Senator Hillary Clinton ANA Thursday, June 26, 2008

I thank Becky Patton, your president and I just met her mother, Mary Ellen Patton, also a nurse, and they worked on my campaign; Becky, of course, around the country but Mary Ellen Patton and in my Youngstown, Ohio campaign headquarters and they are among the many people who if you look closely at the top of their heads you can see this little bump from trying to crack that hard, glass ceiling that we were able to certainly damage but not yet removed and I want to say thank you to all of you. For the past year and half I have had the greatest privilege to travel around this country. I have been in so many different settings where nurses do their work, where nurses are instrumental. Many nurses came to my events, often holding signs, some of them manufactured, some of them homemade and time and time again I expressed my appreciation to our nurses.

And it's very personal for me because I've had several occasions, like most people who live long enough have had, where nurses have provided not only expert care but a lot of comfort and advice and occasionally some necessary encouragement. Whether it was when my father was very, very ill from a stroke and didn't make it in the hospital in little rock Arkansas, or when my husband was in the hospital for his bypass in New York City, I have never forgotten the hands-on care that nurses provided and of course many of you know that my late mother-in-law was a nurse anesthetist and I am proud to support the Virginia Kelly Scholarship Fund run by the American Nurses Association so that we can in some small way contribute to the education, training of the next generation of nurses. But while you and those who you represent are working hard for us, I don't think we in Washington are working nearly hard enough for you.

I don't believe that there is an adequate understanding and appreciation of the hard working you do and how instrumental you are in not only maintaining the quality of health for tens of millions of Americans but holding together our society. I know that budgets have been cut, shifts have been understaffed, the crucial role that you play has gone unnoticed, unvalued, and even undermined. So it should come as no surprise to anyone, and those you here in this great ballroom understand this but too many people do not, that we have a shortage of more than one hundred thousand nurses. A number predicted to reach 1 million by the year 2020. It should come as no surprise either that we got fewer nurses working longer hours, in many ways caring for more patients and feeling under greater stress.

I have talked with nurses in my state, from Buffalo to Long Island and time and again I hear stories about how distressed they are that the working conditions they face have deteriorated dramatically, that they are not being given the support that they need, but we all know that the nursing crisis is not a stand alone crisis. It is a symptom of the twin crises at the heart of our health care system - the crisis of 47 million uninsured – just one diagnosis or one accident away from death, permanent injury, and financial ruin. And you see them every day. You see them in emergency rooms, you see them in clinical practices and you know that what we are talking about is a rebuke to American values. At sometime during the year nearly 100 million Americans are uninsured. They are between jobs. They have left the jobs they had, they are not yet eligible for Medicare. They have had a reversal of fortune, they no longer have private insurance, they are not yet on Medicaid. There are so many reasons why people fall into the category of being uninsured but there is also the crisis of the underinsured.

Tens of millions of people who have health care insurance except when they really need it. The insurance company says, "Sorry, we can't help you; you're not covered; we're sure that was a preexisting condition." They substitute their accounting priorities for your training, your judgment, and your years of experience.

And every single day, working people and their children pay the price. I have met countless people who thought they had done the right thing to take care of their family. They had the

insurance policy, they kept it in the draw or file cabinet or a box at home but it wasn't worth the paper it was written on and when I think about the woman I met toward the very end of my campaign in Rapid City, South Dakota, who grabbed my hand and said, "what are you going to do to help me" and of course health care was one of the principle reasons I ran to become president, because I don't what to live out the rest of my days in a country that does not take care of everyone and does not provide health care as a right.

This woman told me that she hasn't had insurance since she left her parents' home, which is a common occurrence. So many young people, they finish school, they go out in the world of work, they are no longer dependant, they lose insurance. And she's had seizures since childhood and now she is totally uncovered. Or the man whose son had a rare genetic disorder and needed a bone marrow transplant, but the insurance company wouldn't cover the cost and I argued with them and my staff harassed them and finally we were able to get some help but it should not take a United States Senator to get a father the health care he thought he had purchased for his son and been denied.

I have a picture of a young woman in my Senate office whose mother came to see me when I was campaigning for the Senate in New York. She brought this picture with her and her daughter didn't have adequate insurance. She kept going for medical help but because she couldn't pay she really wasn't given the care that she should have gotten. She eventually died and I keep that picture there just be reminded, as a mother, what it must have felt like for that woman. And then I met another woman in lowa during this campaign whose daughter got sick but they didn't have insurance either and her daughter died a year later, and the death certificate lists the cause of death as 'unknown.' She was never really able to afford to get a proper diagnosis and she was just 18 years old.

It is shameful that anyone in this country can tell such a story as that and I pledge to you that I will work with you as long as it takes until we finally have universal quality affordable health care.

In the meantime we are going to do some more work, because I know you are here to lobby, and we have a long list that needs to be addressed. We need more funding to nursing schools to help recruit more faculty, and educate more nurses. About two years ago I was visiting our wonderful nursing school at the state university at Binghamton, New York and they were telling me how many qualified applicants they have to turn away every year because they don't have the facilities for the faculty.

We are going to recruit more nurses to the profession in the first place especially from communities of color that are under represented in our health care system. It's more important than ever that we have a diverse, culturally competent nursing workforce.

It means working to retain nurses with innovative mentoring and residency programs –providing the equipment you need to stay safe and do your job well. It is unacceptable that nearly one third of new nurses leave their jobs within the first year – often because they don't get the support that they deserve and need to have on the job.

It means ensuring that you have the staffing you need so that you can do the job that you went into nursing to do: to provide high quality care. Proper staffing helps insure patients and nurses safety – it actually saves money in the long run. If we take care of people right the first time then they won't have to come back and be taken care of again

It means focusing on prevention and insisting that insurance companies and programs like Medicare and Medicaid start paying for preventive health care to turn our system into a health care system of wellness not sickness.

It also means bringing our health care system into the twenty-first century with electronic medical records and doing it in a way that provides the financial support and training necessary for health care professionals to make the transition to these new systems. But when you can immediately access patients' medical records – their allergies, their blood types, their medications – all with the click of a button or a mouse, you can save lives and we can save money. According to the Rand Corporation, if we had an electronic medical records system, we would save \$77 billion dollars a year. I know my handwriting is not the best, but I shadowed a nurse in Las Vegas during my campaign. We spent about 15 minutes trying to decipher an order. I mean we looked at it sideways, upside down. I held it out, thinking, you know when you get to be a certain age you don't see as well. So, I thought, maybe I was missing a letter or two. 15 minutes that could have been spent taking care of somebody. I think this is an area that holds great promise for saving money and re-diverting that money to be used for better purposes.

Finally, and most importantly, standing up for nurses and patients. We have to do more to highlight the work that you do every day. I know that many of you consider nursing a calling, not just a job. You are doing this work, because you feel a real commitment to your patients. Everyday you have to fight to get them the care you think that they deserve to have. We need more nurse advocates, like you are patient advocates and I intend to be a nurse advocate in the United States Senate.

There are many other issues on our country's agenda in addition to health care and nursing. Whether it's the economy and the way it's not working for hardworking middle class families or whether it's the high cost of gas. I met some nurses in West Virginia who are home help nurses. I've been everywhere and had the best time doing it. These nurses in West Virginia after I spoke came up to me and said to me they are cutting back the number of patients they can visit, because the cost of gas is too high. Their budget doesn't permit them to make the rounds the way they were. So in effect, they are foregoing patient care, because of the high cost of energy.

We have an education system that is still not doing what it needs to do for too many students, a higher education system that is being priced out of range for too many hardworking young people and their families.

We have a war in Iraq that continues to take the lives of not only American soldiers, but Iraqis as well. A war in Afghanistan that is not going as well as it should. There are so many important issues that will confront the next president of the United States. And I had the great blessing of competing for this highest office and doing so at a time when our country desperately needs new leadership.

I am grateful beyond words for the support that the American Nurses Association PAC gave me. And I am asking you to do everything you can to help elect Barack Obama the next president of the United State of America.

I've served with Senator Obama now for nearly four years in the Senate. I campaigned with him for more than 16 months across our country. I debated with him in more debates than I can remember. I have seen his passion and determination and his grit and his grace. In his own life, he has lived the American Dream. It is so remarkable and I am very proud of the Democratic Party and I am very proud of my country that an African American and a woman were competing to become the president.

I have been actively involved in American politics in one way or another for, I hate to confess, 40 years. Somebody should please call out and say "oh I don't believe it" but it's true, it's true. I have seen what a difference a president can make. In those 40 years we have had ten presidential elections and we've only had 3 Democratic wins – two of them by someone I know very, very well.

Think of the progress that we did make in the 1990s in the economy, around the world, where we had a president who really cared about the American people and ran an effective government that made a difference, where incomes went up on average \$7,000 for the typical American family, where more people were lifted out of poverty than any time, more people got a chance to go to college, more people thought that their dreams were within reach. Compare that to where we are today. Think of how much progress we could've made over these past 40 years with different kinds of leadership – leadership that really trusted and believed in the American people and in the American dream. On the environment, on energy, on civil rights and human rights, on health care, on so much that matters to us. That's why it is critical that this election summon up the very best that America has to offer.

The truth is that our opponent on the Republican side has a very different agenda for America. I have a great deal of respect for Senator McCain and his heroic service to our nation. But it is inexplicable and unacceptable that he opposed expanding S-CHIP to provide health care for millions of [inaudible]. It is absolutely unbelievable that the health care plan he has proposed would cause millions of hardworking Americans to lose the coverage that they already have.

Whatever issues you care about, whatever your passion might be, we have to join together and present a united front on behalf of our nation's future and our children and grandchildren and generations to come.

I will be campaigning with Senator Obama tomorrow. We are going to a place very appropriately called Unity, New Hampshire. It's not only well named, but in the New Hampshire primary, both of us received exactly 107 votes. It pretty much mirrors the rest of the campaign where it was right down the middle. I hope that you will work with me and work with your colleagues to make sure we elect more Democrats to the House and the Senate and that we elect a Democratic president and that we get our country back on the right track.

If any of you have any doubts about this, I hope you will just look to the history of your profession. From Florence Nightingale, who revolutionized health care with her groundbreaking ideas on nursing, to Clara Barton, who cared for soldiers on the battlefields of the Civil War and helped to found the American Red Cross, to Dorothea Dix, who revolutionized and humanized care for those suffering from mental illness.

This is a long and proud tradition of men and women who have always stood up for those in need. You have been the voices for the voiceless. You have been the power behind those who feel powerless. You have been unafraid to walk into speak truth to power in many different settings. Some of you have paid a price for that, but you have fulfilled the ideals of this noble profession and that's what we've got to do now. We cannot fulfill the noble ideals of our own country if we do not have leadership that once again puts us in a position to have a future worthy of our past, to have a belief that America can live up to what we believe about ourselves, to once again conduct our foreign policy according to our values and our domestic policy according to the very simple principle of fairness, of treating everybody with the respect and dignity that each person deserves.

So, I am going to be working hard for the next 4 months and I invite you to be with me out on the campaign trail and here in Washington to make sure that we not only win an election but we turn around a country.

Thank you all and God bless you.