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Remarks of
Hillary Rodham Clinton
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Presidents D'Alemberte and McWilliams, Chair Amron, Commission members, distinguished honorees, ABA colleagues and dear friends.

I want you to know what a deep personal privilege and pleasure it is for me to speak to you today. Coming here is coming home. Five years ago, the ABA created the Commission and President Robert MacCrate called to ask me to be its first chair. When we held our first national hearings, we came away deeply disturbed to learn firsthand of both the persistent discrimination and serious barriers to balancing professional demands and personal obligations that continue to confront women in the legal profession.

How many of you recall the testimony of the district attorney who had been asked to face the courtroom while the presiding judge proclaimed: "Can you believe this pretty little thing is a prosecutor?" Or the other stories often related in private or anonymously about the verbal and physical abuse that women in our profession often encountered in court, at work from fellow professionals and even clients.

How shocking it seemed then. And how important it was to get the message out that this kind of behavior cannot be tolerated. But that was before today's honored guest transformed consciousness and changed history with her courageous testimony. All women who care about equality of opportunity -- about integrity and morality in the workplace -- are in Professor Anita Hill's debt, and I am pleased to share this platform with today.

As women and as lawyers, we must never again shy from raising our voices against sexual harassment -- or against the persistent and often illegal discrimination that still limits opportunities for pay and promotion -- and against the glass ceiling that is often translucent, but never transparent.

Through my work on this commission, and, indeed during the past year I have spent many, many days traveling around this

country listening to women. What has impressed and troubled me most are the overwhelming obstacles so many women must hurdle, as we try, with the support of the men in both our professional and personal lives, to balance our careers and our family obligations. We're all in this together, after all, men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children.

I think of today's honorees -- all of whom exemplify the spirit behind my favorite lines from my new favorite movie, "A League of Their Own." Explaining why she's leaving baseball, the catcher played by Geena Davis says "It just got too hard." Coach Tom Hanks replies, "It is supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it -- the hard is what makes it great."

And each of these women:

Margaret Behm, lawyer and political activist who placed women's interests on the front burner in Tennessee, wife and mother of a five year-old and three year-old.

Judge Betty Fletcher, already a wife and mother of four, including one of my husband's fellow Rhodes Scholars, when she first went to law school, a pioneer among women lawyers and a mentor to so many since, who understands the tough trade-offs women still confront.

Dean and Professor Herma Hill Kay, a brilliant academician whose work on sex-based discrimination set the curve, who became a mother to her husband's three sons.

Justice Leah Sears-Collins, a pathbreaker for women--appointed to the Georgia Court at age 36, wife and mother of a nine year-old son and five year-old daughter who like to do cartwheels in her courtroom.

And Representative Patsy Mink who became a lawyer after she was denied admission to medical school because she was a woman, and then went on to help author and enact the Higher Education Act's landmark Title IX amendments.

Each of these women, behind their eloquence, their accomplishments and their achievements, knows it's hard. They know you have to keep going because it is hard. And I hope they serve as examples to many of you in this audience about why it's worth it to keep going when it doesn't look possible.

Today we honor women of privilege and accomplishment, women who have much to be proud of and who make us proud. But we also honor all women who are struggling to do their jobs well and still make time for their families. Women who want to work as best as they can and still have time to help the kids with their homework. Women who want to pitch in and help out in their communities and

who want to be a friend to their friends. And maybe most of all, women who sometimes want nothing more than just an afternoon off.

These women are everywhere. They are in this room. They are talented women juggling responsibilities. But I have also met thousands of other women -- single and married -- who are often just as committed as any of our honorees, but far less fortunate. Women struggling to make ends meet; women existing on shrinking welfare payments with no available jobs in sight; women living on fixed incomes; women caring for sick children or aging parents; women who lack adequate health insurance; women unsure even of a future for themselves.

These women, all women, must constantly make choices, but we also need better choices to make. It is no wonder that the cause of choice has become a clarion cry for American women of all ages, from all walks of life and, yes, in both political parties. We need to respect and enhance the choices available to all women.

In this so-called "Year of the Woman," there are serious issues at stake.

Women like us who earn a handsome living in the legal profession need choices.

Women who work in their homes or who earn hourly wages in offices or in factories need choices too.

And women and children living in poverty need choices most of all.

And that is why I believe each of us here today has a special obligation. However complicated -- or successful -- our own lives -- however tough the personal struggle to balance it all -- I urge you to commit some of your time, your skills and your talents to improving our public life and protecting the future of this nation by bringing about fundamental changes in our public policies.

I encourage each and every one of you this year to become an active agent of political and social change, particularly on behalf of children and families, in order to reconcile the way our government and businesses work with the reality of how Americans actually lead their lives today. As my husband has said over and over, it is not enough to promote family values, we must value families. We must find a new way -- beyond traditional policies. Family values alone won't feed a hungry child, and material security alone cannot provide a moral compass.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops stated it right in their recent pastoral that "our children's future is shaped both by the values of their parents and the policies of our nation."

It is time that we as women and as lawyers commit ourselves to the idea that we will not rest until public policy recognizes and accommodates women's needs and priorities. Today is not the time for a policy address, but this audience knows as well as I what kinds of changes I am talking about.

We must start by changing our profession's priorities. The law, the lawyers and the judges protecting our families deserve at least the respect now given to the law, the lawyers and the judges protecting our corporate boardroom.

Legal workplaces need to adapt to the changing demographics -- women are a significant percentage of lawyers, and our profession cannot afford to lose their talents and contributions. The Commission led the way with its ground-breaking proposals for policies on parental leave, alternative work schedules and child care.

This profession, and every profession, needs employer-based child care, flex-time and job-sharing, parental leave, employer commitment to alternative work strategies. Beyond our own profession, though, we need to address the larger issues of social and economic justice that face this country.

How can we accept for one more year facts like these:

Every 8 seconds of the school day, an American child drops out;

Every 13 seconds, an American child is abused or neglected;

Every 26 seconds, an American child runs away from home;

About every minute, an American teenager has a baby;

Every 7 minutes, an American child is arrested for a drug offense;

Every 30 minutes an American child is arrested for drunken driving;

Every 53 minutes in our rich land, an American child dies from poverty;

Every 3 hours, a child is murdered.

This country should not go on for one more day let alone one more year without taking these facts and seeing the faces behind each of these statistics. And how can we do that? We can start by matching our actions with our rhetoric.

This country needs to give dignity to work, to make every job in America pay a decent, living wage. We need tougher enforcement of child-support payments, so that women and children are not left on their own.

We need a tax system that protects workers and families with children -- and even permits mothers to have real choices as to whether they can stay home for all or part of their children's formative years. And we need to ensure a decent system of

affordable child care for all working parents.

We need a real national commitment to education and job training. We should fully fund Head Start and provide after-school programs for latch-key children. We need college loans that can be paid back via the option of public service.

We need to provide a system of quality, affordable and accessible health care to all Americans. And yes, we need sex education and family planning services and to protect a woman's right to choose.

These goals are not beyond our reach. Effective models for reforming public policy -- for reinventing workplaces and government to reflect people's needs are already underway in businesses and states all over this country. We must learn from these models, expand upon them, ensure that they are made to work.

"Get a grip, Hillary," some of you may be saying. "How can I be expected to do well at my job, nurture love in my life, and still find time to give back to my community -- and get politically involved? A balanced life?" you say. "Some days it's hard even to imagine one." I know that.

But hang in there. Women all over this country are doing it. They're in this room. I've seen them. I've talked to them. They're my friends. They may pack a briefcase or pack a lunch for their kids. They may drive to work, or they may take the subway or the bus. They may dash off to the airport, or to the PTA meeting or spend their time caring for an elderly parent.

None of these women need lectures from Washington about values. They don't need to hear about an idealized world that never was as righteous or carefree as some would like us to think. They just need a helping hand.

As we celebrate our accomplishments as women lawyers -- and chart the direction for further changes in our profession -- let us also commit ourselves to ensuring that government extends a helping hand. This is our year in politics. All of us as women and as lawyers must add our voices. We cannot be silent. We cannot be indifferent.

Only by recognizing the truth of my friend Marian Edelman's saying that "Service is the rent we pay for living" -- only then will we truly realize our dreams for ourselves and our families.

It has been wonderful to be with you today. The work of this commission has lit a torch that I hope all of you will continue to keep aflame.

Thank you all very much.