

“A Health Care Leadership Conundrum”

Interviewee: Peter Edelman

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When the Clinton administration undertook health care reform in 1993, First Lady Hillary Clinton led the White House task force. As counselor to the secretary of health and human services at the time, Peter Edelman describes some of the leadership tensions that resulted from this structure. Edelman and his wife, activist Marian Wright Edelman, had been long-time associates of Mrs. Clinton, but Edelman later resigned his position at the Department of Health and Human Services in protest after the president signed the 1996 welfare reform bill.

Peter Edelman: It was not just that Hillary was going to be the lead person, but the decision-making was going to be controlled from the White House, by Hillary and Ira Magaziner and other people who were on the White House staff. That’s something I do know about. It was a continuing frustration for HHS from the very beginning. Whether or not they thought that Donna would be more pliable because she and Hillary had a relationship, Donna was continually irritated about that. Not on an ego level. It was because she and her staff felt, from a very early stage, that the White House was headed in a disastrous direction. She was constantly going to the White House and saying to Hillary this or that about content and being rebuffed.

End of excerpt.

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