

11/30/94  
NATIONAL WOMEN'S  
LAW CENTER DINNER

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

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NATIONAL WOMENS LAW CENTER DINNER

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Before I actually get started, I have a question. How many of you counted the different hairstyles in the slides? I got to nineteen and quit. If anybody has more will you please let me know after the program.

It is such a delight for me to be here. To be here with the real co-presidents in Washington. The only ones that really count. I was always confused when people would ask me one of those "when did you stop beating your dog" questions about being a co-president, because I always thought they were talking about Marsha and Duffy. But they have given such remarkable leadership to so many issues that those of us in this room and thousands of people beyond have cared about and worked on. And the Center, thanks to the extraordinary leadership of the members of its board, those who have supported it, has really stood steadfastly on behalf of basic principles of justice and fairness and equity for women and their families.

And for many years I have admired the work of the Center, and tried to support it. Because it was always out on the very frontier of where the practical problems met the abstractions - what it really meant to be working, struggling to raise a family, dealing with obstacles and challenges. And I am particularly grateful to all of the business and the individuals who recognize the importance in our economic, political, and social lives of having an institution of the quality, excellence, and commitment that this center represents. And I salute and thank you for your support for its work through the years. It is very important. Because what it does is to set a standard by which we judge how well we are measuring up. And by that standard, the Center itself, always meets it and even exceeds it.

I am also very honored to be here in the presence of two such remarkable women. Sylvia and Fran represent the real hard work of translating hopes and aspirations about health care reform into reality. The kind of clinic that Sylvia has lead and inspired for so many years is really on the front lines of delivering health care all over our country. I have been in and out of so many of those clinics over the past years and I have met with the men and women, the professionals and volunteers, all of whom are really committed to making sure that all women, all men, all children have access to quality health care. And

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Sylvia's work is exemplary in this regard.

And Fran whom I have known and worked with for several years now, has translated her energy and passion and personal experience in a way that all of us are grateful for and a little bit in awe of. Because she has been able to take such an important issue and been able to move it in ways that people can relate to on the grassroots level and that resound all the way to congress and the White House. And I hope that those of us who recognize and appreciate Fran's work will continue to work with her as we move against breast cancer.

This evening is especially poignant in ways for me because there are so many of you in this room whom I have known for a very long time - there are people I have worked with, there are people I have served with in the American Bar Association, on the boards of other institutions that we have been committed to. And I know so many of you have for years worked in your own ways effectively to overcome the challenges that confront us as Americans. I appreciated greatly what Sylvia said, because obviously while we continue to work against the problems that we see we also count our blessings and are grateful for the opportunities that we have. But its particularly important today as we confront new challenges - - a changed political landscape, perhaps even the accumulation of frustration and insecurity that has built up over a number of years in our country - - that we do take stock of where we are and recommit ourselves to be effective advocates on behalf of the causes that we share and believe in together.

Fran and Sylvia are living proof that women are able to make a difference and that in particular, women trained in the law can make very different choices about their lives, but bring their expertise to bear on the kinds of issues that will continue to be ones that we have to address. As women, and as many of us in this room as women lawyers, we have learned that we can use our advocacy skills to affect the world around us to make changes. And we can also acknowledge the progress that we have seen occur. But we know very well there continues to be impediments to that progress, and that we find ourselves in a time not only of taking stock, but of rebuilding. We need to rebuild how we approach problems. We need to rebuild how we see ourselves and our institutions. We need to make the kinds of changes that will continue to make the Center, make the work of Sylvia and Fran, all of us, effective as advocates.

You are involved in the Law Center because you care about the issues and the challenges and the struggles we face together. You are also involved in the Law Center because you believe in the voices of women and the opportunity for those voices to be heard. You believe in the choices women should be able to make

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for their own lives and futures. And you have a vision of the kind of country that we would like to see for ourselves. The path to restoring and rebuilding, whether we talk of families or communities, political institutions, is work that has to involve those of us who care about and share that vision. That vision often comes from working against the odds. Sometimes because the odds are in a profession that is still difficult to crack barriers in. That vision is fueled by the need to balance family and work. That vision is rooted in our hopes about what we can become and not just what we are and a resignation about it.

One of the most interesting documents I have seen in the last year, is the research that has been done by the department of labor in asking women what they wanted in their lives. This work, that is compiled in a report called "Women Count," is based on more than two hundred and fifty thousand interviews and questionnaires with women around our country. We heard from all kinds of women. We heard what they want. We heard what barriers they face. And the answers are not surprising. Women across the country from all walks of life basically want the same things. They want respect. They want equal pay for the work they do. They want the opportunity to balance their work and family responsibilities. And they don't think they are getting enough of the choices they want in their lives now.

When the results of the survey were announced and the report delivered, we held a press event at which three women spoke about what it meant to them to participate in this survey "Women Count." As each woman spoke I realized that they were in a way talking about my life and the lives of my friends. The first woman talked about going back to work, after her husband became disabled, for the first time as an adult - a mature woman. And having to go to work because she no longer would have health insurance unless she got a job with benefits. The second woman talked excitedly about the profession she was in and how thrilling it was to make the advances she was making. But how guilty she felt because everyday when she came home she knew she had to gear up and call out that extra resource of energy so that her family would not be cheated. And the third woman talked about making it in a non-traditional job for a woman, raising three daughters as a single parent, overcoming the obstacles that too often still stand in the way of each of us being judged on the basis of our own merits.

I knew what they were talking about and I imagine every woman in this room has some way of relating to each of those personal experiences. Because in one way or another we are all familiar with the range of emotions and experiences that those three women and the thousand of others who filled out the questionnaires were telling us about.

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What we now must do is to take all of those pieces of individual experience and aggregate them. Help to articulate the vision that stand beyond the individual experiences. Help to give voice to women and their concerns and help to create an atmosphere of respect for the choices that women make. Of course women are not monolithic. We know that. But as we spend more time listening to one another and working with each other, we find that the universe we inhabit has many characteristics in common. We worry about our roles. We worry about our places. We worry about our families and relationships. We worry about our jobs. And as we worry we need to appreciate that those individual concerns have a political, cultural, social, economic, and legal character as well.

One of the great things that the Center has done is to take the individual stories of women and make them part of this greater appreciation for womens' lives and challenges today. I know, and as both Marsha and Duffy said, that we face new challenges now. We face a time in which many of the hard fought victories that the Center and many of the women in this room and the men in this room struggled for will be under attack.

We know that many of the advances that women have made have not been seen as they should be seen as increasing the pie of opportunity as expanding the horizons for all of us, but as being a zero/sum game, in which others have lost because women have been given a chance to fulfil their own potentials. We know that there will be many challenges in the days ahead. But what I hope is that each one of us, all of us who has in the past worked on behalf of those changes that we thought would make our country a more just, a fairer, more humane, merciful, kinder place that would give us all the opportunity for a vision of an America that perhaps we were raised with. And knowing full well that we could never realize all of what we hoped for, never-the-less we continued to strive to make our own contribution to the kind of nation we wanted to be part of.

But as we recognize what we had always hoped for and worked for and as we move into a new set of challenges, that we remember why we became involved in the first place - that we recall the stories that stimulated the experiences that each of us bring to this dinner this evening. And we know that whether you are Janet Reno or Ruth Bader Ginsberg or any of the other women pioneers in the law, in government, or in business, that you have much in common with every other woman in our country. And what we must do now is make common ground with all women. We must make it clear that advances for women, protections for women, choices for women, are for all women. There is no special class of women. What we want to do is to give all of our children, men and women of the future the chance to make the choices that are right for their lives.

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And as we end our evening tonight, and as I look around this room and I see the faces of so many people who in the private sector, and the public sector, and in the Bar, in advocacy groups, and in so many causes of importance have led the way, have made the sacrifices, I ask with every expectation of a positive answer that we not in the face of these new challenges give up on the vision that brings us here tonight - that we continue to work for what we believe in - that we perhaps employ new ways of communicating more effectively about that vision we share and what we hope for every American - but that we redouble our commitment. Because I believe that in a time of transition like the one that we are undergoing in our country now that those voices that are represented in this room need to be heard more clearly than ever. Because I don't think that the American people have voted in any way to turn the clock back. What they are asking is that we articulate clearly the vision that we share. And that we work in ways that make sense to them to move that forward.

We have two examples tonight. . . We have two examples tonight of women who have crossed boundaries, have worked tirelessly, and who have made very clear their commitment. And it is not a commitment that is bounded by any stereotypical line or demographic group. Sylvia works for all women and their families. Fran works for all women and their families. The kind of America that I think we share a vision of has to work for all women, for all men, and for their families. And I am very confident that if the commitment and energy of those in this room is clearly articulated and if we are willing to go back again and make our vision well-known that when it comes to making choices in America, most Americans will want to move forward if we give them the reason to do so and help them have the confidence to do so.

And so as we close an evening like this where we celebrate the great accomplishments of the Center, where we honor two extraordinary women, let's draw strength from what has already been achieved. Let's recognize the challenges to the maintenance of those achievements. And let's not in any way give ground on what we believe is the kind of inclusive vision of the sort of America that we have all worked for. And let's go forth to meet the challenges that are posed confidently, optimistically, and with great appreciation for all that has been done before to be built upon. Because I think in many ways, as Sylvia alluded, our best days are ahead of us, because there's nothing like a good fight for advocates to get energized over. Thank you all very much.

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