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Five Minutes with President Clinton

Clinton Remarks that Anti-discrimination Clause Is "A Good Idea"

By Editorial Staff

On Thursday, April 7th, James Edwards, DC, of Emporia, Kansas was able to have a quiet, five-minute discussion with President Clinton regarding chiropractic coverage under national health care. The conversation took place at the KCTV studios in Kansas City after Mr. Clinton's televised town hall meeting.

Dr. Edwards asked President Clinton to protect chiropractic patients by adding an anti-discrimination clause to his plan. "That's a good idea," the president responded, adding that anti-discrimination language would solve the problem of gatekeepers limiting access to chiropractors.

Those words concluded what was a remarkable day for Dr. Edwards. It began by greeting President Clinton when he arrived at Forbes Airport in Topeka, Kansas. "U.S. Congressman Jim Slattery was gracious enough to invite me to the welcoming session," explained Dr. Edwards. "I was able to briefly greet the president both before and after his remarks to the crowd."

Dr. Edwards was seated next to Kansas Attorney General Robert Stephan. "When the president started to leave, the Attorney General offered to stand on a chair and take photographs of the president and I together," said Dr. Edwards. On Friday, the Topeka Capitol Journal newspaper ran its own front page photograph of Dr. Edwards shaking hands with Clinton.

From Topeka, Dr. Edwards traveled to Kansas City where President Clinton was to hold a televised town hall meeting on health care that evening. Dr. Edwards had been selected

by television station KCTV to be in the audience and have the opportunity to ask the president a question. "As exciting as the morning was for me personally, absolutely nothing of benefit had been accomplished," he said. "Until our meeting, the president's staff had completely shielded him from chiropractic's concerns. My only goal for the day was to personally tell the president what our patients need."

After going through extensive security and being seated in the studio of 130 people, Dr. Edwards learned that only six people would be allowed to ask a question. They were also told that the president has a habit of talking to the audience members individually after the broadcast if the Secret Service agents are satisfied that there is no threat to his safety. "When I learned that I would not be a questioner, I mentally prepared myself to talk to the president after we left the air," Dr. Edwards said. "As it turned out, it couldn't have worked out any better if I had scripted it myself."

After the program concluded, everyone remained quietly in their seats and the president slowly began moving around the room. The only noise in the room was the voice of the president as he talked with individual audience members. When the president reached Dr. Edwards, the chiropractor said, "Mr. President, I'm a chiropractor and we both lost a mutual friend when ..."

President Clinton interrupted and said, "Dr. Stan Heard." Dr. Edwards commented that President Clinton's eyes watered during the time they talked about Stan, his wife Penny, and their five children.

"We talked about the KCA Heritage Award for lifetime achievement which was posthumously given to Dr. Heard and which Penny and their children accepted on his behalf," recalled Dr. Edward. "I didn't hesitate to use Stan's name to get the president's attention. I knew that's exactly what Stan would have wanted me to do. Stan and KCA legal counsel Steve Dickson and I talked at length the night before the plane crash that took their lives. I knew exactly what they would have wanted me to say."

President Clinton then began talking about how chiropractic was covered under his health care plan. Dr. Edwards politely waited until the president had finished, and then firmly explained to him that the plan wouldn't work the way he described it. "I explained that patients would not have access to chiropractic since chiropractic is not a named service and since his plan will use medical doctors as gatekeepers," said Dr. Edwards. "I told the president that Dr. Stan Heard talked to me the night before he died about why

an anti-discrimination clause was needed. As I did, I handed him my written question and the anti-discrimination wording that Stan Heard and Steve Dickson had worked so hard to get to him. That was the point in the meeting when he stated it was 'a good idea.'"

Dr. Edward's written question touched on chiropractic patients' concerns that MD gatekeepers could severely limit their access to chiropractic care, and queried the president on what steps he would take to assure Americans that their freedom of choice in health care providers would remain intact.

Dr. Edwards remarked that although Dr. Heard and Mr. Dickson had spoken to Clinton aides about chiropractic's role in health care, the president was unfamiliar with the phrase "anti-discrimination clause." "I am totally and absolutely convinced that President Clinton had never heard the words 'anti-discrimination clause' prior to hearing it from me," he said. "You could see it in his face. You could see his razor-sharp Rhodes scholar intellect processing completely new information. Stan, Steve, Penny Heard, Dr. Brad McKechnie, and the ACA all had many meetings with the president's senior staff about the clause, and I told him that. The president's comments left no doubt in my mind that no staff member had ever passed any of this information on to him. I told President Clinton that the paper he had just put in his pocket contained the wording that Stan Heard had wanted written into the law."

Dr. Edwards said that he hoped his meeting with the president would have some kind of an impact. "Now that we know President Clinton thinks an anti-discrimination clause is 'a good idea,' there is reason to hope that he will direct his staff to insert the language," he said. "One thing is certain from my conversation with the president: He can never say he wasn't aware of what we want for our patients. During our meeting, the information was presented to him both verbally and in writing. The president now knows that the anti-discrimination language will determine support or opposition to his plan by millions of chiropractic patients. The ball is truly in his court."

Although Dr. Edwards certainly deserves praise for his actions, he refused to take any personal credit. "I was fortunate enough to have prepared thoroughly and to have been in the right place at the right time," he said. "The real credit goes to Stan and Steve, who worked so hard on getting anti-discrimination wording inserted and to Penny Heard who continues to open White House doors for us. I will unashamedly admit that when I got back to my car, I broke down in tears. I knew Stan and Steve would have been thrilled with what had just happened. For the first time since their deaths, there was

hope that the loss of these two great men had not been in vain. They didn't live long enough to be the messengers, but their message has finally been delivered."

Editor's Note: Dr. James Edwards is the senior member of the Kansas Chiropractic Association (KCA) Board of Directors, and is secretary-treasurer of the KCA's Political Action Committee. Dr. Edwards was the association's 1991 "Chiropractor of the Year." He is a graduate of Logan College of Chiropractic (1977) and Arkansas State University.



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