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Kühnberger Fundraiser

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Remarks by the First Lady at
Kitzhaber Fundraiser
Portland, Oregon

We are glad to be here and I am glad to be back in this state for so many reasons, but mostly because I really believe that you have an opportunity in this next election to elect someone your governor who has not only got ideas about the future of Oregon, but has a proven track record. He has the character, intelligence, and plain old guts to face up to the hard tasks of governing in this time in our country. And I hope all of you know what a leader this state is on health care because that's the way we view it from Washington.

You don't see a lot of things very clearly from Washington, I have to confess. I was glad to be here today. One thing we can see clearly is that this state has really paved the way, with the kind of commitment and courage of tack-lick hard issues that is all too rare today and you have done it all in large measure because of this man's leadership. When you look at what has happened in America in public policy for the last decade, there are a few actions that really stand out. The education reform movement that John referred to that swept lots of states after the 1983 report, which said that we were a nation at risk and that we had to do better. And that's one of the items on the agenda for this next upcoming legislative session after you elect John governor. And there were leaders in that, and our environmental movement, people who really took on some hard issues there.

But when you look all the states even at the at the national level for the last decade, there is a very clear example when you look at this state, about how a problem was tackled in a unique way. Starting at the grassroots, building consensus, talking about things that nobody wanted to talk about, being willing to face controversy. Being willing to be misunderstood, which is the lot of those who try to take on issues that are a little ahead of the curve, and it is absolutely clear that this leadership of this state has played a major role in putting health care reform on the national agenda. Yes, it took a president who was willing also to stake his leadership and political capital but it also took a state like this serving as an example that made the conversation even possible. So I hope

when you who are supporting this candidacy, speak to your friends and neighbors and engage in the kind of debate that will go on all over the state in the next months, that you make it clear how far out ahead Oregon is in dealing with its health care problems because of the leadership of the man who should be the next governor. That is a pretty strong argument.

I also want to say something more general about this candidacy and about John's race because I think it's very important. We are engaged in a transition in our country right now, and it certainly affects every segment of our lives, but in particular it impacts on political life. We are engaged in a classic battle between those who would prey on the fears and anxieties and insecurities of good people, for their own political or financial advantage. People who would stir up divisiveness and hatred, who would lead with the kind of negativism that never builds but only tears down. They are very powerful voices. The reason they're powerful is that people are concerned, the world has changed. We are finding a new way. Many people thought they'd work for the same company all of their lives, and it disappears out from under them. People have nostalgia for the kind of stable life that they think they remember from an earlier time that seems so disrupted now, even though it was not there to begin with. It's scary to walk down the streets of your own neighborhood. You feel sometimes like you are a prisoner inside your house. You wish that you could let your child get on a bike and be gone all day, the way my mother could have let me.

So there are very real factors that we have to contend with, that are creating anxieties and insecurities in people. But in the face of that kind of challenge there are two responses; there is what I consider the false leader, who tries to prey to negativism and tries to give people excuses to do nothing. That path is not the path that this country traditionally has followed. That is not the path that the people who settled this part of the United States followed, because it doesn't carry with it any hope, or courage, or vision, or commitment. Then there is, in the face of the same insecurities, leadership that tries to be honest in dealing with people, appreciating their anxieties and their difficulties, but continuing to try to urge them to come together to create solutions for the problems that we jointly face. Now on the one side we've got the airwaves filled with meanness, and spitefulness, and hatred, and divisiveness that never will build anything but walls between people and even inside people. We have got to stand against that. The only way we can fight that kind of cynicism and negativism that fuels and takes advantage of legitimate concerns by decent people about their lives and their futures, is to stand for hopefulness and problem solving and action that will move us forward. This will be an important election not only because of the issues that are at stake for your state's future but it will be an important

election because it is a classic battle between the forces of negativism, cynicism, fear mongering, hatred and positive, hopeful, visionary, practical leadership.

I think I know how it is going to come out but I also believe that you have to work every single day to make sure that is the result. Because we are facing some difficult times. We have some very powerful, well financed, well organized opponents, but I don't believe that most Americans see the glass as half empty. We have always been an optimistic, positive people and what we have to do, those of us who stand for that kind of politics, is to make sure that we reach as many people as possible and give them a chance too to be positive, contributing members in building a stronger state and a stronger America.

Thank you all very much.

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