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WLF, Detroit
6/10/96

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR WLF/NETWORK '96
DETROIT, MICHIGAN
JUNE 10, 1996

Thank-you Faylene. I am so happy to be here. With every WLF/Network '96 reception I attend, I am more hopeful for the future of this country and our families. This extraordinary organization within the Democratic National Committee has made it possible for thousands of women to take an active role in politics. I applaud and thank each of you for your commitment to the political future of our country.

The reason you are here, and the reason I am here, is because we share a clear vision for the future of our country and our families. And we know that if we want that vision to come true, we must fight for it. We cannot leave it to others. We must be among those who stand up and say, "Here's what we want for America in the 21st century and we're going make sure it happens that way."

Women have a critical role to play not only in this next election, but in the everyday political life of this country. Because of our diverse experiences in society, in the home and in the workplace, we can bring special insights to the current debate over America's future.

We have been catalysts for change since the beginning of this nation. The first demonstration ever held at the White House happened when the suffragettes chained themselves to the White House fence. Women started settlement houses, agitated for the abolition of slavery, forced the end of child labor -- trying in all the ways they knew to bring equality and justice to those who were left out.

Jane Addams once compared government and politics to "enlarged housekeeping." She thought women, as traditional housekeepers, could help government run more effectively if they were involved in the political process.

And because of the work of so many women before us, we have made progress as a nation. We cannot let that legacy of commitment and action be replaced by apathy and silence. Seventy-five years after winning the right to vote, many women do not feel they have a stake in our political process. Fifty-four million women chose not to vote in the 1994 elections.

We must reach out to these women and make them understand that every woman does have a stake in the political life of her country. The decisions made at City Hall, at the State House, in Congress, and in the White House will directly impact the life she -- and her family -- lead.

I believe the election in November will be one of the most important elections in our political history. It is about two very distinct visions of our future. It is about who we are and who we want to become as a people. It is about the next millennium and what kind of America we want to leave our children and grandchildren. It is about whether we want to live in a society divided by income, race, or religion, or one that lives up to its time-honored principles of inclusion, compassion and community.

And while we all feel a little unsettled by the overwhelming changes that are taking place in our economy and our society, we must also look at this as a moment of great opportunity -- a time for us to rise to the challenges of a new era -- just as so many Americans before us have done.

I believe the President has the vision and leadership necessary to help our country meet these challenges.

- The first challenge is to cherish our children and strengthen our families. There is nothing more crucial in the world than how we raise and love our children. While nothing can replace the attention, encouragement and discipline of a parent, there is much that we as a society can do to support families and cherish our children. (V-chip, teen smoking)
 - More than 1.5 million Michigan workers are protected by the Family and Medical Leave Act.
- The second challenge is to throw open the doors of educational opportunity for all Americans. (America's Hope Scholarships, Pell grants, Direct loans, Goals 2000,)
 - More than half a million students and former students in Michigan will benefit from student loan reforms.
- The third challenge is to uphold the American Dream. Economic security goes hand in hand with health security. (Medicare, Medicaid, Kennedy-Kassebaum) Every American that is willing to work must be given the opportunity to make a contribution to the prosperity of their family. (G.I. Bill for workers, Earned Income Tax Credit, minimum wage)
 - Under the President's watch, 324,500 new jobs have come to Michigan.
 - The unemployment rate in Michigan has dropped from 7.4% to 4.6%.
 - Nearly 400,000 Michigan families will receive a tax cut as a result of the Earned Income Tax Credit. It is a program that rewards work.
- The fourth challenge is to reclaim our neighborhoods from crime, gangs and drugs. (The Brady Bill, community policing, the assault weapons ban)
 - In Detroit, reported robberies are down 21 percent. In Flint, reported murders dropped by 29 percent.
 - There are 1,121 new police officers walking the beat and keeping the children of Michigan safe.
- The fifth challenge is to protect our environment. Protecting our environment has historically been a bipartisan commitment. We cannot allow Congress to permit lobbyists or polluters to write loopholes into our environmental laws. We must be vigilant on behalf of our environment so that our children are assured of clean air, clean water and clean communities to grow up in.

- The sixth challenge is that the United States must meet its responsibilities as a world leader. If we expect to compete economically, if we want our ideals of democracy and the free market to flourish, we must remain engaged in the world. (Mideast, Bosnia, Ireland, Haiti)
- Finally, the seventh challenge is to reform our political system.

Political reform starts with each one of us. Our goal should be to involve every woman, every citizen, in our political process.

I recently came across a survey of American women in the Ladies' Home Journal. The survey examines women's attitudes toward government and the electoral process and the issues that move them to support one candidate or another. When I looked through the results, I was heartened to see that so many women feel they should and will vote on election day. And it was uplifting to learn that the majority of women surveyed believe that government can and should have a role to play in our lives. Still, the survey showed that many women seem to have a deep sense of cynicism about politics.

This concerns me, because politics is the fuel of our democratic system. Whenever anyone asks me, "How can you stand being involved in politics?" I always say: "Are you married? Do you have a family? Do you belong to a church, a school, a sports team or civics group?" Politics with a small "p" is what brings us together peaceably to work toward common ends. So when we talk about politics, we're talking about ways to address the concerns of women: families, the economy, jobs, health care, crime, and education. Not surprisingly, these were the very issues that women were concerned about in the Ladies' Home Journal survey.

The election of 1996 will determine whether we go forward with optimism, or whether we give in to our worst fears. Because I believe in America, I believe that we're going to choose hope and optimism. And I also believe that more of us, women and men, will choose to stand up and be heard. Thank you for your involvement, your concern, your commitment -- and thank you for keeping democracy alive.

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