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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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January 27, 1994

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY  
AT AIDS PROJECT LOS ANGELES "COMMITMENT TO  
LIFE AWARD" DINNER

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you so much.  
(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: And let me just also say a personal, very personal thank you to Barbra, who gave one of the most wonderful women I have ever known, my mother-in-law, one of the best years that she ever had, particularly at the very end of her life. And I will be always grateful, Barbra, that you shared your love and your talent with a woman who meant so much to me and my husband and a lot of other people.

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: You know, when I have heard about the Commitment to Life award in years past, I have always known that it represented a commitment to life. And it seems that we will continue to do all that we can to affirm and reaffirm life, no matter how difficult the times, no matter how hard the challenge in front of us.

That certainly is what Los Angeles has done in the last weeks in response to the earthquake, and it's what many of you in this audience and millions of others have done, living with HIV, living with AIDS, struggling every day against great odds to commit yourself to life.

Two years ago, before my husband was nominated, I had the opportunity to tour APLA. I went there with our friends, David Misner (phonetic) and others, to witness firsthand the work that APLA does. I left that more committed than ever to do whatever I could and to help my husband do whatever he could to see that we could give the kind of love and support and resources that APLA does every day, day in and day out, to the thousands and thousands of people who need the kind of help that has been given because of the support of all of you tonight with this extraordinary

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But, you know, any joy or satisfaction that I or anyone takes at the work that APLA has done has to be ambivalent and tempered, for I wish, despite all the good work of APLA, that there was no such thing as APLA, there was no such thing as AIDS, and there was no such thing as HIV.

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: But that hope and that wish cannot be realized yet. And so we have to do more than hope, and we have to do more than wish. We have to face reality, we have to know what we're up against, and we have to do all that we can to turn the tide against a plague that knows no boundaries.

It infects our children and our elderly, our rich and our poor. It has ravaged the lesbian and gay community, men and women of all races living in every country and community around the world. For most, if not all of us here tonight, the names that we have seen and recited, some out loud, some just quietly to ourselves, have meant the loss of people we have cared about.

We have been forced to watch as AIDS and HIV have stolen lives and precious hours from those whom we have cared about. And we have said "Goodbye" far too many times. Yet, among all of the darkness and, yes, the despair, the alienation, the frustration, the anger, there is hope. There is the hope that is brought by APLA. There is the hope of each one of you who has reached out to support and care for someone else.

Every single one of you has made a commitment to life. You've shown courage, and especially those who are living with HIV or AIDS, every day demonstrate courage and strength to us. You are not alone. When others closed their eyes and sometimes their hearts, the members of APLA reached out. And now, we are trying very hard to take that spirit that has been APLA and spread it throughout our country.

You are not alone because we have tried in the year that we have worked to bring change to Washington to bring change, as well, to how this country thinks about, views, and feels about AIDS.

For the first time, we have someone who has been appointed to coordinate policy who is with us tonight,

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Christine Gebbe (phonetic), who has worked tirelessly to take policies that were nonexistent, uncoordinated, uncared about and bring them together, to try to work to stop HIV transmission, to care for those already infected, and to work as hard as we can to find a cure.

The idea of finding a cure has to remain at the forefront of our efforts. I have personally talked with scientists, researchers in the government, in our pharmaceutical companies, who are work day in and day out. This is an extraordinary challenge. We need to do all we can to spur them on. And we need to continue to provide the resources that they need in order to make the breakthrough that we know we will someday see.

As has already been mentioned, the President has increased overall AIDS funding and has increased the funding of the Ryan White Care Act. But we have to do more than that. We are aware that people with HIV and AIDS need comprehensive health care services and that these are too often --

(End tape 1, side 1.)

MRS. CLINTON: In order to do that, we have to pass legislation that will, once and for all, make it illegal to deny insurance to people who need it most.

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: The insurance companies have been allowed to discriminate for too long. Health care costs should not be decided on the basis of whether you are young or old, sick or well, or have HIV or AIDS. Health care costs should not be determined by whether or not someone in your office has cancer or AIDS.

In short, health care costs should not be determined by insurance companies. They should be determined by people's needs. And they should be allocated fairly to every single person in this country.

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: Every single American citizen must have insurance, regardless of health status. And, under the President's approach, all Americans, every single one, will

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be able to enroll in any health plan of their choice and receive the comprehensive benefits package at the same rate paid by anyone else in their community.

That package will be portable, so that people with AIDS or HIV or any other chronic disease can keep their coverage, regardless of where they work, when they work, whether they change jobs, or even lose their jobs. They should not --

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: They should not have to worry when they learn they have any disease when they need their insurance the most that it will not be there or will run out, because we also intend to prohibit lifetime limits on insurance policies, as well.

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: We know that we cannot yet prevent people from AIDS from suffering and from dying. But we can and we will prevent them from going without care and from knowing that they will be left alone when they most need to be cared for.

We can guarantee comprehensive health coverage in this country. It is a disgrace that we have not done it before now.

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: There will be many in the months ahead who will argue that there is no health care crisis. You tell them that you know there is. You who support and work with APLA see it every single day. You see it in the eyes of those who come because they have lost their jobs, they have no insurance, they need your help.

There will be some who argue that health care should not be a right, that certainly it should not consist of comprehensive benefits that include continuing coverage for chronic diseases, that it should not include mental health benefits and counseling and drug and substance abuse help.

And I hope you will tell them with one very loud

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voice that the days when Americans turned their backs on each other, denied the reality that was staring us in our face, walked away from problems because they were unpleasant or difficult to deal with are over. We are now --

(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: We are now creating a new American community, one that is willing to take responsibility, willing to care, willing to have courage, and willing, above all, to recognize each other's humanity, maybe even, insofar as possible, put aside the differences that divide us and try to work together, love each other, and create a better future for ourselves and our children.

That's what APLA has demonstrated day in and day out. That's what each of us is called on to do as we leave here this evening. And that's what this Administration and this President intend to get done, no matter how hard the obstacles, how difficult the challenge, because we know there are millions of people whose lives will be better, will be longer, will be filled with more hope and joy if we stay on the road we are on and do all that we can to deliver health care and, beyond that, to rebuild the American community for all of us.

Thank you all very much.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, the speech was concluded.)

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