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U.S. COAST-GUARD

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PRESERVATION

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Remarks by
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
at the United States Coast Guard Academy

Mrs. Clinton: Thank you so much for that warm welcome, and for giving me a real chance to see the Coast Guard Academy in action. I am very pleased to be here and delighted that my daughter Chelsea could join me, she and I were looking forward to this visit. I would like to thank the Academy for inviting me to participate in the regimental review. I must say, seeing all of you executing your maneuvers out there, so precisely and well, was very impressive, and it gave me a great deal of pride in the cadets of this academy.

As some of you may know, I had the great honor of being able to participate in the christening of the Columbia, the last of the Los Angeles class of fast-attack submarines to be added to our naval fleet. It was the last christening at which the submarine would slide into a river. From now on there will be a dry-dock procedure in which the submarines will be floated out. So I was particularly pleased to have the chance to participate.

I was thinking about it, as I drove from the Electric Boat Company across the Thames River to the Academy, of how many times in my life I have come into contact with the Coast Guard. I have seen you and your predecessors to enter this Academy, and those who enlisted, in so many different settings. And it is not often that someone gets to come, as I have been given the honor to today, to say a simple thank you. Thank you to the Coast Guard for your service, and thank you to all of you who are cadets in planning to serve your country by being in the Coast Guard. It is something that we all too often take for granted, because the capacity for progress and innovation is really the story of the Coast Guard.

For 204 years, Coast Guard cutters have kept our waters safe and secure; Coast Guard personnel have overseen tariffs and customs; they've broken up ice flows in the Great Lakes and along the eastern seaboard; they've kept commerce going so that heat

and oil and other necessary products and services could reach their destinations. And day after day, as I have traveled around this country, from Hawaii to Alaska, all up and down our coastline, I have seen the vital role the Coast Guard plays. And now more and more of our fellow citizens are seeing and understanding as well. Because they are turning on their television sets; they are watching Coast Guard cutters intercept drug traffickers; they are watching Coast Guard spokesmen and women talk about what is happening in their efforts to save refugees' lives. So I believe that, maybe more now than in our recent history, there is a greater understanding of the critical role that the Coast Guard plays.

Now I imagined, as I stood out there watching the regimental review, that, especially for those of you swabs out there, the last several weeks have probably caused you to wonder what you have gotten yourself into. I imagine that you wondered why, as I've been told, you have to square all your corners in Chase Hall, keep your head as high as in the boat, worry about such matters as getting demerits for dust-bunnies under your bed, wonder why you can't relax the weight requirements for your football team--all the things that bother people about those first weeks of getting acclimated. Some of you may have written some letters home saying that, "Oh my goodness, what have I gotten myself into?" And then you look at the first class or you look at the people who are leading your regiments and you think, "Well maybe it is a compliment when you keep on going." And at that moment you remember the kind of careers and futures that you are preparing for, and that you are a part of a very important public service.

During the last months, the President has spoken often about the importance of Americans coming together and working hard to achieve a sense of community and a sense of common purpose. He has said over and over again, that we need to reward responsible behavior with opportunity. Because he believes, as I know you do, that if we give people a chance to fulfill their potential, if they are willing to work hard and play by the rules, they not only benefit themselves and their families, they benefit the rest of us. This academy is one of those institutions in our society that serves as an example of how to instill basic values, and then to exemplify them. You have done so many important things in the long and distinguished history of this academy that demonstrate how people can come together and work to together.

I must say on a special note, that the way the Coast Guard has fully integrated women into its ranks--maybe it is possible to say that the first women in any armed services have been guaranteed access to every job, every rating and every challenge--is a real testimony to your forward looking leadership and to the way you work together as a team for that common purpose. The fact that there are today, 467 women officers in the Coast Guard

ranks, is a real commendation to all who have led the Coast Guard over the past 20 years.

I learned a little bit more about the Coast Guard because we are very privileged in the White House, to have as a White House Fellow, Lt. Tim Atkins of the Coast Guard, who has been assigned to the National Security Council, because the role the Coast Guard is playing in our national security is becoming more and more significant, and the National Security staff determined that it needed the kind of representation that Lt. Atkins could bring. And he is here with me today, and we are very grateful in the White House for his service.

As we move forward, in looking at the future and what it holds for our country, we can see that in many ways we are charting very new waters. Because in the most recent assignments that the Coast Guard has been involved in carrying out--in Cuba and in Haiti--we've had to make new policy. We've had to respond to new circumstances. In our efforts to create humanitarian alternatives to war while maintaining our leadership position in the world, we've had to engage in some new thinking.

As we have looked out at the post-Cold War era, we know that we are now confronted with enemies that did not exist before, and that can turn up unexpectedly in any corner of the globe. We have discovered that our capacity to preserve peace and strengthen democracy is tested from every continent across every ocean. And we are finding here at home that some of our most basic values and institutions are being undermined by cynicism, intolerance, and hopelessness. And that is why, on both the domestic and foreign fronts it is important for the Coast Guard, and for each cadet, and each member to take seriously the missions they have been given.

On the domestic front I am very proud of the contributions that you've made as cadets to your neighbors here in Connecticut. In the "Connecticut Stand Down Program" you are making a difference in the lives of homeless veterans. In your work with the Teen Hot-Line, The Scout Club and the Recreational Alternatives to Drugs Project you are helping young people find alternatives to what they find in their own neighborhoods. And in your work with the Salvation Army Soup Kitchen and Lawrence Memorial Hospital you bring helping hands and open hearts to people who need that kind of support.

Humanitarianism in our new domestic agenda takes on an even greater meaning, because we have to show by example the importance of service, of contributing, of helping build a stronger more secure community. We have to, each of us, determine how we can best make that contribution. So domestically, not only in the work that is done on our oceans and lakes, but right here at this academy people are showing the way.

And then with respect to national security, I know the President feels very strongly that the bravery and dedication shown by your fellow Coast Guard men and women in the recent months in response to the refugee crises in Cuba and Haiti has been exemplary. When the Cuban government, led by Fidel Castro, responded to its own internal, domestic problems by trying to do again what it had done in 1980, forcing an exodus of Cubans on the high seas the Coast Guard was dispatched to the front line. Not only were tens of thousands of lives saved, but working in conjunction with the Navy, the refugees were taken to Guantanamo where they were held to be processed while negotiations could be worked out and Castro could be backed down so that we could make sure that lives were not lost in the meanwhile.

While this administration has continued to support and encourage genuine humanitarian aid to Cuba, the United States government has stopped the flow of money and all flights that were being used to prop up the rapidly deteriorating Cuban economy. And in the migration talks that have just ended a few weeks ago, the United States has agreed to accept up to 20,000 Cubans each year, but we're not about to be fully...or forced into accepting floods of refugees as Castro intended. The agreement will therefore create orderly, legal and manageable immigrant flow that could not have happened without the assistance and leadership of the Coast Guard.

Similarly, the Coast Guard's response to the plight of the Haitian people has been one of inspiration as well. The President knows that over half of the first class, and many of the third class cadets, were part of a tremendous humanitarian mission. You literally save tens of thousands of lives. On the Fourth of July alone, you rescued over 32 hundred Haitians from 72 different boats, nearly doubling the previous one day record. Because the Coast Guard was there, able to stem the refugee tide and control it, the United States today will prepare for the military action that will lead to the peaceful return of democracy in Haiti. And once again the Coast Guard is on the front line of Operation Uphold Democracy, with six aircraft, 14 cutters, several patrol boats, and more than 250 Coast Guard active-duty and reservists providing for security, search-and-rescue, and command staff support.

It is because of the tradition of the Coast Guard--of bravery, dedication and skill--that the Coast Guard is known for its humanitarian service. And I hope that each of you takes great pride from that designation, because truly that is what all military services ultimately are attempting to do if they are part of a democracy's military. Democracies do not wage war on one another. That is why the great effort to further democratize the world is so important to the keeping of the peace. That is why the actions in Cuba and Haiti--the last two undemocratic

regimes in our hemisphere--is so important to the future peace and stability of our country and our neighbors. Because ultimately it is the humanitarian mission that is the long lasting one that undergirds peace and that is truly the first line of national security.

There is much ahead of you as you finish your careers here at the academy, because you will be taking your positions in the Coast Guard in a time of great change in our country. It is a time of challenge but also insecurity. My friends and I sometimes think about what it was like when we were growing up at the height of the Cold War. In fact, when I heard reference to a job I held in 1973 in the introduction, I thought many of you were not even born in 1973, and that caused me to pause, but when I talk with many of my friends, and we think back to the 1950s and early 1960s, when we were actually doing nuclear air-raid drills in our school halls, when we would go out and sit down next to our lockers and put our heads down between our legs -- as though that could have protected us from a nuclear holocaust -- when I think about how in so many ways the world was a simpler place because we knew who our enemies were. They were there on that big map: the Soviet Union, and China, and the other communist countries in Eastern Europe. We knew what their goals were, to spread communism and to undermine us, or as Khrushchev boasted, to "bury us."

Yes it was a dangerous time, and thank goodness we are no longer living with the threats we once faced as a nation. Thank goodness that our country is dismantling the nuclear weapons that used to be pointed at us in the former Soviet Union.

But when an era changes, when authoritarian or totalitarian states become fledgling democracies, when walls are torn down, there is also a great deal of confusion that goes along with that, because the old rules no longer apply. We have to begin to sort out how do we all deal with new nations that didn't even exist five years ago. We have to determine what our real national security interests are. We have to understand that even though the clear picture of good versus evil is not so clear and understood as it was before, that we have to continue to show our leadership. But it requires a new kind of leadership. It requires new ways of thinking and new ways of acting. Never before, I believe, have we so required creative, thoughtful military leadership. People who have a broad depth of knowledge about economics, and sociology, and science, and the emerging issues that not only affect the United States but the entire world. So many of the problems we are going to face I could not even have dreamed of when I was in college.

Who would have thought that environmental degradation, that the kinds of problems that arise from the erosion of the soil, from the polluting of the waters, would be undermining many of

the states in central Africa and northern Africa, that would lead to internal wars that might spill over borders? Who would have thought that weapons would become so mobile that thugs and gang leaders in small countries could dominate large parts of those countries because of the weapons which they have? So many things are different now and they demand a new creative response. And as certainly as this President and this administration are working through it, it will also be part of your job as well.

Every era poses challenges to those who not only live in it but want to really make the most of their lives. No time is ever easy. But now we have some particular challenges. It is easy to get discouraged; it is easy to fall pray to the quick answers, the simple solutions, the 30-second sound bites. Your education here will prepare you to think more deeply, and thoughtfully, and analytically about what faces you, the Coast Guard, and your country. Because we will, I predict, in the next few years, continue to kind of sway back and forth as a nation, as we begin to try to find our way into this new territory, for which there is no guidebook for this new world that we are creating as we go along. And part of the balance that we have to strike is between those who believe that America must retreat, that we have to become isolated, and those who continue to urge us to take our rightful position as leader of this world--the strongest nation anywhere on the planet, whose democracy and ideals are beginning to take root.

The battle between cynicism fueled by a media that is more interested in sensationalism and very exciting confrontations instead of the hard work of solving problems will have to be fought. Ultimately, it will come down to a real battle between hope and fear. Will we be optimists about our future, or will we give in to those who would divide us, set us apart, create war and anxiety among us? You would not be here at this academy if you were not a positive person with an optimistic view about your own life and the life of your country. This is, if not the most, one of the most competitive academic college environments anywhere in the country. You have been chosen from among thousands of applicants. You owe yourself, you owe this academy and ultimately, I would argue, you owe this country which not only makes your education possible, but has made your opportunity for this education possible, your highest degree of dedication. Not only as a member of the Coast Guard, but as a citizen of this nation. We need you now, more than ever. And based on what I know and what I have seen, I believe you are ready to meet that challenge.

Thank you all and God bless you.

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