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DEDICATION OF ELEANOR
ROOSEVELT COLLEGE - SAN DIEGO

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT THE DEDICATION OF ELEANOR ROOSEVELT COLLEGE
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. I feel like I'm at a Chargers pep rally today. And I know that there are probably students from the town of the other team in the California Super Bowl. And I hope that all of you have a great time on Sunday watching what is now being called the California Super Bowl and frankly after the earthquakes and the floods and all the other problems you have been faced with, California deserves the Super Bowl and I'm glad to see it happening.

It is a great honor for me to be here. I want to thank Anne Craig and James Lyon. I want to thank my old friend David Roosevelt and the Roosevelt family. I want to thank the United Nations Association for its recognition. And I appreciate the welcome and the introduction from the Chancellor.

Being here today is for me a very special moment. As Doris Kearns Goodwin so eloquently told all of us, "Eleanor Roosevelt is a woman for all times and all people." The courage that she displayed in her own life and the causes and convictions for which she stood give me the greatest encouragement. And to think that finally a college that will educate the young people of this country and abroad who come here whom she loved is a very special time for all of us. I hope that each of you after having a taste of Doris' book will read the entire book for yourself. Because it is not only a marvelous narrative about two of the most remarkable Americans our country has ever been blessed with, but it tell vividly what our country went through, the challenges it faced during the second world war. It also reminds each of us and I think encourages each of us to be humble in the face of the many difficulties that generations before us have undergone on behalf of our nation.

There are two important dates that are around this particular time of dedication. The one I've already mentioned the Super Bowl. The second is the upcoming birthday anniversary of Franklin Roosevelt. Next Monday would be his 118th birthday and I along with Doris and David and others who care so much about Mrs. Roosevelt know that the legacy that President Roosevelt left us is still making our country great. And I

believe that he would be very proud to know that his wife, his partner in his enterprises was being honored in this way.

In celebrating President Roosevelt's birthday and the birth of the Eleanor Roosevelt College we have, and I hope each of you associated with this college will continue to have, opportunities to consider the many ways in which these extraordinary public servants helped lead our nation through very difficult stressful times. There is no comparison to the circumstances in which my parents -- your grandparents -- found themselves in facing the Great Depression, facing the second World War. What never flagged throughout that period, no matter how difficult circumstances were, was the faith that the American people had, fueled in large measure by their confidence in themselves and their future despite the odds that America would continue to be great, America would grow, America would solve its problems.

Today we should take heart from the fact that facing our own problems we have the same greatness within us. And this generation of students who will go through this college should be assured that you too will have the future in America that many of us took for granted. And one of the ways we can insure that that will be the outcome is to begin thinking more positively about ourselves and looking to people like President and Mrs. Roosevelt for our role models. Seeing them and in them the very important ways that each of us can participate and make a contribution to our own futures and to our country.

I am a die hard Eleanor Roosevelt fan. I have read her autobiography, her newspaper columns, and many books about her and President Roosevelt. And from the first time I can remember hearing about her, I have always admired her. I was born in 1947, the year before she was sent by President Truman to serve on the United States delegation of the United Nations. Once there, she oversaw the writing and passage of the UN Declaration on Human Rights. I have also read that document which she championed and I'm always struck at how this woman at the end of the second World War, the beginning of the Cold War, continued to emphasize the themes that she had sounded throughout the years. Namely, that we must cooperate, we must find ways to work together.

I almost cannot even imagine the courage it took for her, at the dawn of the Cold War, to persuade delegates from so many different nations to sign their names on behalf of human rights. Although I admired Mrs. Roosevelt over the years, I must say that over the past few years I have felt an even greater affection for her. And have taken on occasion to having imaginary conversations with her. Now I am sure that there will be a talk show host somewhere who will point out with great glee that I have gone over the edge and am talking to myself and talking to Mrs. Roosevelt on a regular basis, but I believe the world, and

particularly our country, would be better off if we all spent a little time talking with Mrs. Roosevelt and less time yelling at each other and listening to people yell at each other. And on occasion when confronted with a particular situation I might say to Mrs. Roosevelt, "Oh my goodness, what do I do now?" And in my imaginary conversation -- my mind's eye -- she would listen to me calmly and look at me seriously and now say very much. I would then go on doing the best that I could and another occasion would arise when I would attempt to seek some pearls of wisdom from this woman who seemed to embody grace under pressure and I might say, "how did you handle this sort of thing. How did you deal with all of the concerns that you had and all of the difficulties that you faced?" And again in my mind's eye I would see her listening calmly and not saying very much. And finally the more I learned about her the more I understood what she dealt with on a daily basis as she persistently and passionately carried forward with what she believed would make the world better. That she could not answer my questions because in her view one simply went about life and did what was expected and did it to the best of one's ability.

So every time I begin to harbor thoughts like, "why haven't we solved this problem by now?" I imagine Mrs. Roosevelt shaking her head and saying something like, "the thing always to remember is to do the thing you think you cannot do." Or perhaps I see her again in my mind's eye saying, "these problems that we faced today are problems that we faced in the past. We have made progress, there are many, many improvements in the way that we treat one another, and we know we have more to do but continue to persist." I have found great inspiration in her example not only for the questions I ask and the role in which I find myself now, but more than that for the humanity and the dignity with which she led her life.

So is not only a model for me but I hope that she will be a model for whole generations of Americans and indeed this college helps assure that. As others have mentioned she was an inveterate traveler. She went everywhere and anywhere she thought her presence would make a difference. She called her experiences the best education she ever had. Not surprisingly she passed through California now and then. And as she did everywhere she made it her business to seek out people who otherwise would be ignored, overlooked whose voices would not be heard. So that she could return to the White House and make sure the President knew not only what his advisors told him, not only what was being written in the press, but what she personally saw and experienced.

I remember particularly a story that Doris relates in her book. When Mrs. Roosevelt was in California she went once with Helen Gahagan Douglas a writer, an actress, and later a congresswoman from California to the San Juaquin Valley. They

were going to tour migrant labor camps and they were driving along when Mrs. Roosevelt spotted a row of migrants' shacks. She asked to stop the car so she could get out. She marched across the a field of mud and muck to inspect the migrants' living conditions. And as she approached one of the workers realized who she was and said matter-of-factly, "Oh Mrs. Roosevelt, you've come to see us." It seemed perfectly normal that the President's wife would get out of a car and walk across a field to talk to migrant workers.

Today we live in an era of short and selective memories and we often forget the sacrifices and stands made by men and particularly women of the past. Those women who had the courage to break new ground simply by living according to their values and beliefs. I know that it is often difficult today for young people, particularly to make sense out of all of the contradictions and conflicts they see in today's world. And I know that all of us wished that everything that we faced could somehow be made simpler so that somehow our choices our decisions were not so difficult. But life is a great adventure. Eleanor Roosevelt knew that and she lived it. And she also understood that everyone of us everyday has choices to make about the kind of person we are what we wish to become.

She was often attacked and criticized but there was never any confusion in her own mind about what constituted a meaningful life. She refused to be categorized or stereotyped which of course greatly frustrated her critics. She was one of those rare people who strikes that elusive balance between "me" and "we." Between our rights and expectations as individuals and our obligations to the larger community. She conceited herself as a citizen. Someone who was there trying to make sure that democracy worked well. Someone who wanted to help educate other citizens about what they could do.

One of my favorite stories, again, takes place in California. She went to the West Coast to tour this part of the country on behalf of the President shortly after Pearl Harbor was bombed. You can imagine the swelling fear that existed in our state here. You can imagine the prejudice against Japanese-Americans. Editorials described Japanese-Americans as traitors, spies, and worse. Their houses and businesses were searched and many Californians were convinced that their former neighbors were now their enemies. As the hysteria mounted, Mrs. Roosevelt took it upon herself to pose with a group of Japanese-Americans. She issued a statement accompanying the photo that said, "Let's be honest. There is a chance now for great hysteria against minority groups -- loyal Americans born Japanese and German. If we treat them unfairly and make them unhappy we may shake their loyalty which should be built up." This act of honesty and courage so enraged so many in California that the Los Angeles Times essentially called for her removal from public life. But

of course she continued to speak out against the unfair treatment of anyone -- Japanese-Americans, German-Americans, anyone who she believed was mistreated. And she particularly worked to reverse her husband's policy of internment camps here in California and elsewhere.

One of my favorite quotes of hers is as follows, "To undo mistakes is always harder than not to create them originally, but we seldom have foresight. Therefore, we have no choice but to try to correct our past mistakes." She lived by that. In many, many ways she kept reminding the people of her time, those in power, that they could reverse their mistakes. She was able finally to see that the internment camps -- in large measure because of the impact they were having on children and families - - were shut down.

For many of you who are students here, you may not believe now that you will ever face any issues that pose moral questions. That you will never have the opportunity to exhibit courage in the face of dilemmas such as Mrs. Roosevelt. I would say that everyday you have the opportunity to demonstrate courage. You have a choice. You can decide to be someone who tries to bring people together or you can fall prey to those who wish to divide us. You can be someone who stands against prejudice and bigotry or you can go along with the crowd and tell the jokes and point the fingers. You can be someone who believes your obligation as a citizen is to educate yourself and learn what is going on so you can make an informed decision. Or you can be among those who believe that being negative is clever, being cynical is fashionable, and there really is nothing you can do anyway. Your college experience will be a great opportunity for you to test yourself. It may never make headlines or any book of quotations, but you will know where you stand. You will find out what you are willing to be for and against. You will begin to understand what that balance about me and we that Mrs. Roosevelt worked to achieve can mean. You will discover as people do as they grow older that a meaningful life includes others and is open to new experiences. You will find as you study history, and literature, and the arts, as you delve into the sciences that your opportunity to learn and grow is as great as the investment you are willing to make in it.

And I hope that you will appreciate the understanding of life that Mrs. Roosevelt has given to us. That we have a continuing obligation to the larger world even when things don't work out as we would wish. Even when problems that we thought had been solved continue to plague us. Even when people don't act responsibly, don't do what they should to take care of themselves, we have to believe that if we work on behalf of a better world for all it will benefit us as much as those whom we attempt to help.

It is a gift for those of you here to be affiliated with a college not only named for Mrs. Roosevelt but dedicated to her ideals. She placed great faith in America's young people. That is my first memory of her. When I was in junior high school and had a teacher who talked to us about Mrs. Roosevelt and about how young women, just like young men, could learn and grow and make a contribution to the larger world that all of us must inhabit together. Mrs. Roosevelt would tell young audiences, "Do not stop thinking of life as an adventure. It is meant to be lived. You must keep curiosity alive. One must never turn his back on life," and I would add, on his fellow men and women.

There is probably no better time than now to rekindle the values and ideals of the Roosevelts. As Doris Kearns Goodwin has told us, they were not perfect people. They made their mistakes. They had their heartbreaks. But they had a fundamental belief in both the value of their own lives and in the betterment of the world in which they live. They both worked hard to keep faith with those core values.

As we look around our world today, we need to go back to those values. We need to understand that opportunity and responsibility go hand in hand and that our communities are stronger when we invest ourselves in them. I like to believe that if the Roosevelts were here today they would in their own ways -- he in his humorous, very human way of telling stories and relating to people -- he would say, "this is a great time to be alive. America's best days are ahead of her." She in her slightly more earnest way would look at us and say, "that's right, but each of us has an obligation to make sure that happens."

I hope for all of you that the values and ideals that this college represents will not merely be a weigh station for four years of your life, but be a beacon for you to live by and for you to help guide others to live by as well. Congratulations on the adventure awaiting you, and thank you for being part of this dedication.

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