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JEWISH LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE LUNCHEON

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JEWISH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE LUNCHEON
WASHINGTON D.C.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much for having me here. It's great to sit here and see so many of you who were strong supporters and such good friends. I want to thank Stephen for his friendship and for the introduction, and also introduced his wife, Kate Capshaw, who is here with him.

And it is exciting to think that not only were we celebrating Russian democracy, but we were celebrating American free enterprise at the (inaudible) State dinner. And that we have that continuing spirit of adventure and fortitude and risk-taking that made this country such a blessing to those of us in this room (inaudible) not only Stephen's (inaudible), but in so much of what all of you were doing.

And all the time (inaudible). And David has not only a very good sense of humor, as was just exhibited, but has really done a tremendous job in reaching out in this party to people who need to be and want to be (inaudible), but may never have to ask (inaudible). We are going to miss him when he goes to Chicago. But those of us from Chicago will have a chance to see him (inaudible).

I also want to thank Terry for your excellent work. And I would not make any jokes about that (inaudible), and you shouldn't either if we want extra cash from (inaudible). As we know, she will do a superb job.

I also want to thank the people who co-chaired this event. Peter May and Miles Lerman and my friend, (inaudible); vice chairs, Abe Poland and Andy Abrahams, Ann Chestley (phonetic), and Stephen.

We are grateful to all of you for your willingness to take on this task. And for the results. This will be a very important day in the Democratic Party's efforts to

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continue to fight out the rest of this election campaign (inaudible) 1996 and beyond.

(Inaudible) comes a crucial time not only for the Democratic Party, not only because of this election that we are engaged in, not just because of all of the issues that are at stake, but because there really is a (inaudible) slowly going on in America about what direction we will take, and what our vision for our country and society is.

We need only to look around us, as the President said yesterday in his speech, to see the breakdown of what used to be called a civil society. You see it in so many ways, large and small, every single day, to know that we have a great deal at stake. Not just in our government, but really in our family, our workplace, and who we are as a people.

And although politics and government is not (inaudible), it cannot solve people's problems, it cannot be anything other than a good partner, what the government does, what it stands for, who it gives aid and comfort to, is critical as a nation and as a people work through, redefining who they are at the end of an era.

That is the kind of period we find ourselves in today. It is a period not unlike periods we went through before in American history. We have been through these periods of redefinition, (inaudible) because one era (inaudible), and the future is not that clear. And the direction that people look to determine how they will define their own lives, has not yet been settled.

A vibrant democracy such as ours depends upon many different voices being heard, depends upon pulling out all different points of view and working toward a consensus, (inaudible) compromise, but always respecting what are the fundamental values that keep a society such as ours, as diverse and pluralistic, moving together.

Today the foundations of that democracy are being in some way shaped by a different tone of discussion and dialogue and debate.

They are giving way to what Deborah Tanner (phonetic), a linguistics professor at Georgetown --

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some of you may have read her other works. You just don't understand one of my favorites, "(inaudible) I learned I was not the only woman married to a man who refused to ask for directions."

I thought that was such (inaudible) and there is nothing I could do about it. You will find the gene in the male species which says, "Do not ask for directions. It is (inaudible) even to be asked about it." I know it sounds (inaudible).

She is a great observer of what goes on in our society, and she now says that we are living in what she calls the culture of critique. Instead of discussion or dialogue on a variety of issues, we engage in verbal warfare, we put each other down, we attack.

We use our radio programs and our TV programs to give forums to people who are shouting at each other. Not in any effort to find the truth, let alone an accommodation, but to score points at each other's expense, and never to be held accountable, because all that matters is the verbal warfare.

This is part of the reason there is so much confusion in (inaudible), and why I believe there is a lot of distrust and cynicism about government. Because we just see it all the time. We are barraged by the outrageous and dysfunctional, the hostile.

This is not a new phenomenon, however, it has happened before. And what we need to do in these periods of transition is work even harder to bring our country together and to overcome divisiveness.

If you look at the end of the first world war, I think there is an interesting comparison. One era had ended. There have many historical accounts of what happened, we were certainly debilitated at the end of that war, unable even physically to give voice to the vision what we saw.

And we began to see a lot of uncertainty take root in America. We saw the rise again of the Klu Klux Klan, and we saw race riots, we saw the beginnings of the Red scare, and we saw a period in which people would rather deny the problems around themselves instead of addressing them.

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It happened again after World War II. Only this time we had a president who, despite falling popularity to historically low levels, continued to battle against what he saw as efforts to divide the country, and keep pushing to try to bring America into a more prosperous, stable environment.

Roosevelt still had to put up with McCarthyism, he had to put up with black lists, he had to put up with the increased resurgence in racism and other unfortunate examples of divisiveness.

Now we see at the end of the cold war, a comparable period. We see people who are again confused, uncertain, insecure about their own futures. We see the rebirth of a radical right. We see the politics of fear being used to prey on the anxieties of Americans.

And all too often today the hatemongers are not members of fringe groups. They walk among us, they are more organized, they are well funded, very articulate, often well disguised. They are trying to fill what I call an enemy void.

You can't scare people about the Soviet Union or the eastern bloc countries. Well, we will scare them about blacks or immigrants or Jews or Catholics or women taking their jobs or Hispanics or whatever else we can conjure up to scare one another with. Anything that does not fit the (inaudible) racial definition of "normal American."

So in a climate of uncertainty and insecurity the voices of division and hate will always have an audience. And it is not necessarily that their audience are people themselves who are meanspirited.

They are often people who are struggling to make ends meet. They are people who wonder why they keep working and their jobs don't seem to get any better, their benefits seem to decrease. They are looking for simple solutions to their problems.

It doesn't have to call up images of a past that is memorialized in so many ways. And so, even if we have Schindler's List, to know how extremism and simple solutions are often grabbed onto by people who live in that kind of insecurity.

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But I think it's important to those of us in this room to care about the fundamental values of the American democracy, to believe in our constitution, believe in it with all our heart and soul because it has served us so well and given so many people the opportunity to find their own particular American dream here, to understand that we have to be involved in politics no matter how distasteful or difficult it is at times, and to continue to battle on behalf of the voices that bring us together.

I think it's so important to each of you, who are giving us this extraordinary support here in our political battle, to know that it is part of a much larger struggle that we constantly every day redefine America and Americans in line with our vision for the kind of country we want for ourselves and our children.

We have to be willing to stand up for issues that we believe in. We have to be willing to stand against the tides that all too often are moving against us. And we have to be willing (inaudible) to rely on our religious faith, and to respect where our religious faith takes us. But also to understand that in a civil society, in a pluralistic constitutional democracy, there is no religious test for political leadership or citizenship.

And I think that is a very important point that we will have to make many times again and again through the years to come. Because although the vast majority of people in this country understand that, and say they agree with it, the kinds of uncertainty they may (inaudible) the underlying, the legitimate religious faith of our fellow citizens (inaudible).

I am a Christian. I am a Christian who believes passionately in enduring religious faith and who believes passionately in the right of every one to their own religious faith and belief. And believe that it is one of my duties as a citizen to support that right.

But I also know that it is not enough in difficult times merely to rely on our own (inaudible) beliefs, and so I do feel (inaudible). I think that when we look toward the future in our country we know, based on personal experiences, how individual faith and (inaudible) individuals can be distorted and twisted and used for political and (inaudible) purposes.

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I may not be Jewish, but I have had the privilege in the past to study something about Judaism. And I know the importance that Stephen was referencing; dialogue, discussion and tolerance.

And I know that (inaudible), one of the great teachers and students of the Koran, believed that the study should be open to everyone regardless of social class or background.

I also had a chance to study (inaudible) Buddhist writing. And (inaudible) make basically the same point, although 2,000 years may separate them. And that is that faith is essential to the (inaudible) that people feel to one another. And religion is not (inaudible) to tolerance.

In fact, real religious belief, Judaism, Christianity, real religious belief is rooted in a deep appreciation for (inaudible) and the knowledge that none of us ever will know (inaudible).

And we have to be willing in our political lives and our citizenship (inaudible) to work on behalf of our democratic society, respect your faith, (inaudible) faith, but not letting it be misused for political purposes.

I hope that as we celebrate the extraordinary breakthroughs (inaudible), as we reflect on the hundreds, even thousands of years that have separated the people (inaudible), we will recognize that it is really individuals laboring every single day against great odds, who kept in mind their own personal faith, their own personal history and experiences, but used them then to have an expansive tolerant inclusive view of the world that would enable men like Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein undo literally thousands of years of hatred, divisiveness, and to move forward into (inaudible) knowing fully well how difficult it will be, a better future for all of their people.

None of this would have been possible if people like you had not persistently been willing to make sacrifices, to stand up for what you believe in, and to use your resources to further what you believe is in the best traditions (inaudible) Judaism, but in the American political experience.

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I usually don't talk about religion, I usually don't talk about faith in political settings. But every time I turn on the television and I see some of those who are running for political office, or who are attempting to use the anxieties and insecurities of their neighbors to promote their own personal political agenda, I think it is important that people of faith stand up and use their faith to say that is not what faith is about, that is not what religion is about.

My faith, my religion are a constant (inaudible) to me to be a more tolerant, loving person. I fall short all the time. But I am to be judged by my deeds. And my deeds will say much more than my words about the kind of person I am and the kind of country I want to help build.

But I think people of faith, who believe as we believe, should not remain silent, but instead should speak out and reach across the boundaries that divide us to give hands to those who are being manipulated, who are being misled, to tell them and to tell each other we can work together, we can make progress together.

Yes, times are difficult. Yes, there are anxieties and insecurities that have been in every era known to human kind. But America depends upon each of us to do our part to build the kind of country we know we can make together. That's what will save our (inaudible) as we move forward to the 21st century. Thank you for helping us.

(End of Speech)

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