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Eric Banks Postivism

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS OF THE FIRST LADY  
AT THE ERNIE BANKS POSITIVISM AWARD LUNCH

Thank you so much. Boy, oh, boy. Or as they say, "Holy Cow, Holy Mackerel." It's a -- it's really exciting for me to be here, especially after being able to go to the game on Monday and throw out that first ball although I didn't have the arm that I used to have. You know, that does happen. Even to those of us who had dreams and played softball and, when the boys would let us, play hardball, as we used to call it.

I'm glad I learned to play hardball when I was a little girl. (Applause.) And I'm glad I was a Cubs fan because being a Cubs fan prepares you for life. It also really prepares you for Washington and politics, which is part of, but not totally synonymous with, life. And so, for both of those reasons I'm particularly honored to be here and to be a member of this society.

In fact, it was not too long after I got to Washington -- and Cubs fans have the greatest interpersonal network. We can recognize each other. There's a look of undaunted optimism. Some might call it foolishness and naivete, but we know that it's positivism because that's what Ernie Banks has told us all these years.

So it wasn't long before I got an invitation. And I met today the gentleman who nominated me for membership in this esteemed society. And I want to thank him on behalf of myself and my two younger brothers and my father, because it was really a family affair when we followed the Cubs, day in and day out and really did not only follow these players, many of whom I did ask -- all of whom are here and others who couldn't come -- that I asked to join us because of my memories.

But everybody else who played for all of those years, who, for whatever reason, connected with us in an emotional and very personal way. And every one of us has Cubs stories to tell and Wrigley Field stories to tell. I've

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spent a lot of time last year, when I thought I was going to get to go to Wrigley Field, talking to my dad about the games.

And, you know, my father would talk about Cubs games and Wrigley Field the same way that you talk about an errant but still loved child. (Laughter.) You know, I mean it was like -- oh, he's going to do it if he can only get his act together and we've got to stand behind him and -- you know.

And we would watch those games on summer afternoons and yell and scream and listen to Jack Brickhouse and, you know, all of us would imitate him. And then we'd all go out into the back yard, or more likely, out into the street, and we'd play the game over again.

And on rainy days we'd sit in front of the TV set and we'd watch the games because we couldn't go swimming or anything else. In those days -- you know a lot of things have changed -- but, you know, when you had lunch and you wanted to go swimming in the summertime, you had to wait an hour because your mother told you you would drown if you went swimming. So we'd all wait an hour and we'd watch at least the first, you know, couple of innings.

And on rainy days we'd sit there, and we'd play card games, and we'd watch the games, my brothers and our friends, we'd act out the plays that had just happened. And, you know, hit our heads a lot of times for what was going on.

And it was that kind of atmosphere of love and support and optimism and continuing hopefulness that I think bring us all here today. Not many of us can re-create, on a daily basis, what it felt like to be a kid or a teenager or an adult watching these guys play and feeling as good as we did then. But it is something that we carry around with us and we can kind of dig deep and find every so often.

And going to the game on Monday was a treat for me. The last time I had been there was in '87. I did make the play-offs in '84. I took my father and mother to the play-offs. I got tickets -- don't ask me, I'm sure the press will try to find out, and I'm sure there's a story there, I don't know. (Applause) And so I took my father to the game.

And, you know, by that time, you know my husband had been a governor and we'd gone some great places and taken

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my parents with me. And, you know, I had done OKay and we were, you know, doing all right. But I picked him up to go to the game that day and he looked at me and he said, "You know," he said, "you've turned out all right." (Laughter.)

And I remember being there and feeling all that you feel and that we can remember from that typical but still unfortunate outcome. But on Monday it was a little bit of a shock because one of the first things I did, I met the new manager, whom I really like. And he's really optimistic and positive, he has a big smile on his face and wishes he had some pitchers but was going to keep smiling until maybe can find one or two.

And we walk into the locker room. And, you know, in Washington I keep -- people keep referring to my husband and me as young. You know, it's always young this and young that. Well, walk into a locker room of currently playing players sometime. It is a humbling experience. I mean most of the guys whom I met there in the locker room were maybe born in the year of the amazing Mets and what happened to us, but more likely not. It was after that.

And they were so young and just, you know, so geared up. I was so glad to see Billy Williams. I mean, I felt like I was finally with somebody I could recognize. And he was so nice to me. So he and I talked a little bit and then we left. And I go out and I sit in the stands and -- after I threw the ball out.

And I don't know, Ernie, if I did any good. Because Ernie would call to the players as they were waiting on deck. You know, he would call them and they would all turn around and he would give them a, you know, this or that or he would say something to them. You know, and they all got geared up.

But if I did have any positive effect, it quickly diminished to the point of nonexistence when I had to go up and meet Harry Caray. I probably should have stayed in the box if I had any small role in some of what went on. I can't take any credit for Rhodes -- I think that was Gene's ambition and determination.

But so there I am with Harry Carey and we're up in the box and he is just as you would expect, in person. I mean he is so full of life and energy and -- what's the word? Malaprops, that's the word. And just, you know, going 90 to nothing.

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So we sit down and Ron Santo is there and we're doing some radio and we're having a great time. And all of a sudden, you know, Harry looks at me and says, "Can I kiss you?" (Laughter.) I said, well, gosh, that's the nicest question I've been asked in a very long time -- why not? You know.

So we did a little kiss in the radio booth and it was like no big deal because, you know, it's radio. And I mean, I don't even think the listeners knew. I mean it was just sort of this sweet little kiss, right?

Well, there is such a difference between radio and television. And, as somebody who grew up with radio and loves radio, I forget about television all the time. That should be obvious to many of you who watch frequently. So we do the radio thing and then Harry says, "We've got to go next door and do the TV." So we go next door to do the TV and, you know, he says, "Put your hat back on." So I put my hat back on. He says, "Yeah, I like that."

So then we start doing the TV and he's saying, "Do you want to do play by play?" Well, you know, Ronald Reagan could make it up because he was on radio. But, I mean, this is TV. I mean, people get to see what it is you say. And I say, "Well, you know, I might be able to say a few things but not very much."

So we're going along and then we've finally finished and Harry says to me again, he says, "Well, can I kiss you?" "Sure." So he grabs me, knocks my hat off, you know, does this routine. So here, I -- I'm so excited because I get to throw the ball out. All across America the next day is this face-smushed picture of Harry Carey, you know, kissing me. Where else would that happen but Wrigley Field? I mean, that is such a Wrigley Field event.

And I guess then, the final -- (Applause.) the final thing that I would say is that history, I guess, was also made, as it frequently is at Wrigley Field. I had about, oh, I don't know, 100 of my high school friends who were there to see me and we, you know, were kind of reminiscing. So I sat with Ernie and, you know, the owners and the dignitaries.

And then I went up and saw Harry and Ron Santo and talked to a lot of the guys in the press box and went back and forth about what was going to happen this season. Had a just great time.

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Then I went across the field to see these friends of mine, about 100 of them. You know, boys I'd gone to high school with. Kids I'd gone to kindergarten with, that we stay in touch with. You know, kids that I played out in the street with, or at the school in the yard that we had there. And we were so excited to be kind of re-living all of these games together.

And it was right in that spot where, if you watched the game or saw the re-runs, two Met homers were hit, right to my high school friends. And a friend of one of my friends, a young man who'd been brought there caught both of them. And being a true Cubs fan in Wrigley Field, threw them both back because they were Met homers. (Applause.) So that second one was really tempting but he didn't give in. And now, he's going to be on Letterman tonight.

So if you do the right thing, things work out. And the Cubs -- eventually things will work out. Thank you all very much.