, and we have to attack those obstacles. And then we also have to look at the opportunities.

And let me start with the obstacles, because there are reasons why we haven't been able to keep and attract businesses and grow the economy here the way that we should. We have a very high rate of state and local taxes. You know, the state and local tax burden on those of us who live in New York is the second-highest in the entire country. We have among the highest utility and power costs in the entire country.

I've been in businesses here in Western New York, in manufacturing facilities as well as other businesses, that have told me that they could move across the state line to Ohio or Pennsylvania and cut their utility costs by a third to a half.

And we also do not have adequate transportation, either road transportation, or airfares are too high, so we don't have adequate airport transportation. So those are some of the obstacles that I would like to work on.

Now I can't directory as a senator deal with the high state and local taxation, but as a citizen I'm concerned about it. But as a senator, I would fight to make sure that New York got its fair share of federal dollars, which would us bring more money back to the state, which now sends \$15 billion more to Washington than we get back, in order to lower those taxes.

And I would also fight very hard to make sure when we deregulate electricity, which is working its way thought the Congress, it's done in a way that does not disadvantage Western

New York. And I would also work to make sure that we have better transportation, whether it's, you know, 219 I-86, some the routes that are important for moving goods and services.

But I think there are also opportunities...

BLITZER: Mrs. Clinton, if I could interrupt for a second, because we don't have a whole lot of time. But one issue that you would be able to deal with if you were a United States senator, federal taxes.

CLINTON: Right.

BLITZER: Your opponent, Rudy Giuliani, the Republicans by and large want to cut back, want to reduce federal taxes across the board by a lot more. Now, during a time of affluence, when the economy is strong right now, why not give the American people, the people of New York state, people here in Western New York more of their money that they give to Washington? Why not reduce significantly the tax burden at this point?

CLINTON: Well, I favor middle class targeted tax cuts. I favor easing the marriage penalty. I think we should promote marriage, not penalize it. I favor making college tuition tax deductible so that more families can afford to send their children to a wonderful university like this. I favor long-term tax credit for care that people give to their loved ones who they take in and care for in their homes.

So I think that we can afford the kind of middle class targeted tax cuts that would make a difference. But I do not believe it is in our interests as a country to go back to the days of exploding deficits with the kind of very large, across-the-board tax cuts that my opponent and the presidential candidate on the Republican side advocate.

I would rather see us continue the policy of fiscal discipline and responsibility that brought us to this point, and to use the surpluses that we have built up to do several things: to deal with Social Security and to pay down the debt, to add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare, to provide the middle class targeted tax cuts, which we can afford, to expand coverage for health care for people. And I would take the entire Social Security surplus, and to use it to pay down the national debt, and to reform and modernize and strengthen Social Security, to extend its lifetime. And I would take the non-Social Security surplus and use about 40 percent of it to similarly pay down the debt, and the remainder to put that prescription drug benefit on Medicare, do the targeted tax cuts, and do some of the other investments we need.

I think that's a stronger policy for the future, and that's what I would support.

BLITZER: Hillary Clinton, sounding very much on the tax cut issue like Bill Clinton, but on some other issues you don't necessarily agree. But we will have a chance to do a lot more. Our LATE EDITION town meeting from the University of Buffalo will be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: Welcome back to our special LATE EDITION town meeting from the University of Buffalo with the U.S. Senate candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Let's take a question from the audience. Go ahead please.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE) in New York. Mrs. Clinton, if you're elected senator, can you promise the New York voters that you will not run for presidency in 2004?

CLINTON: Yes.

(LAUGHTER)

Yes, and I have said that I want to be the very best senator I can be. You know, I have a lot of plans that I'd like to work on with people throughout the state. I do have an economic plan that I particularly want to work on that would, I hope, help bring the new technology economy here, because as a student here you know that this university is one of the most wired universities

in the entire country. And yet the city of Buffalo is one of the least Internet-connected cities of our big cities, so that a lot of the graduates from the university have to go elsewhere to get the jobs that really they're equipped to take.

So I'd like to work as hard as I can over the next six years as senator to really make sure that we get the new economy, and we get the right mix of jobs and skills, that we provide federal financing to expand broadband access, and we make it possible to ensure that we've got technology expertise available to businesses so that we really do create jobs here that you and your classmates can take to stay right here. And that's going to be a big effort that I'm going undertake, and that is going to be my primary focus: the economy when I'm a senator.

BLITZER: And so you're making a firm commitment that even if there's a Republican president in the White House in 2004 that there is no circumstance whatsoever, under any circumstance, would you not serve...

(LAUGHTER)

... would you not serve your six-year term as senator?

CLINTON: I am going to serve my six-year term as senator. I owe it to the people of New York. I'm working hard to earn the trust and the votes of New Yorkers. And I want to help make things in the state. That's really what motivates me.

You know, I've been involved in public service for more than 30 years. I've never run for office before. But what I'd like to do is to bring people together to solve problems.

And I know that the upstate economy and the economy in Western New York, that we can make the changes together, the public and private sector, everybody working to do what needs to be done. I've seen that. When I was here on February 7th, I met three young graduates of this university who started a dot.com company. And they went from their three selves to employing about 65 people.

They had \$60,000-a-year jobs they couldn't fill because we don't have the emphasis on matching the skills with the jobs, and keeping people who graduate from this university and others here. I want to be somebody who helps make that happen.

BLITZER: All right. Let's take another question from the audience.

QUESTION: Good evening, Mrs. Clinton. I'm Judge Frank Caruso (ph) from the town of Tonawanda, and my question is, with the number of school shootings that have happening across the country, and most recently the shooting at the National Zoo, how would you address the issue of teen violence in our country?

CLINTON: Well, judge, I think there are several things we have to do, and I hear from parents and students all over the state about their fears and concerns about gun violence. And you know, it's really well-placed, because we lose about 13 children a day to gun violence, accidental or deliberate.

I think we have to do more to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals and people who are unable to exercise responsibility. That's why I support the sensible gun safety measures that have been before the Congress now, but the Republican leadership will not take them up.

I think we can have sensible gun safety measures without infringing on the rights of, you know, responsible citizens, and I think we have to do more to do the background checks, and to license and register those handguns so that we try to get hold of them.

I also think we should have a national buyback program to try to sweep up as many guns as we possibly can.

But I don't think that guns are the only reason that we've got more violence in our country than most other civilized societies do anywhere in the world.

Certainly, the access to guns turns, you know, what used to be arguments on the playground sometimes into deadly gun fights, and that is a real problem for us. But I also think we have to look hard at whether we are providing the kinds of support and services that children who are depressed or who have other kinds of emotional or behavioral problems need. We're not taking seriously enough some of the cries for help and attention that kids give. If you look at some of the school shooters, they said things that should have been a big light flashing for all of us. They said that they wanted to kill somebody, they wanted to kill themselves. We as parents, as teachers, as judges, as police officers, we have to be very alert and we have to have more services to try to intervene and prevent a child's problems from becoming violent.

I also think that we have to do more to provide family support and good values. You know, a family is a child's first school, a child's first teachers are the parents, and we have to help our children learn how to control themselves and to empathize with one another. That should start in the home, but I think there are some programs that I've seen in schools around the state that would work also, having conflict resolution and mediation to try to help youngsters deal with their problems besides resorting to violence.

And finally, I just think that parents have to exercise a lot of parental authority over the kinds of media that their children watch at young ages. I just don't think that it's good for our children to see so much violence as a steady diet, and every time I say this it's inevitable that, you know, somebody about the age of my daughter says, well, you know, I play those games, I watch those movies, I don't do anything. I say, yes, but, you know, there are many children who are vulnerable to that. We don't know all the reasons why some are vulnerable. It might be genetic or temperamental or family break-up, whatever it might be.

So we have to try to play the odds and more parents and adults have to try to provide alternatives to children besides the steady diet of violence. So there are many things we should work on, all of which I would try to work on in the Senate.

BLITZER: All right, Mrs. Clinton, let's take another question. On that gun issue, though, let me just point out one thing, when it comes to gun control you and Rudy Giuliani don't really disagree, he supports significant gun control, too.

CLINTON: Yes.

BLITZER: There isn't a whole lot of space like that.

CLINTON: There--that is right.

BLITZER: OK, let's take another question.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Rob Grilo (ph). I was wondering why would you make more gun laws if the ones we have now aren't being enforced?

CLINTON: Well, you know, we have increased enforcement by, I think, about 30 percent, but we have to do more and we have to do better. And I agree that we have to do everything within our power to enforce those gun laws and to send a very clear signal to anyone that committing a crime with a gun is going to carry a heavier penalty.

I would support putting more resources into our federal system so that we can hire more assistant U.S. attorneys in order to be able to prosecute at the federal level as many gun cases as we can, and I really applaud the efforts to work that are starting out here in Buffalo so that we've got even better cooperation between the federal authorities and the state and local and state authorities. So I agree, we've increased it, but it needs to be even more than it is.

BLITZER: All right, let's take another question, please, go ahead.

QUESTION: My name is Aaron Libere (ph) from New York City. How do you feel about the police situation in New York City and what do you think needs to be done to change that?

CLINTON: Well, I have spoken out about this, and I am very troubled and concerned about recent events because I--you know, I am a very strong supporter of law enforcement. For the last, I guess, 17 or so years I have basically lived with a lot of professional law enforcement officers who have been assigned to my husband and myself.

I've had a lot of experience with local and state police officers here in New York who have been exceptionally helpful to me, and I think it's a very tough job that we have to respect those who carry it out. What I regret is that in New York City we've seen a false choice being posed to people. I don't think we should have to choose between effective policing and mutual respect between our police and our communities.

Therefore, I believe we have to do more to support our police and to make it clear that they have a job to do that we want them to do, but we also have to provide more and better training. We have to provide more supervision and monitoring for those young police officers, because we've added lots of police officers. You know, about 6,000 of the police officers in New York City are paid for with the federal funds that came from the anti-crime legislation passed in 1994 to put 100,000 more police on the street.

Well, we need now, I think, to provide more training and support so that those police officers who we ask to do this job are really fully prepared to do it. But we also have to ask the police to show respect toward the vast majority of people who are law abiding citizens and I don't think that some of the tactics that have been used recently in the city are really going to create the kind of community support for the police that most police officers I know want.

So I reject this false choice that has been posed. I do not think we have to choose between continuing to lower crime, which is in everyone's interest, and creating good relations between our police and the communities. And we've seen how it can happen in other cities and I'd like to work to make sure it happens in every city in New York.

BLITZER: Mrs. Clinton, I'm the time cop here. Unfortunately, I have the duty of telling everyone that we have to take another commercial break.

We have a lot more to talk about with Mrs. Clinton.

Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: Welcome back to our LATE EDITION town meeting from the State University of New York at Buffalo with the U.S. Senate candidate, the Democratic candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton. I take it there are no other Democrat candidates running for this Senate seat.

Mrs. Clinton, there is--polls show this is a very, very close race, Zogby Poll this month showed Giuliani 45 percent, Clinton--that would be you--44 percent. But look at this, in a new poll that just came out just today, it shows that Mayor Giuliani has 52 percent of the upstate vote, while you only have 38 percent of the upstate vote. We are here in upstate.

Why are you having such a hard time winning support among upstaters?

CLINTON: Well, you know, Wolf, upstate New York is historically a very Republican area--not Buffalo and Erie County, but most of upstate New York--and I feel pretty good about the progress we're making. You know, I'm spending a lot of time. I've, as of today, been in 56 of

the 62 counties. By tomorrow, I will have been in 58 and I intend to visit all 62 in the next couple of weeks.

And what I'm finding is that the people I'm talking to--you know, this morning I started out on a dairy farm talking to a lot of dairy farmers and other farmers in Wyoming County and in western New York, and you know, they're traditionally Republican, but they're listening to my views on the issues, they're asking a lot of good questions. And I'm just going to work as hard as I can to persuade voters in upstate, Democrat, Republican, independent, everyone that I will work very hard to help the people here and I want to represent the entire state and everybody in it.

BLITZER: All right, here's one of those upstate voters, go ahead.

QUESTION: Mrs. Clinton, my name is Pat Radle (ph) and I'm a first year student at U.B. Law School. Senator Moynihan has twice voted in favor of banning partial-birth abortions. In fact, he's called the procedure practically infanticide. Do you agree with Senator Moynihan?

CLINTON: You know, I have always been a very strong pro-choice advocate. I believe that a woman's right to choose is protected by our Constitution. I have also said that there is a way, and the president and the Democratic leadership in Congress have proposed a piece of legislation that would ban late-term abortions, except in instances to save the life of the mother or to prevent serious harm to the health of the mother. That is a position I could support, but the Republican leadership will not let that piece of legislation come to the floor for a vote. They would rather, in my view, play politics with this incredibly sensitive and difficult issue, which I really regret.

So I would like to see us do everything we can to protect the life and the health of the mother, and of course I'm a very strong supporter and have been for many years of adoption, and foster care and the changes that we need to make to make sure every child has a safe and loving home, and I would continue to work on that as well.

BLITZER: Mrs. Clinton, like gun control, on this issue of abortion, there is no difference between you and Mayor Giuliani, on other issues, affirmative action, gay rights, you agree as well. What is the biggest policy difference there is between you and Rudy Giuliani?

CLINTON: Well, there are a number of them, Wolf.

BLITZER: Just give us the biggest one.

CLINTON: The biggest is probably his support of the very large, across-the-board, in my view, risky and irresponsible tax cuts. He also supports vouchers for public education, which I reject. He would be against the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which I would vote to ratify. He is not for a patient's bill of rights that includes the right of people to sue their HMOs, and I think that that's the kind of version we should look to pass. On many issues that a senator will vote one, he has taken a position that is not only opposite of mine, but I think opposite of views of most New Yorkers.

BLITZER: All right, let's take another question from one of those New Yorkers.

QUESTION: Hi, Janell Samnella, Rochester, New York.

I just want to know how you're going to defray the cost of college tuition. I want to know how come every time I get my fax-a-form (ph) back, it keeps saying no, you're not eligible for TAP (ph), you're not eligible for PAL (ph), but you can take out a loan. I think the government doesn't understand that just because, you know, parents are in the middle-class to upper-class income-level bracket doesn't mean that they're paying their students college tuition. So how can you help us? How can you help us students?

CLINTON: Well, I had proposed, along with Senator Schumer and now the president has agreed and put in the budget, that we make \$10,000 a year of college tuition tax deductible, which would be an enormous help to middle income families like yours. I believe this we made college tuition tax deductible and combine that with the aide that is available for people who are eligible for it, we would go a very long way in making college affordable for every student.

I'd also like to create a national teacher corps, because we're going to have a big teacher shortage, and I would like to encourage some of the students here and on this campus to consider going into teaching, but a lot of students say they can't afford too, because they come out of school with too much debt. So I would like to say that if you agree, you could get a full scholarship anywhere in the country, if in return, you would teach for four years. I would like to defray and to eliminate the debt that a lot of the students come out of school with, and I'd like to do the same for nursing and medical schools as well.

So I think the combination of making tuition tax deductible and really focusing on areas of shortage, like teachers, doctors and nurses, would probably cover the needs of most of our students, which I think would be a great step forward.

BLITZER: All right. Let's take another question, please.

Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, Ms. Clinton, my name is Betsy Snyder, and I'm from the West Winfield (ph) area near Utica, New York, and I'm a third-year law student here at UB.

From my area in Central New York, the backbone of our economy is farming. And presently, many farmers are having a problem in passing down their farms to their children to carry, due to detrimental tax consequences. What do you suggest that you could do to help family farmers pass onto children, as well as small family business owners facing similar problems?

CLINTON: Well, that's the announcement that I made this morning when I was on the dairy farm in Wyoming County, because I have heard about this from farmers and small business people all over the state. I believe that we should raise the exemption for the inheritance tax to \$1.75 million, and I also believe that we ought to increase the unified credit to a million dollars, because there are many family farms that cannot afford the estate taxes that are currently levied. I don't think we can afford in our balanced budget to go as far as the Republicans do, but I think that based on all my conversations, that we have to do more to remove this burden so that families that have worked hard to build up a farm--like the farm I was on today fourth generation, and the fifth generation is waiting in line to take over--they'll be able to do that, so I hope that that will help.

Because you're right, a lot of people don't know that agriculture is still the number one industry in New York. So when we talk about economic development upstate, we have to talk not only about the new economy and technology, but doing more to help our farmers, and that would include, for example, including New York in the dairy compact so that our dairy farmers would get a much fairer price for their milk and doing some changes in some of the federal financing and subsidy programs, so that all of our farmers would have a leveler playing field so that they could compete and really continue the rural tradition that means so much to upstate New York.

BLITZER: All right, Mrs. Clinton, we have to take another break.

More of our conversation, our town meeting, with the U.S. Senate candidate from New York, the Democratic candidate, Hillary Rodham Clinton, when we come back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: Welcome back to the University of Buffalo, where we're continuing our special LATE EDITION town meeting with Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Let's take another question from a New Yorker.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Dan Kamerada (ph) from Rochester.

President Clinton and yourself pushed for a nationalized health care. When brought to the American people, this was soundly rejected. If you were elected, would you try to get the same nationalized health care. How would you guarantee that people without health care could get coverage?

CLINTON: Well, you're right. You may remember I had a few things to say about health care a few years ago, and I learned a lot from that experience, and I'm now from the school of smaller steps.

I still believe that we have to work toward the time when we can provide quality, affordable health care for every American, because since those years, we've had, as you've pointed out, even more uninsured Americans, and an increasing number of what you might call underinsured Americans, and so there are a lot of steps that I think we could take. I've mentioned a few of them just briefly.

We do need to add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare and to ensure that Medicare is always there for my mother, and your parents and you eventually. We also need to pass a real patient bill of rights that puts doctors and nurses and health professionals back in the position of making the decisions about health care, and not bookkeepers and accountants and people in insurance companies. I think we have to continue as I did. As soon as we were not successful on that, and I took stock, I began working on some other ways that we could expand health coverage, and I'm very pleased that we have a children's health insurance program, which I'd like to build on and expand, because I'd like to see every child get the health care that child needs. I now would like to see us expand that to the parents, the working parents of children that we're insuring.

And you know, when you think about it, it's very sad that we have so many uninsured and underinsured people, and I've been in and out of hospitals all over the state. And I was up in Massena, which is--I don't if anybody here is from Massena, but it's up in the north country--and I went into a hospital room and met a woman who has no insurance, and she has asthma and a heart condition, and so every three months she goes into the hospital where they take very good care of her, but then they don't have any way to pay those bills because she makes too much money in order to qualify for Medicaid but she can't afford insurance.

In that same hospital I met a young woman who switched jobs and was not yet eligible for the health insurance of her new employer when she found a lump in her breast and a family friend, an internist did the out--did the biopsy and found out that it was cancerous and sent her to his friends, an oncologist and a surgeon, and the surgeon said to her, "You know, this may be a blessing in disguise because now I'll be able to take care of you the way that I want to without arguing with your insurance company."

So we really have some work to do to make sure that it's doctors and nurses and to make sure people have access. We also have to lower the cost of prescription drugs. They are just way too high and they're going up too fast, and I've said that I would introduce legislation that would permit us to reimport American manufactured and approved drugs from Canada so that we could buy them at the low rate that Canadians buy them, so we can have a more competitive marketplace for drugs.

BLITZER: Mrs. Clinton, but you know that millions of Americans will forever define you by that failed health care plan of 1993, not so much because it was--you wanted to go in one full step, but because it was big government, an effort by the government to take over our health care, and they will always see you as someone who simply wants big government to do all these things whereas the private sector and individuals should be doing more, that are local and state governments.

How can you reassure voters in New York that you're not simply for more federal government takeover not only of health care but all sorts of other issues that affect our day to day lives?

CLINTON: Well, I think, Wolf, all you have to do is look at not only the positions that I have taken and advocated for many years but what I would do in the Senate. Now, you know, there is a lot of evidence that the problem has gotten worse, and so I think we should put our heads together and come up with whatever will work and to try to make that available to people.

I think it's also very important that we do continue to take these steps that we've taken like the Childrens Health Insurance Program that I worked so hard on, because we have to figure out a way, because this is not a problem that just affects the uninsured or people who have to argue with their HMO. It eventually affects all of us, because if we don't have a system that is really funding our local hospitals, our academic health centers, all of the pieces of our system that really make America's health care system the best in the world, eventually it will affect what kind of care all of us can receive.

BLITZER: All right, let's take another question.

QUESTION: Hello, my name is Marcy Kelly (ph), I'm from Hamburg, New York and I work for an agency called Action For Mental Health, which is part of the West New York Independent Living Project. It's a disability rights advocate agency. Currently in New York state we can't get equal health insurance coverage for mental illness, insurance companies do not cover mental illness and middle class and lower-class people go without mental health treatment. On the federal level, Medicare only allows 90 days of in-patient hospital care.

What can you do to help us in this--in getting insurance coverage we need for treatment for mental illness?

CLINTON: Yes, I'm really glad you asked that, because I think it might surprise people to know how often as I'm traveling around the state, maybe going into a diner or, you know, in a supermarket, people will come up and talk to me about just that problem.

You know, we still have a stigma, don't we, when it comes to mental illness? And I think the more we learn about how our bodies and minds work--you know, the mind is an organ just like the heart or the liver, and we are learning that a lot of the susceptibility to mental illness is really in our genes. I think when we map the human genome we're going to discover that just like some of us might be susceptible or vulnerable to diabetes or cancer, others might be susceptible to depression or schizophrenia.

I think it's time we realize that health care should be both body and mind, and I would like to advocate and work toward parity for coverage for mental illness, because what I see happening now is that a lot of untreated mental health problems are manifesting themselves in violence. You know, we have so many people with mental health problems in our prisons. We were talking before about school violence and the level of youth violence. There's a lot of evidence that many of those youngsters are affected by emotional and behavioral problems.

I think that it's really in our interest to do more to destigmatize the treatment of mental health and to provide the resources, because I think eventually it would save money in many, many of the cases that I'm aware of, and I applaud you for working on it and being an advocate.

BLITZER: All right, Mrs. Clinton, we have to take another break. More of our town meeting with Mrs. Clinton when we come back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: When we come back, more of our LATE EDITION town meeting with Hillary Rodham Clinton, and I'll ask her one question I've been waiting to ask all night. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: Welcome back. Let's take another question right away from the audience.

QUESTION: Good evening, my name is Judata Abdella (ph), and I'm from Buffalo, New York.

Monetary compensation to survivors of the Holocaust has set the precedent for reparations to victims of war. Do you feel that this should extend to the Palestinian people who have lost their land to Israel?

CLINTON: You know, I am a very strong supporter of Israel's safety and security, as well as a strong supporter of the peace process. And right now, I believe that we should support the negotiations that are ongoing to permit the parties to reach whatever arrangements they finally can reach. And I don't think it's useful for those of us who are at a distance from the situation to be really commenting on what should be the basis of the discussion between the parties, and I hope that, you know, progress will be made.

BLITZER: But you did at one point call for a Palestinian state. Do you still believe there should be an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel?

CLINTON: Well you know, I expressed a personal opinion, but I think that that also is one of those issues that has to be decided between the parties, and it is part of the final status negotiations.

BLITZER: So you've backed away from that?

CLINTON: Well, I think it's not useful, especially for someone to comment or talk about what should be the determination between the parties.

BLITZER: All right. Let's take another question.

QUESTION: Hi, Mrs. Clinton, my name is Alka Sharma (ph). I'm from Buffalo. My question is, what key strength do you feel that you possess that will make you the best advocate for New York?

CLINTON: Well, I think I bring 30 years of experience and commitment to the issues that New Yorkers are talking to me about: How do we improve public education? and I and I am a strong supporter of that. I was one of the first people, for example, to call for teacher testing back in 1983, and I'd like to do more to both increase standards and accountability as well as provide more opportunity. The work that I have done in health care and will continue to do, the work that I've done on economic development I think is all very relevant to the job of a senator.

But it's not only issues, it's how you get things done. You know, in the Senate, we have to work with 99 other people, and I think I bring a leadership style that will try to unite people, and try to work with people in a way that will actually accomplish some very positive results for our state, and so I think both on issues and how I would go about doing the job, I think I could be a strong advocate for the needs and interests of the children and families of New York.

BLITZER: Are you saying that Rudy Giuliani can't work with other people?

CLINTON: Well, I'm saying that I will work very hard with other people, and I'm going to say run a campaign that is based on issues and ideas, and I've worked with the Senate for many years. You know, I was confirmed by the Senate back in 1977 for a position in the Legal Services Corporation. You know, I've worked with senators on, you know, legislation, I testified, even before the White House years. And in the White House years, I've worked with members of Congress from both parties on not only health issues, like CHIP, but on improving adoption, and foster care and education. In fact, you know, Wolf, I even worked on improving adoption and foster care with someone who rarely has a good thing to say about my husband or me--that's Tom DeLay. But you know, I invited him to the White House, and we worked together, and we made some very significant changes in how we will hopefully move more children from foster care to adoption.

I'm willing to work with anybody. I think that the most important commitment I can make to the voters of New York is that I will get up every single day and work my heart out, and that means working with people that I may not agree with and that may not agree with me, but I know that I might need their vote to do something for Buffalo or Western New York.

BLITZER: All right, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, Mrs. Clinton, my name is Erin Ziggler (ph), and I'm from Buffalo, New York.

I was wondering, how do you feel about granting MFN status to China when considering their very poor history on human rights?

CLINTON: That's a very good and hard question. And I know many people, here in Western New York in particularly and Erie County, are concerned about this vote, and I share the concerns that many of my supporters in organized labor have expressed to me, because I do think we have to make sure that we improve labor rights, we improve environmental standards in our bilateral and our multilateral trade agreements.

But on balance, I've looked at this, I've studied it, I think it is in the interests of America and American workers that we provide the option for China to go into the WTO. Right now, we are trading with China. We have a huge trade deficit with China. The agreement that has been negotiated between our two countries would open their markets to us in a way that they are not yet open, and in fact, for many large manufactured products, like automobiles, we would have the first chance to really get in and compete in that marketplace.

I also think it's not just an issue of trade. I believe it's a security consideration. I want to do everything we can to persuade China to improve its human rights record, to be sure that it doesn't in any way interfere with its neighbors or with Taiwan. I don't think you gain that by isolating China. I think we must work out as best we can a relationship in trade, and a very firm statement and commitment to improving human rights and try to make as much progress as possible.

BLITZER: Mrs. Clinton, we only have a few seconds left.

Here's the question that I've wanted to ask you. Our audience at home is now going look at a picture of you wearing a Chicago Cubs baseball cap and a New York Yankees baseball cap. If the Cubs make it to the World Series this year, the first time since 1908 that they would actually be in a position to win a World Series, a lifelong Chicago resident, a native of Illinois, would you say the Chicago Cubs should win or the New York Yankees?

CLINTON: Well, you know, Wolf, I got into trouble when I told people that I was a Yankees fan growing up. But part of the reason I was a Yankees fan is because I was also a Cubs

fan. You know, I needed an American League that could win. It's depressing to be a Cubs fan year after year after year. But you know, I'm no longer going to talk about baseball. I will just privately keep my opinions to myself, because you know, I got so much grief the last time I opened my mouth.

If that were ever to happen, you can come back to me.

(LAUGHTER)

BLITZER: She's not telling us.

All right, Mrs. Clinton, thank you so much on behalf of the University of Buffalo, everyone at CNN. Thank you so much for joining us for this "LATE EDITION" town meeting.

CLINTON: Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: I want to thank the audience once again.

We will have a similar forum in the not-too-distant future with the Republican candidate, Rudy Giuliani.

For all of us here at CNN, thank you very much for watching. I'm Wolf Blitzer in Buffalo. Good night.

END