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All Three Morning Shows Host Hillary; NBC's Lauer Hits From Left: "Have You Watered Down Reform?"

Network News Touts Clinton Care 2.0

In 1993, TV journalists were mightily impressed with then-First Lady Hillary Clinton's universal health care plan. ABC's Dr. Tim Johnson, undoubtedly spoke for many liberal journalists: "The Clintons are almost heroes in my mind for finally facing up to the terrible problems we have with our current health care system."

That version of Clinton Care fizzled, of course. But when now-candidate Clinton yesterday announced her plan to use tax dollars to insure all Americans, the networks were ready to resume their role as Hillary's media helpers.

Both ABC and CBS led off their Monday newscasts with Clinton's proposal. On ABC's *World News*, reporter David Wright scoffed at Mitt Romney's criticism: "Attacking Hillary for some Republicans is almost instinctive." Dr. Tim Johnson then defended Clinton's plan as wisely expanding government's role: "In fact, every industrialized country in this world that is successful with health care — often more successful than we are — has a partnership between government and the private sector. And that's what I think we have to have in this case."

Over on the *CBS Evening News*, fill-in anchor Harry Smith began by arguing that "it's a huge problem. An estimated 47 million are not covered." Of course, CBS didn't bother explaining how that statistic is inflated by including those who make more than enough money to buy insurance, as well as millions of illegal immigrants.

On Tuesday, all three network morning shows hosted Hillary Clinton as a guest. In a set-up piece before the candidate's appearance, NBC's Andrea Mitchell positioned Clinton's plan as in the middle: "There will still be critics on both sides saying it does too much or too little." But co-host Matt Lauer only confronted Clinton with complaints that she wasn't liberal enough: "Critics are saying that this in some ways is the kind of plan you would have rejected back in 1993....Have you watered down reform?"

Lauer even suggested Clinton is too cozy with big

business: "Some of your competitors are saying you've taken more money from the insurance industry than any other candidate, so the question is, is there a conflict looming on the horizon? Are you losing some leverage in asking these insurance companies to get on board and make tough choices?" Clinton defended her liberal credentials, telling Lauer: "The insurance industry is not going to nominate me for Woman of the Year."

As he had Monday night, CBS's Harry Smith touted health care as a political plus for Clinton: "In a new CBS News poll, 66% of voters said her health care experience in Bill Clinton's administration is actually a strength for her. As we know, her efforts in the 1990s failed; 52% of those questioned said it wasn't her fault."

Interviewing Clinton, Smith conceded he thought her 1993 plan was "unfathomable, unworkable," but blamed business for its failure: "We remember those ads from during your presidency — President Clinton's administration — the Harry and Louise ads, how the health industry, health insurance industry, was determined to not make this work."

Alone among Clinton's morning inquisitors, only ABC's Diane Sawyer posed a single conservative-oriented question. "Medicare is already \$16 trillion over what has been funded," she reminded Clinton. "Can you realistically keep it [her new plan] at \$110 billion?" But Sawyer also asked two questions based on John Edwards' left-wing critique, even wondering about Edwards' goofy idea of withholding health care for members of Congress if they didn't go along with his universal health care plan. "Would you do that, or is that a gimmick?" Sawyer asked Clinton. She had to ask?

— Brent Baker and Rich Noyes

As they had in 1993, the big three broadcast networks all championed Hillary Clinton's latest health care plan, with some pressing for an even more liberal approach.

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