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Greenburgh Health Center

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White Plains, New York

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I am delighted to be here and I thank everyone who is gathered here today at this important center and symbol for basic values about the quality of our lives and common humanity and how well we care for one another. I want to thank Bill Johnson for his leadership and Dr. Davis, thank you. I am pleased to be here with Richard Brodsky, who has been a leader in issues affecting health and the environment and other matters that are of direct and immediate concern not only to the people of his district but to the entire state and even beyond.

And I am very grateful that you could be here and thank you for the history lesson about where Adam got his start and it's always good to know these things. I don't get to ask questions, I get to pick up information. I also want to thank Robert Morrow for being the Chair of the Board.

This is a unique circumstance here in a center like this because it does have community involvement. It has Representative Hutchins, Mr. Morrow, who is also the Chief of the Fire Department, and it has patients and other people who really represent the community that is served. I want to thank Judith Rostin, who is the nursing director.

There are a number of elected officials here whom I am grateful could come and there are also, I understand, some representatives of other health centers and I've got a list. I don't know if everyone was able to be here but I think it is significant that those intending to come were from Syracuse Community Health Center.

Thank you very much, Mr. Cowles. Thank you. From Sunset Park Community Health Center, which is a center that Jennifer was talking about that had some recent publicity. Barbara Minch from, Barbara is from the William Ryan Community Health Center. I'm very glad you are here. Jenny Biaz, also from William Ryan. Thank you so much. Ann Knowles from Peekskill. Thank you Ann. Carol Morris from Mount Vernon and Carol is someone who I have had the privilege of visiting and being with. Susan Ebocher, who cares

for the homeless Lindsey Farrell. Open Doors Family Medical Center in Ossining. Any other health centers in the area and even beyond represented?

Well I am so pleased you all could come as well as the people here at Greenburgh because I am committed to supporting the incredibly important work that community health centers do here in our state and around the country because we know that without these centers there are a lot of people like Jennifer and Eric who would not get the health care that they need. And in addition to the actual health care they wouldn't get the love and concern and attention and follow-up that comes from being a part of a center that really values the person.

Not just as a number or a statistic or as a patient but as a human being and I think Jennifer attested to that. A center like Greenburgh and those others that are here are truly the health care safety net. Treating the uninsured when other can't or won't. Treating those who are on Medicaid, even some managed care policies but primarily serving as that safety net for people who have nowhere to turn.

I don't have to tell the experts who are here, the people who are on the front lines administering these centers, providing the medical and nursing care and even the patients, many of whom I saw as I walked through the center, that we are facing a lot of challenges in this changing health care system. We know there are three and a half million people without health insurance in New York and nearly 80% of that number are people who are in working families where one or more members go to work every single day of the work week and still cannot afford insurance but make too much to be eligible for Medicaid or other coverage assistance.

Now I have spoken out on this issue and I will continue to do so and I will also pledge to you that I will work to address the problem of the uninsured in our health care system. I want to see the day when New York and America provides quality affordable health insurance for every citizen. But until we get to that point there are steps we have to keep taking to help the families who are uninsured, to shore up the systems that are providing the health care that they need.

And there is no doubt in my mind that supporting community health centers is a critical part of what we must do now and

far into the future. Our community health clinics keep the average primary health care costs below \$350 per patient. These are cost effective delivery systems. It is estimated that they save the entire health care system over \$7 million a year. In New York alone community health centers serve one and a half million people annually and more than 11 million around the nation.

Now while the numbers of the uninsured are going up, the amount of the Medicaid payments that health centers receive is going down. And the Medicaid payments were always stretched to cover some of those uninsured people who didn't have any source of payments at all. Those numbers just don't add up and anyone who runs a center, like Mr. Johnson and the other administrators here, know that it's become increasingly difficult to continue to provide quality care given the mathematics of paying for that care.

That's why as a senator I would fight to double funding for our community health centers to \$2 billion annually by the year 2005. This increase would insure that we could not only take good care of the more than 11 million that we are currently serving but I think we could take good care of 9 million more so that we could have a population, a patient base of about 20 million people. This is very good investment for the future, for the health of our state, for the health of individuals and for the quality of care that our entire system delivers.

If I am elected to the Senate I will also work on legislation to create a prospective payment system for Medicaid reimbursement. Now this reimbursement system would provide reimbursement for services on a pre-defined set rate per patient visit. This would reimburse the health centers fairly for the important care they provide everyday to Medicaid patients. The federal government has cut the funding back way too far in my opinion for these community health centers.

It is time that we address this problem by insuring financial stability for our health centers so they can contain costs, which all of them are doing, without having to cut back on the care they provide for the uninsured. Richard mentioned a problem, which we all know more about that I guess we wish we did and that is the hot spots for cancer around New York.

We have those in Suffolk county, in western New York, we have them right here in Westchester and we know that unless

we provide services through a health center there are going to be a lot of women who are not going to have access to the kinds of diagnostic tools that they need, treatment, follow-up treatments. It's equally true for prostate cancer, it's true for a lot of the diseases that are no respecter of race or ethnicity or age or income. They strike throughout the entire population and we know that people who are at the lower income levels can't afford the kind of preventive health care that they need and we have to do more to turn that around.

And we also have to do more to recruit our best young primary doctors to serve in low-income areas. And as a senator I will fight to strengthen and reauthorize the National Health Services Corporation. We need to increase its funding. We need to focus the scholarship programs on serving the communities with the greatest need. We need to tailor the loan repayment programs to meet the long-term needs of other vulnerable communities. And we need to do everything in our power to reach out to talented young doctors to encourage them to serve those people who need them and their talents the most.

Now taking all of these steps - increasing the funding, putting in the prospective payment system, recruiting more doctors - those are all very important steps but they are not going to solve our problem of the uninsured and I don't want to pretend that what I am saying will do that. I want you to know that we are going to take these steps, if I have anything to do about it in the Senate, to provide you with more resources while we continue to expand coverage and try to provide more support for all healthcare providers to do the work that is needed to be done.

I think that the community health centers are anchors of the communities that they serve. I met a woman outside holding her granddaughter who has brought her children and now her grandchildren here for 28 years and this is the kind of continuity of care that every person is entitled to have. I know that the work that this center does includes a lot of public education and preventive healthcare awareness programs like the senior citizens forum. I know Sunset Park distributes free books at the clinic to encourage parents to read to their children, a program that I have been very involved in. It's called Prescription For Reading. I know that everyone in the Center here could stand up and tell us what you are doing to provide the kind of network of help that so many families need.

I promise that in the United States Senate I will work my heart out to help you help people. You cannot go through this Center and meet the patients and see the children and meet the dedicated staff who comes to work here everyday without being moved by the commitment and the compassion and the competence and the care that takes place here. There is no reason why we should not be giving you the tools you need to make sure that every Jennifer, every young mom, every Eric, every young baby who is born within the area of this Center has the same chance to have as full and healthy life as any of our children anywhere else. So this is what I will work on and am very grateful that you could be here with me today. Thank you so much.

Over the past several years I have been privileged to work with the American Nursing Association in Washington. I have addressed the national convention several times and I have put forth ideas and worked with nurses about what we can do to give nurses more authority over your profession so that you can have an opportunity to make the decisions that will help patients receive quality health care. Now, part of how we do that is to be a strong and steady champion of organized labor and of workers' rights. And this a big difference between Democrats and Republicans.

There has been a concerted effort in the Congress to undermine the efforts that have gone on for a hundred years to provide protections for those of you in the workforce and, particularly, to try to undermine organized labor. Well, to me, I want to be a very strong advocate of those protections because it is good, not only for those who are working, it is good for those you are taking care of. So you can count on me being a strong and effective champion not only for New York's nurses in the Senate but for the right of New York nurses to organize and bargain and fight for what...

I think we also have to do more to recruit people into nursing. And I would like to see the legislation that we used back in the 1960's reinvigorated....so that we would be able to offer scholarships and loans and debt forgiveness to young people willing to become doctors and nurses because we don't have enough.

I also will fight very hard to improve health care for children and adolescents and I will fight hard to provide more support

for mental health because right now you know so well that we are not treating diseases of the mind the same way we treat diseases of any other organ of the body. I said something about this yesterday at a speech in New York City in front of newspaper publishers and I then sat down for lunch. And a young woman came up to me, introduced herself and said she was a nursing student from Oregon and she had just finished her rotation at the Adolescent Psychiatric Center in Portland, Oregon. And she thanked me for mentioning it.

She said, "I see so many problems of young people that are not being addressed because they are not identified or because their parents don't have insurance that covers it or because we've cut back on public support for mental illness." It is something I'm hearing about as I travel around the state. I met a man the other day who told me about his ten-year old son who is autistic. He said, "You know, I have an insurance policy from work. I've had the same policy from the same employer for many years. I never realized until my son was born what it would cost to care for an autistic child. I can't afford it. I don't get any help with that. If my son had a heart condition, I'd get help with it but he's got autism. I don't get.... help with it."

I was in a diner not so long ago and a man told me about his 19 year old daughter who was just diagnosed as schizophrenic "You know," he said, "I don't have any coverage for that and I've been going from place to place trying to get somebody who will take her in and help her." Every time I speak to groups of high school or college students somebody either in the public meeting or afterwards will say to me, "Mrs. Clinton, there are so many people - (I never know whether the young person are talking about themselves or talking about a friend) - there are so many people who have depression, anxiety, problems and nobody to talk to and nowhere to go."

So, this is a big issue also and it's something that you see because those of you who are not in psychiatric nursing you know that many of the problems that patients bring to you have been compounded by depression or other kinds of issues - addiction, alcoholism, whatever. So, we have to look at the entire person when we think about nursing somebody and taking care of a patient.

You know, on Sunday we are having a Million Mom March in

Washington and I wish everybody here a happy Mother's Day. I was just over at...barbecue...and it was great and one of the women there told me that she's coming with about 200 other women from Syracuse to march in the march. And I was talking with her and she said, "You know, we've got to do something about guns. It's a big health problem." Think about that. It is.

It is a public health problem. It's not just a question of a law enforcement problem (of course, it is that) but it's also a public health problem. And those of you who are on the front lines see those people coming into emergency rooms with gun shot wounds who have to hold somebody's hand who is losing a child because of self-inflicted or accidental or deliberate gun shots you know the health problem.

And the final health problem that I would mention because I think it is important for you and your profession and through the union to be advocates on behalf of these issues because I know you care not just about working conditions and compensation and the things that you fight for in contract but you care about health or you wouldn't be in this profession and that's the issues that we are starting to study about environmental health.

As we look at the state and we see these hot spots of cancer, we have some hard questions to ask ourselves. Why is it that there are parts of New York State that have a higher than average rate of cancer? It is something that I think we have to really spend a lot of time and research getting into to figure out what's actually going on there.

There are so many questions and challenges that we face when it comes to health. And we cannot answer any of them without a high quality, well trained, motivated nursing force. So, for me, the work you do is not only important in and of itself, and I not only thank you and recognize you today for that, but it is part of our overall challenge of how we are going to try to provide the healthiest possible condition for people from their earliest years to their later years. And that means doing everything possible to get young mothers the pre-natal health care they need all the way to getting the best quality health care and hospices and nursing homes and hospitals at the end of life. And I'm very grateful to you because when you're needed, you're there and most people are so grateful for it. And what I want to do is be your advocate in

Washington to make sure everybody understands the importance of what you do. Thank you...