

**Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.)
Addresses the Alliance for Retired Americans
2007 Legislative Conference
Alliance for Retired Americans
September 4, 2007**

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[START RECORDING]

MALE SPEAKER: It is a tremendous honor to introduce our next speaker. New York Senator, Hillary Clinton.

[Applause and music played]

SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON (D-N.Y.): Thank you. Thank you so much. Wow, what a great crowd. [Laughter] Thank you. Thank you, George. Thank you so much. Thank you to Judy Kato and my old friend Ed Coil and to all of you. Ed told me that I have been here I guess three out of the last four times and I'm looking forward to coming back as President. [Cheers]

You know, I wanted to thank you all because you have played a very important role in making sure that we have stood against the Bush Administration's ill advised policies and it has been because of your advocacy and your strength combined with that of so many other Americans who understand what we have to do to keep faith with people who have done so much for us our entire lives that we beat back all of the bad ideas like privatizing Social Security for example.

[Applause]

And we are going to have some more work to do. You know, when I first started working with some of you and trying to figure out how we could bring health care to every American, I was a lot younger. [Laughter] Now, I look at you

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and I think how young you are. [Laughter] I see a lot of fellow baby boomers and we are all thinking about how we are going to deal with the issues that we'll confront just like we once had to worry about our parents or our grandparents. Now, we got to make sure that we have a secure retirement and health care and that Social Security and Medicare are strong. And I want to thank you for the work that you did for a lifetime. And I want to pledge to you that I will stand with you as we move forward for a better future and a better opportunity for all of our people. [Applause]

And it's especially important that you come from the Union movement because you know what solidarity means. You understand how we got to stay together through good times and bad. And together you are representing 3.4 million members and I know you are going to continue to be a force for positive change because we sure do need a lot of change in this country. There is no doubt about that. [Applause]

But there are some things that shouldn't change. You know I believe that if you work hard and you do your part you shouldn't be left to fend for yourself during your golden years. If you help make America stronger and safer and more prosperous then your retirement years should be good. And you shouldn't have to worry about whether you are going to be able to afford the prescription drugs or the rent or the

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mortgage payment. And for me, protecting Social Security, strengthening the right to organize, fighting for universal health care, tackling the pension crisis is fundamental to restoring the American dream.

And we are going to confront these difficult challenges because I know that it's not only important to do it for all of you and the millions you represent but for us to do it for ourselves so that we know that we are a country that doesn't turn away from all of those in need. You know, I have been campaigning across the country and too many people feel like they are invisible to their government right now. You know they just feel like the [applause] President, the Vice President, this administration doesn't see them and doesn't care. All of the families without health care, they are invisible.

I visited with a group of retirees in New Hampshire on Sunday and a number of them were telling me about how hard it is to make ends meet. Some were helped a little by the Prescription Drug Benefit, some were hurt. People had good policies were all of a sudden having to pay much more than they ever had to pay before. They feel invisible. And there sure are a lot of hard working Americans who can't afford energy prices, can't afford to fill up the tank, can't afford to send their kid to college, and they are feeling invisible

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as well.

So, I want to focus today about how we are going to see each other and hear each other and respect each other and help each other. That means we are all going to be visible to each other. I'll tell you one thing people and their problems are not invisible to me. And I'll bring you and your problems with me into the Oval Office [applause] if I'm so fortunate as to become our President. [Applause]

Let me just talk about a few of the policies that I'm working on that I want your help to work with me. Long-term care, I hear about it everywhere. I did an event in Iowa and had a number of people, about 300 or so, many of them older but a lot of them children taking care of parents, worrying about their own futures. Long-term care costs now may up 40-percent of all Medicaid spending. We estimate that that will grow dramatically in the next years. The average cost of a private room in a nursing home is more than \$70,000 a year. The average hourly wage for home health aides is up 13-percent and it should be. These people work hard. They deserve to have a fair wage.

And we have got all kind of challenges to Medicare. So what has the President done to meet any of these challenges? Has he called on us to make a commitment to saving Social Security and Medicare or to come together to

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address all of the problems we face? No. Instead of saving Social Security, he tried to privatize it. Instead of focusing on Medicare, he's focused on giving tax breaks to Haliburton and of the cronies that unfortunately have gotten all these no bid contracts from this administration. And I did not vote for the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit because I thought we could do a lot better [applause] if we gave Medicare the right to negotiate for lower prices with drug companies. [Applause]

Well, why are we surprised? This is all part of what the administration calls the ownership society. They own it and we work for it. It's really you are on your own. That's really what it is and you know I was thinking one day because somebody told me if you look at the words "You're on your own" the first letters spell yo-yo. [Laughter] and I mean don't you feel like it. Somebody is pulling the string and you are just kind of going up and down. Well, I think that we got to stand against this failed policy because we have too many people who are just not being taken care of. And I know it because I know who the people are.

So, I want to have a fresh start. Now if I could punch the restart button on the computer and go back to the beginning of the 21st century I think you would join me in doing that, but we can't. We have got to start fresh in 2009.

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We are going to do everything we can in a Democratic Congress to make sure that we bring about the changes that are needed on behalf of seniors and our middle class families.

Let me start with calling for a renewed national commitment to Social Security. This is the most successful domestic program in the history of the United States.

[Applause] Now you don't have to worry when I'm President privatization is off the table because it is not the answer to anything [applause]. From my prospective, cutting benefits isn't the answer. Raising the retirement age isn't the answer. We need to get back to the fiscal responsibility we had in the 1990's where we weren't raiding the Social Security trust fund anymore. [Applause]

When my husband left office, we had a secure Social Security system until 2055. And then all of a sudden the Bush Administration took us back into deficiencies. We have lost 14 years of the solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund in the last six and a half years. Well we are going to rebuild that Social Security Trust Fund because I have to tell you if you think hard about it, President Bush has had two overriding goals for America cut taxes on the wealthiest and wage the war in Iraq. And he hasn't been willing to pay for either one of them. He has borrowed money from the Social Security Trust Fund and he has borrowed money from countries

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like China to pay for the tax cuts and to pay for our military.

I think that is outrageous and we are going to reverse that. And we are going to get back to doing what works and what is right in America. [Applause]

Secondly, I will be a President who strengthens not weakens our unions. You know unions often make the difference between a secure retirement and no retirement at all. And I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of the Employee Free Choice Act. [Applause] I was proud to speak on behalf of the Employee Free Choice Act on the floor of the United States Senate. I don't care how long it takes or how hard the fight is, I will not back down until we give people the right to organize by signing a card and having the chance to vote and have collective bargaining. [Applause]

Now third, I'm going back at universal health care. Some of you helped me back in '93 and '94. [Applause] And we are going to get it done this time. I've learned a lot. I think we all have. [Laughter] We know how hard it will be but I intend to have a universal health care system that does three things, lows costs on everybody, improves quality for everybody, and covers everybody. [Applause]

And I believe that if we started by letting the federal government negotiate for lower drug prices, we would

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be on our own to getting all that done. You know for the Republicans in Congress and in the White House to prohibit Medicare from negotiating for drug costs have been you know just a total cost that has been passed right on to everybody who has to pay for prescription drugs. And to prohibit us from importing drugs that basically the United States taxpayers pay to develop that were approved by the FDA that we can't reimport back into the United States; we could save \$50 billion over the ten years if we did that. I don't know how many of you get your drugs from the VA but one of the reasons the price is so low at the VA is because when my husband was President he gave the VA the right to negotiate for lower drug prices. [Applause]

Fourth, after people have worked a lifetime we are going to make sure that they can afford to retire with dignity and comfort. Today nearly one out of every three households nearing retirement don't have enough in their pensions, Social Security, and bank accounts to add up to even one half of their income when they retire. So we have to strengthen the system of defined benefit pensions that have served so many people [Applause] so well for so long. [Applause] And I am proud of my work in the Senate to ensure that companies fund 100-percent of their defined pension obligations but of course we have got to close some loopholes

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because what's happening now is that companies cut their employees' pensions when they sell off subsidiaries or they go into bankruptcy. You have heard all of that haven't you?

Let's just pick one company. Haliburton for example. [Laughter] Haliburton used this loophole to rob its employees of \$25 million in pension benefits and then rewarded the CEO at the time who happened to be Dick Chaney with a \$20 million sweetheart retirement deal. That is wrong. And when I'm President we are going to put a stop to that and we are going to prevent the bankruptcy court from discharging all of those pension obligations as well. [Applause]

We need to restore the pension benefit guarantee corporation to its historic role as an advocate for worker retirement benefits not as an excuse maker for companies that want to get rid of their pension obligations.

Fifth, when I'm President, I'm going to take immediate steps to address the growing problem of fraud and abuse committed against our seniors. We have seen it [Applause]. We have seen it in the long-term care market. Millions of Americans have purchased long-term care insurance policies. They thought if they ever needed it, they didn't have to worry, it was paid for. Then the company denies coverage or raises their premiums or withholds payments.

Now, back in March, I wrote a letter to the

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Government Accountability Office demanding an investigation into these practices. And when I'm President, I will require all insurance companies that benefit from federal tax advantages or that want to market their products to federal employees to follow much tougher new consumer protection standards.

Now, we also know that 85-percent of the victims of telemarketing fraud are over 65. These fraudsters prey on seniors. They offer prizes, sweepstakes, and lotteries that lead people into a terrible deception where their debt is increased. Some people have lost their homes because of these frauds. I'm proposing we give seniors and other victims the right to sue companies that misuse their personal data.

[Applause] I am also proposing [applause] that we create an interagency center for telecommunications records privacy to crack down on these evolving Internet and international schemes. Sometimes when you pick up the phone you are not even talking to anybody in America. Right? I mean they are selling some kind of fraudulent practice and they are thousands of miles away. So, we are going to develop an aggressive coordinated strategy to protect personal phone records. And we are going to enforce that because I don't think you should be tricked into spending money, buying something, only to find out that you were misled.

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You know I did an event in Iowa and I had two women who had been subjected to these frauds. One woman said that she and her husband had bought a long-term care plan and they had been very specific in asking all the right questions or so they thought. They were told that if one or the other were to get sick and needing care the policy would kick in. and they would have help in their home which is really all they wanted. You know neither of them wanted to put the other into a nursing home unless it became way overwhelming to them. So, they thought that's what they bought.

A little while later, the husband came down with Parkinson's so this woman pulled out the policy and called the agent. And the agent said well that's not what the policy says. And the woman says well I have the notes about you told me the policy said and I read it the best I can even though it's pretty long. The agent said well that's not what it says. It says that if you are both sick, then you will get help. And the woman said well that's not when we would need help. I'm trying to take care of my husband just like he would take care of me. And it was just a horrible situation for her. But she is a fighter so she's taking them to the insurance commission and she is going to stay on them until she gets her money back or gets some kind of help. And she is not giving up because she was misled. [Applause]

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Now, you know everybody who is running for President, we will all tell you about the changes we want to make but I think it's fair to say these changes will not be easy. That's why we need each other. That's why we need to build a strong movement for change in America. Even as President, I can't get universal health care unless I have millions, tens of millions of Americans standing with me and demanding that it happen. And that's why what you do here at the Alliance is so important.

I'm going to do everything I can to be a President who sets big goals for America. I want to restore America's leadership in the world. [Applause] I want to rebuild the American middle class. I want to reform our government, get back to the old fashion idea of appointing qualified people to do the work that we ask them to do in the United States government. [Applause] And I want to reclaim the future for our children. And I think about great leaders like Franklin Roosevelt who gave us Social Security or President Johnson who gave us civil rights and voting rights and Medicare and Medicaid.

We are going to set goals again. And we are going to realize them together. I hope that you will partner with me, that you will not only go through what will be a very vigorous campaign but more importantly I hope that you will

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be there when the hard work starts because that's when we will really need each other. That's when I'll send out the call George and say we need the Alliance to stand with us as we reform long-term care, as we move toward universal health care, as we protect pensions, as we begin to unravel the deceptions that too many of these fraudsters, you know do to poor people and people who don't know what they are getting themselves into. We can do all of this because finally that's what Americans are suppose to do. You know we are the nation that is the problem solver. We roll up our sleeves, we get to work, we make things happen. And I want to do that again with all of you.

So, I really came today to say thank you. Thank you for your commitment, your dedication, your leadership. Thank you for being on the right side of these issues that matter so much to our country and thank you for believing that we can take our country back.

Thank you all and God bless you. [Applause]

[END RECORDING]