

LADIES FOR SINGLE PAYER

By
Anita Yellin Simons

© 2009 by Anita Simons



Member
All rights & privileges.

Contact:

Anita Simons
2217 Caminito Preciosa Sur
La Jolla, CA 92037
619-884-6482
asimonsays@gmail.com

LADIES FOR SINGLE PAYER

By
Anita Yellin Simons

CAST

(all women are ages 40s-50s)

DOROTHY – wife, mother, and single payer health care activist
MARY TODD LINCOLN – wife of President Abraham Lincoln
EDITH WILSON – wife of President Woodrow Wilson
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT – wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt
PAT NIXON – wife of President Richard Nixon

THE SETTING

The present in front of the White House gates.

PAT

No, dear. I think she's just fainted.

EDITH

I hope it's not a stroke. You know that's what took my poor Woodrow.

MARY

I don't see any blood and we're not in a theater, so I don't think she's been shot by a mad actor.

ELEANOR

Ladies, she's been out here with a purpose. Look at her sign.

PAT

"Single Payer for all now." Some sort of secret campaign fund?

EDITH

Just like a Republican to think about money.

MARY

Well, single could mean she's unmarried or "one at a time" with a "player." Oh, my, you don't suppose she's a...a...I can't even say the word...

ELEANOR

A prostitute?

EDITH

Eleanor, don't be so crude.

PAT

I don't think that's what it means, but it is rather perplexing. Do you think it refers to her employer singling her out because she's a single woman?

EDITH

Still harping on women's rights, eh, Pat?

ELEANOR

Just because your husband opposed a woman's right to vote is no reason to pick on Pat.

MARY

Why don't we just ask her. Her eyes are opening. (*shouting to Dorothy*) Hello, Dorothy. Can you hear me?

EDITH

I don't think she's deaf.

DOROTHY slowly sits up, as if awakening from a long sleep.

DOROTHY

What happened?

ELEANOR

I think you passed out.

PAT

How do you feel? Should we call an ambulance?

DOROTHY

Please not that. I couldn't afford it. I'm just a bit dizzy.

All of the Ladies help her up. She looks at Eleanor.

You look familiar. Are you on C-Span?

ELEANOR

I don't know about C-Span, but you may have seen my photograph, perhaps in a history book. I'm Eleanor –

DOROTHY

Roosevelt? But you're – I mean, I don't know how to say it politely, but you're --

EDITH

For God sakes, don't you think we know? A simple word like "dead." Nobody wants to say it out loud.

DOROTHY

(to PAT)

You look familiar, but I'm sorry....

PAT

Americans have such a short memory, don't they? Pat... Pat Nixon. It's lovely to meet you.

DOROTHY

(shakes PAT's hand in disbelief)

Pat Nixon? Mrs. Richard Nixon?

EDITH

(thrusting out her hand)

Shocking, isn't it? I'm Edith Wilson.

MARY
(stands to curtsy)

I'm Mary Todd Lincoln.

DOROTHY

This is too much.

ELEANOR

Not really. There are many more of us.

DOROTHY

No, I mean "too much" as in "Whoa, time for a reality check here." I'm standing in front of the White House with four First Ladies. Dead First Ladies. They're gonna put me away for good.

MARY

Oh, I know about that.

PAT

Many Americans have ignored the First Ladies, as if we were a trifling appendage to the President.

EDITH

Our husbands got all the attention, but we were there, too.

DOROTHY

There?

EDITH

(points to the White House).

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Making decisions, advising, influencing...

ELEANOR

Some of us more than others, right, Edith?

EDITH

We're the unelected Presidents.

DOROTHY

Wait, a minute! Am I being Punk'd?

EDITH

Punk'd?

DOROTHY

It's a TV show. Pat, you remember Candid Camera? It's like that.

PAT

I was never very fond of hidden recording devices.

DOROTHY

If this isn't Punk'd, then I must have gone way off the deep end.

MARY

Off the deep end?

PAT

Slang for having gone crazy.

EDITH

You know about that, Mary, from your days at the White House.

MARY

I confess that I did suffer from fainting spells, but that was no reason for my own son to commit me to an insane asylum.

DOROTHY

I don't think he could do that now unless you had insurance. Is that why you're here, because I'm insane?

EDITH

We're here because you need our help.

PAT

And because we've been in that big white house and we know how hard it is to hear "the people" from inside those walls.

ELEANOR

What is it that you want to say to the President?

DOROTHY

I want him to give us single payer now.

MARY

Ah, the words on the sign. But what does it mean?

DOROTHY

Don't you know what single payer means?

EDITH, MARY, PAT

No.

ELEANOR

I'd like to take a stab at it.

EDITH

I'm sure you would, Mrs. Know it all. When don't you have something to say? It's a wonder we didn't have fireside chats with you too.

ELEANOR

At least, I didn't treat my husband as an invalid who had lost his power.

DOROTHY

Why do you two argue so much?

PAT

They're Democrats.

EDITH

Eleanor never liked the fact that I was so attentive to Woodrow after his stroke. And she's jealous because I was more effective in influencing my husband.

ELEANOR

On the contrary. The way you took over the Oval Office was an excellent illustration of how *not* to act in the face of Franklin's incapacity.

PAT

That's for sure, not many of us knew that he was stricken with polio and ruled from a wheel chair.

DOROTHY

Excuse me lades, but this isn't helping my cause. Can we get back to single payer health care? Eleanor, what did you want to say?

ELEANOR

I was going to outline the history of health care in America for those, like Mary and even Edith, who have not kept up with the times. No wonder they don't understand the term "single payer." I dare say neither do most Americans.

EDITH

How the hell do you know all this when you died one year after I did?

ELEANOR

I never cancelled my subscription to *The New York Times* and they deliver anywhere.

DOROTHY

Could we get back to the issue at hand? What am I supposed to do?

ELEANOR

Let's start with a little history of health care in America. Mary, what did you do when you or your boys were ill?

MARY

Usually, the doctor came to our home, but it sounds like a lot of changes have occurred since the 19th century.

EDITH

I remember the first medical insurance policy was initiated in 1929 by a group of teachers in Dallas, Texas. For \$6.00 they were covered for a month of hospitalization. This coverage was the precursor of the company you now know as Blue Cross.

ELEANOR

The big turning point was World War II. As the war raged, the War Labor Board imposed constraints on wage bargaining between unions and employers. This new product, health insurance, which was excluded from taxable income, became an attractive benefit alternative for labor negotiations. The period between 1940 and 1945 was the perfect storm for commercial insurance industries. The number of insured rose from 20 million in 1940 to 142 million in 1950.

DOROTHY

And what about you, Pat? What happened while your husband was president?

ELEANOR

Yes, do tell her. What is your husband responsible for, Pat?

PAT

You seem to know so much. Maybe you should tell her.

ELEANOR

In 1971, John Ehrlichman, after meeting with the son of the founder of Kaiser Permanente, urged the President to pass legislation that would expand the market for health maintenance organizations. All of this, by the way, is documented on those famous tapes. The next day Nixon made a big push for legislation that would provide Americans "the finest health care in the world." And the rest, as they say, is history.

DOROTHY

Oh, my, god. This goes back to Nixon?

PAT

You can't pin it all on my husband, and none of this is going to help you now. You need a plan to help people understand the term "single payer." Wasn't that the whole point of our visit, Ladies?

MARY

That's why I came along for the ride. To help Dorothy. I have an idea. If you can explain it to me in simple terms, and I understand it than I bet anyone will.

EDITH

Now you're thinking, Mary. Go ahead, Dorothy, give it a try.

PAT

And remember to KISS.

MARY

I beg your pardon?

PAT

It's an acronym for Keep It Simple Stupid.

MARY

It doesn't sound very polite.

EDITH

I like it! It's very clever. Go ahead, Dorothy, KISS!

ELEANOR

In 50 words or less. Choose your words carefully.

DOROTHY

OK, here goes. "Single payer delivers universal comprehensive healthcare to all residents through a provider of your choice. We pay taxes - not premiums - which costs less than insurance premiums. The term "pre-existing condition" will never be used to deny care. No more bankruptcies from medical costs. Everybody In, Nobody out."

EDITH

By jove, she's got it! What do you think, Mary?

MARY

I understand it now, but why wouldn't anyone want this single payer?

DOROTHY

That's the point. A majority of Americans when surveyed describe the principles of single payer, but they don't know that's what it's called. The opposition tell untruths and label it socialism, while our voices are silenced by most of the media.

EDITH

First of all, you need a better slogan.

PAT

What you've described sounds a lot like what we used to call Medicare. Do you still have that program?

DOROTHY

Yes, and some people refer to single payer as Medicare for all ages.

EDITH

What is this Medicare?

ELEANOR

Well, in Mary's time and even our time, growing old meant poverty, disability and going without health care. Franklin understood this and supported the principal of national health insurance and was successful in giving America the Society Security Act. But if you recall, Edith, it wasn't until 1949 that Senator Hubert Humphrey introduced the very first national health care bill targeted to senior citizens.

EDITH

That's right. Another fine democrat, I might point out.

ELEANOR

But as usual, it met with disappointment and he had to wait until 1952 to introduce a bill that guaranteed hospital care for everyone on Social Security. Unfortunately, it took over 13 years for his dream to become a reality when on July 30, 1965 President Lyndon Johnson, signed into law the most significant piece of social legislation ever to pass Congress that gave all citizens over the age of 65 access to health care.

EDITH

Please, is there anything you don't know?

ELEANOR

Well, I don't know how to bake a decent apple pie.

DOROTHY

I can help you in that department, but we still haven't solved my problem. What else can I do to get people to understand single payer?

ELEANOR

As my dear friend, Margaret Mead said: Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.
(she picks up a new sign that reads: HEALTHCARE IS A RIGHT, NOT A PRIVILEGE)

PAT

And as my friend Alice Paul said: Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end.
(she picks up a new sign that reads: MEDICARE FOR ALL AGES)

EDITH

Although I can't call Emma Goldman a friend, she was right when my husband had her deported and she shouted: No real social change has ever been brought about without a revolution... revolution is but thought carried into action.

(she picks up a new sign that reads: EVERYBODY IN – NOBODY OUT)

MARY

And I recall the former slave Harriet Tubman's inspiring words: Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.

(she picks up a new sign that reads: PATIENTS NOT PROFITS)

ELEANOR

Dorothy, you already have the knowledge and the determination. All you need now is an army of soldiers to carry out the mission and hold up these signs.

EDITH, PAT, MARY look out to the audience.

EDITH, PAT, MARY

Hey, there's a crowd of people out there. Who among you wants to join the cause of single payer health care reform and follow Dorothy out to the streets of San Diego? Stand up and shout with us: EVERYBODY IN, NOBODY OUT! EVERYBODY IN, NOBODY OUT!

Get the audience up on their feet and shouting until Dorothy steps in.

DOROTHY

Great. Then welcome aboard. Boot camp for Single Payer Soldiers starts in 10 minutes. Take a seat and relax. *(to First Ladies)* And thank you, First Ladies. Thank you for inspiring me to keep going. We'll all be thinking of you as we take to the streets.

The First Ladies, carrying their sign, exit through the audience.

CURTAIN