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CNN World Today Interview
with Lissa Muscatine

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Conducted by Kelly Wallace – Full Transcript
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KW: Okay, Lissa, what about the (inaudible)? I mean, what would you say have been lessons Mrs. Clinton may have learned after what happened with universal health coverage in '94?

LM: I think what happened is that she realized that there was a different approach to take to advance the issues she cared about. And I think one thing that's very important is that she never really gave up on the idea of public health, of expanding health care for people. She just figured out different ways to get the job done, and that's really what she's done over the last five years.

KW: Now you say "figured out different ways." What did she do differently, or what did she think that needs to be done to get the things she wanted to get done?

LM: Reforming the whole health care system was a huge task, obviously, and what she's done instead is push for smaller bits of what she tried to achieve. For example, health insurance for children who are not covered. Now—we now have a couple million more children covered than were before—that was one of her primary goals. Making sure that women get to stay in hospitals after they've had babies, and get that coverage included under their health care; and making sure that people who switch jobs don't lose their coverage. Those were the sorts of things that she has pushed after health care reform in the early part of the administration.

KW: She said, I think that quote was, "I now come from the school of smaller steps." So is that what she did, not just on health care but on other matters as well?

LM: I think that's right. I think what she's done is she's traveled around the country; she's talked to lots of different people; she's heard from them about the issues that have been problems in their lives and she's come back here and told her staff to start working on these things. And in fact, if you look across the board at health and family kinds of issues—children's issues—she's made a lot of progress and a lot of difference on a variety of issues in each of those arenas.

KW: What do you consider her most lasting achievement over these seven years that she's had the privilege of working as First Lady?

LM: I think that there is no question that she has had an indelible imprint on policy affecting children and families—whether it's something like health insurance for more kids; whether it's getting mammograms covered for older women every year under Medicare, which wasn't the case before; whether it's having gulf war investigated as a disease affecting gulf war veterans; whether it's pushing for better schools. She's just had an indelible imprint when it comes to children and families.

KW: And she also drew her attention, it looks like in '95 and a little bit in '96 and '97, on adoptions. I mean, how important is achieving the Safe Families Act of '97 to her in terms of her own look at her achievements?

LM: I'm glad you mentioned that because that's obviously one of her most lasting contributions. There's no question that in this country now, there are not as many children languishing in foster care year after year after year with no chance of ever being put into permanent families. There's no question that kids who are in foster care and then get too old for it now have some help afterwards when they get to be old if they haven't been placed into families. These are all initiatives that she really was the driving force behind. That's going to—may be one of her lasting marks, I think.

KW: What was she able to do—because you know after 94 she sort of learned some lessons (inaudible) driving force. Was it getting business, getting foundations, getting staff to go along with this? I mean, what was she able to do to take some of these bold ideas and make them a reality?

LM: She has really been influential and been able to make that (inaudible) in a variety of ways. I think she's used the bully pulpit of her office to some extent. She's used quiet influence. She's had her staff work within the administration—both internally within the White House as well as with agencies and with members of Congress. She's been a force with outside groups. She's been a coalition builder. In all of these different ways she has asserted her influence to advance the causes that she really cares about.

KW: We talked about (inaudible) on the world stage, in general. What did she try to do on the world stage, and what was she able to accomplish?

LM: Again, I think this is an area where she will really have a lasting impact. I think, arguably, she is the most visible and most influential voice in the world for women's rights and for children and families. She's traveled around the world as kind of an unofficial ambassador for this country, speaking out about democracy and human rights. She's gone to very remote parts of the world to heighten awareness about things like microcredit, through which women can become entrepreneurs in their neighborhoods and start to raise their own incomes and the prosperity of their neighborhoods. She's been a tireless champion of family planning overseas; for girls' education. And then, of course, she's gone to a lot of emerging democracies during this past decade, where they really needed some support from us and they really needed to hear someone encourage them on to stick with democracy, stick with human rights—that that was going to be a way to a better future for them. She has been one of the most visible people doing that in this staff, in this country.

KW: Do you think everything she has done has been one of the best kept secrets of the administration—or worst kept secrets—because, do you think people just don't know, don't get it, all that she's been able to accomplish?

LM: I like to say it's the untold story. Yeah, I really agree with that. She's done a lot of different things; she's had an impact on a lot of different arenas. And I think that after 94, a lot of people just assumed that because health care didn't go effectively, that was going to be the end of her involvement. And quite the opposite has come true.

KW: And do you think (inaudible) that people don't fully know?

LM: I don't think people really appreciate fully the breadth of her involvement, the depth of her involvement, and quite frankly the impact that she has had on issues that really do affect the daily lives of particularly children and families in this country.

KW: I need to outline for our pieces—so what kind of senator would Mrs. Clinton be, and let's take a look at what kind of first lady she has been. So I know you can't talk political, but if she does become the next senator from the state of New York, what kind of policies, what kind of approach will we see in Mrs. Clinton?

LM: I think what you can be guaranteed of seeing is exactly what we have seen when we look closely at her over the last, really, 30 years. She's worked for 30 years on these issues. She has a wealth of experience, she has a wealth of understanding about them, she knows a lot of people, she knows how the system works, and she has a dogged determination to get things done. And I think the other thing is that she really listens to people. She did it when she was in Arkansas; she's done it as first lady. And I think she will listen to people, she'll find out what the problems are, she will get to work and she will build the coalitions necessary, she'll bring people together in a way that results in progress. That's really her trademark from the last 30 years in a realm of areas. And I think that will be true again in pretty much anything she does.

KW: Thank you, Lissa. Anything else you would like to add?

LM: That's pretty much it.

(General chatting about what was talked about.)

LM: I could say one other thing. I think what she's also done is she's sort of used the convening power of her office. She's brought people together in ways, large and small, whether it's a White House Conference on Early Childhood Development, or a White House Conference on Child Care. Or to have small groups of people meeting to educate her about the issues or to help her figure out new ways of doing things. And that's really her great strength, is this ability to gather people and to get people galvanized to solve problems. In child care and early childhood development, where she went around the country and she urged doctors' offices to help start a prescription for reading, where they would encourage parents to read to their kids every night. These seem like small things, but in fact in the daily lives of people, they really can make a difference.

KW: It's amazing, I've heard people talking (inaudible), that even when the camera's off, you know, sort of talking to people and then getting to her staff, you guys, just to say, "Hey, I talked to this person, and they're having this problem. Can we do something about this (inaudible)... and follow up and follow up and follow up.."

LM: You know, that's the funny thing: I hear people say, "Well, what's her staff going to do now that she's running?" Are you kidding? This staff is as busy as it's ever been, because she has not lost interest in the issues she started and she has no intention of giving up on those. So

everybody sort of cringes when she comes back with stacks of papers... (inaudible). She really is the hardest worker I've ever seen.

(Some general conversation about when Lissa came to the administration, etc.

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