

Office of the First Lady
Press Office
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Contents: FLOTUS Statements and Speeches

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Box 31 of 42

Speech Binder 06/01/1995 - 04/26/1996

Enclosures filed in
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Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce	06/01/1995
Lady American Booksellers Association Convention-Chicago, IL	6/4/95
125th Anniv. Celebration of Metropolitan Museum of Art-NY	6/6/95
Alice Deal Junior High School Promotional Exercises-D.C.	6/9/95
6University of Minnesota Commencement Ceremonies-MINN/	11/95
Senate Spouses Luncheon, White House	6/12/95
Reception for the Washington Performing Arts Society, The White House	6/12/95
USDA's "Team Nutrition" Campaign- Washington, D.C.	6/12/95
Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families	6/13/95
Mother Teresa's Home for Infant Children-D.C.	6/19/95
American Newswomen's Club, The White House	6/26/95
RESULTS Dinner, Washington, D.C.	6/26/95
1995 Women's Health Achievement Awards-Washington, D.C.	6/27/95
Remarks at UN 4th World Conference on Women Briefing	6/27/95
U.S./Latvia Hospital Partnership Announcement-The White House	6/28/95
National Performance Review, Health Care Financing	7/11/95
NAACP Annual Anniversary Convention	7/13/95
125th Anniversary Celebration of Gandhi's Birth- The Kennedy Center	7/14/95
Women's Foundation of Colorado	7/26/95
Remarks to Delegates to 4th Conference on Women	8/8/95
Safe and Drug Free School Event	8/9/95
President's Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses	8/14/95
75th Anniversary of the Ratification of the 19th Amendment and Women's Right to Vote	8/26/95
WHO Colloquium "Women and Health Security"-Beijing, China	9/5/95
UN Fourth World Conference on Women-Beijing, China	9/5/95
NGO Forum-Huaiyou, China	9/6/95
UN Development Fund for Women Panel Discussion "Women's Economic Empowerment"-Beijing, China	9/6/95
National University of Mongolia-Ulan Bator, Mongolia	9/7/95
Women's Campaign of the United Jewish Appeal-Chrystal City, VA	9/18/95
Prevention Magazine Children's Health Index: 1995 Press Conference	9/27/95
Circle of Care Conference, The National Institutes of Health-Bethesda, MD	9/27/95
Vassar College	10/2/95
Child Health Day Dinner-New York, NY	10/2/95
Nicaraguan Institute for Women-Managua, Nicaragua	10/12/95
University of Chile-Santiago, Chile	10/13/95

Remarks to the Conference of the First Ladies of the Weastern Hemisphere, Asuncion, Paraguay	10/16/95
Fifth Conference of Wives of Heads of State and of Governments of the Americas- Ascuncion, Paraguay	10/16/95
Babies and Children's Hospital at the Colombia-Presbyterian Medical Center-NY	10/23/95
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's Kick-Off of "Baby Safety Showers"- Washington, D.C.	10/25/95
National Breast Cancer Coalition Second Annual Gala, NY	10/26/95
I.B.E.W. Fundraiser-Washington, D.C.	10/30/95
DNC Women's Leadership Forum Luncheon-Washington, D.C.	10/31/95
"Keep Patients First" Rally-Washington, D.C.	11/3/95
"Beyond Beijing: Acting on Commitments to the World's Women"	11/8/95
National Adoption Month Event, D.C.	11/13/95
New York Women's Agenda "Star Breakfast"	11/28/95
Irish Women at the National Gallery of Art-Dublin, Ireland	12/1/95
Sculpture Garden Reception, White House	1/5/96
Women's conference Circle, The White House	1/24/96
Bosnian Humanitarian Event, The White House	1/29/96
Association of Junior Leagues, The White House	2/2/96
Ramadan Reception, The White House	2/20/96
New England Circle Discussion-Nashua, NH	2/22/96
Women's Leadership Forum- Philadelphia, Pa	2/26/96
National Hispanic Schoalrship Fund Dinner-Washington, D.C.	2/28/96
Glide Memorial Church-San Francisco, CA	2/8/96
Southern Methodist University-Dallas, TX	3/5/96
Project Children Annual Dinner-WADC	3/7/96
National Council of Jewish Women's 40th National Convention-Detroit	3/8/96
Fourth Annual American-Ireland Fund Dinner-Washington, D.C	3/14/96
Council of Foreign Relations-New York, NY	3/19/96
Ciragan Palace-Istanbul, Turkey	3/27/96
Zappeion Conference Center-Athens, Greece	3/29/96
Children First: A Global Forum Via Satellite-Atlanta, Georgia	4/10/96
California Democratic Party Convention- Los Angeles, California	4/13/96
"United Methodist Church and The White House" essay by William Quick	4/24/96
Arts and Humanities for "At Risk Youth Event"-The White House	4/26/96

2. Speech Binder 5/1/96-1/22/97:

10th Anniversary of the Chernobyl Tragedy	5/1/96
University of Arkansas Commencement	5/11/96
Drew University Commencement-Madison, NJ	5/18/96
Freedom Forum Journalists Memorial-Arlington VA	5/21/96
University of Maryland Commencement Address	5/23/96
Ame Church-Washington, D.C.	5/28/96
Muslim Women's League-Los Angeles, CA	5/30/96
Covenant House-Los Angeles, CA	5/30/96
Q&A George Washington Univ. Communitarian Event	6/6/96
Valencia Community College-Orlando, Florida	6/8/96
Communication Workers of America Convention-Detroit, Michigan	6/10/96
Triton Community College-Chicago	6/12/96
Women's Leadership Forum-Boston, MASS	6/20/96

National PTA 100th Annual Convention-Wash., D.C.	6/22/96
Arrival in Romania- Bucharest, Romania	7/1/96
Departure from Romania-Bucharest	7/2/96
Arrival at Krakow, Poland	7/2/96
Lazienki Palace-Warsaw, Poland	7/2/96
Departure from Warsaw	7/3/96
Arrival in Czech Republic	7/3/96
Radio Free Europe Headquarters-Prague, Czech Republic	7/4/96
Departure from Czech	7/6/96
Arrival in Slovakia	7/6/96
Departure from Bratislava, Slovakia	7/6/96
Arrival in Hungary	7/6/96
Meeting with Roma Community	7/7/96
Departure from Hungary-Budapest	7/8/96
Arrival in Estonia	7/8/96
National Library of Estonia	7/9/96
Women's NGO, Estonia	7/9/96
Departure from Estonia	7/9/96
Arrival in Finland	7/9/96
Hotel Kalastajatorppa-Helsinki	7/10/96
Departure from Finland	7/11/96
National Senior Service Corps	7/17/96
Ethnic Press Conference Call	7/18/96
Talk to America	7/18/96
National Association of Elementary School Principals-Wash. D.C.	7/26/96
ABA Young Lawyers Division	8/2/96
Jane Adams Women in Government Luncheon-Chicago IL	8/26/96
HRC Remarks for the Democratic National Convention-Chicago IL	8/27/96
Democratic Governors' Association-Chicago IL	8/27/96
Background on the Family & Medical Leave Act	8/27/96
Forward to <u>Stranger In the Senate Draft</u>	
Houston Westin WLF Fundraiser	9/5/96
UT Austin Rally	9/5/96
Audience questions from AP Managing Editors Association	9/18/96
LA Times Conference	9/26/96
"The UN Woman's Conference One Year Later"	9/28/96
East High School	3/2/96
Talking it Over: "Deadly Legacy" comic book	10/22/96
Signing of the US-Bosnian Hospital Partnership	10/21/96
Working Women Count Event	4/10/96
Transcript of Q&A at the Sydney Opera House	11/21/96
Remarks to the Women of Australia Sydney (as prepared)	11/21/96
Remarks to the Women of Australia Sydney (as given)	11/21/96
6 th Conference of Wives of State and of Governments of the Americas	12/3/96
Plenary conference of the First Ladies and State Governments of the Americas	12/4/96
Response to question about her role in welfare reform for 2 nd term	
Human Rights Day Event with Julie Su-Roosevelt Room	12/10/96
Announcement of Donations to children's hospitals and charities	12/20/96
Child Development Event-Georgetown Univ. Med Center	1/10/97
Washington Post statement from HRC (not for release)	1/11/97
Gay Men's Health Crisis Event	1/22/97

3. Speech Binder 01/22/1997 - 07/14/1997:

NARAL Luncheon	1/22/97
"Taking Charge of Your TV" viewing project	1/25/97
Briefing w/ Sec. Rubin & USAID's Atwood	1/30/97
Microcredit Summit	2/3/97
Nat'l Prayer Lucheon	2/6/97
Education Awards Ceremony	2/7/97
Working Mom' Magazine, E.Room	2/10/97.
Breast Cancer Prevention Event, W.H.	2/12/97
Chicago's Children's Museum	2/18/97
Woman's Employment Network Lucheon	2/19/97
5th Meeting of WHO Global Comm. On Women's Health	2/21/97
"Creative America"--/Arts and Hum. Committee	2/25/97
DC School Construction Grant Announcement, WDC	3/4/97
Pediatric AIDS Foundation-Elizabeth Glasier Award	3/5/97
Int'l Women's Day, State Dep't	3/12/97
Univ. Cape Town	3/20/97
Women's Roundtable, Harare (open)	3/21/97
Women's Roundtable, Harare (close)	3/22/97
Dorothy Duncan Center for the Blind, Harare	3/22/97
Kuwandzana Polyclinic, Harare	3/22/97
Zambuko Trust, Harare	3/22/97
Nile Center, Kumpala, Uganda	3/28/97
Society for Research in Child Dev'p, Sheraton WDC	4/3/97.
Visit and Learn Program at Cardozo H.S., WDC	4/10/97
Early Childhood Development and Learning Conf.	4/14/97
Prescription for Reading Announcement, WDC	4/16/97
Press Briefing on WH Conference on Early Childhood Dev'p	4/17/97
Women's Leadership Forum	4/18/97
Corporate Council on Africa, Chantilly VA	4/21/97
65th Anniv. Of Folger Shakespeare Library	4/22/97
University of Louisville	4/29/97
President's Summit on America's Future	4/29/97
Microenterprise Summit, Bridgetown, Barbados	5/10/97
Univ. Amsterdam, The Neth.	5/27/97
Banneker High School	6/13/97
Ohio Univ. Commencement	6/14/97
Foreign Aid Briefing	6/16/97
Friends of art and Preservation in Embassies	6/18/97.
Washington Post Principal Leadership Group	7/1/97
Vital Voices Speech- Vienna, Austria	7/11/97
Salzburg Seminar	7/14/97

**FLOTUS STATEMENTS
& SPEECHES
6/1/95 - 4/26/96**

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6/26/95 American Newswomen's Club, The White House
6/26/95 RESULTS Dinner, Washington, D.C.
6/27/95 1995 Women's Health Achievement Awards-Washington, D.C.
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8/8/95 Remarks to Delegates to 4th Conference on Women
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11/8/95 "Beyond Beijing: Acting on Commitments to the World's Women" World Bank,
D.C.
11/13/95 National Adoption Month Event, D.C.
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1/24/96 Women's conference Circle, The White House
1/29/96 Bosnian Humanitarian Event, The White House
2/2/96 Association of Junior Leagues, The White House
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2/28/96 National Hispanic Scholarship Fund Dinner-Washington, D.C.
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3/5/96 Southern Methodist University-Dallas, TX
3/7/96 Project Children Annual Dinner-WADC
3/8/96 National Council of Jewish Women's 40th National Convention-Detroit, Michigan
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3/19/96 Council of Foreign Relations-New York, NY
3/27/96 Ciragan Palace-Istanbul, Turkey
3/29/96 Zappeion Conference Center-Athens, Greece
4/10/96 Children First: A Global Forum Via Satellite-Atlanta, Georgia
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6/1/95
Ctr. Detroit Chamber

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 1, 1995

REMARKS BY
FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT THE GREATER DETROIT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
MACKINAC ISLAND, MI

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much, Congressman Dingell for your introduction, for your leadership and service and for your friendship.

I'm delighted to be here with all of you, and particularly pleased to have this occasion and to share it with Mayor Archer, and Ed McNamara, and Beth McDermott and all who have already been acknowledged.

And I also want to say a special word thanks to Dan Musser and the Grand Hotel staff. It is such a pleasure to be here again, and I am very grateful for the high standards that you (Applause.) (inaudible.).

I must confess, though, that it is a little awkward that this occasion occurs on this evening. Many of you may know that I grew up in the Chicago area. (Laughter.) I know. I am a rabid Chicago sports fan. (Laughter.) I mean, I just want to lay it all out there. (Laughter.) And I think it a little bit of cruel and unusual punishment for any of us hockey fans to be at a dinner, (Laughter.) listening to anyone give a speech. (Laughter.) I knew there'd be applause somewhere about that. So I hope that for those of you who are suffering through this and wondering what's happening on the ice, that somebody is taping it for you.

I really appreciate what you are doing here with this conference and the tradition that it represents. I think it is an exciting time for our country, and particularly for this region of our country and especially for Detroit and southeastern Michigan.

You have faced a lot of obstacles in the last decade. You have overcome many of them, and it is now time, as you well know, because of the subject matter of this conference, to be engaged in a broad and important discussion about the size and scope and role of government about the social responsibility and commitment of business, but more fundamentally, about what kind of country we are and what it means to be an American on the cusp of the twenty-first century.

We all know that there are unprecedented opportunities unfolding throughout our country and around the world. We are all grateful for the end of the Cold War and the replacement of totalitarianism with democracy after democracy, in places we really didn't expect to see that flower.

We see people all over the globe seeking to emulate our country, our democracy, our economy, and yet it is clear that despite the model and beacon we are to so much of the rest of the world, that we have many questions here at home, about who we are, where we're going, what kind of futures we're building for ourselves and our children.

We also have seen very vividly in the last weeks forces at work here and abroad undermining those values, the values that we hold dear; values of civility and community, of sacrifice and service, of peace. We see antipathy too often replacing empathy. Shouting replacing listening.

And now, as we saw to our collective horror, home-grown terrorism exploding in America's heartland. I don't need to tell leaders of this business community that too many Americans feel their lives are out of sync. American families have always been the anchor of our economy and the backbone of our country.

Yet as families try to cope in today's world, they are confronted by pressures, and burdens, and uncertainties that really didn't even exist in many respects a few years ago. From the fears that come with the necessary downsizing to be competitive, to the reality of stagnant wages, more and more Americans are stressed out.

There is a sense that nothing is really permanent in our society anymore, not families, not neighborhoods, not jobs, not even our values. And so instead of the working class or the middle class, we have now in our country what is being referred to as the anxious class. And I'm talking about hard-working, responsible men and women, who because of shifting employment trends have been forced to change jobs, maybe to take on an additional job. Many people who drive too far to work and get home too late. People who worry about whether they can afford to take care of their aging parents while sending their children to college. People who are struggling to keep their businesses and their dreams alive.

One of the great challenges we face, today, is how to address the stress and anxiety that is weakening the American family, how to undue the forces that erode institutions that strengthen and preserve families.

We have unfortunately engaged in what I would call a false debate for too long about what is afflicting our families and

what we need to do to try to help. That false debate has posited on the one hand the idea, that all that is wrong with the American family is the changing economy, the global economic pressures, the kinds of stresses that are too frequently played out in the work-place, and that is we only could get our economic house in order, everything else would work out. On the other hand, we have those who say it is not the economy stupid, it is family values, and what we need to do is reinforce the values that we espouse and that many of us feel we grew up with. And if we can just get back to those values, then everything will work out. I do not believe it is an either/or choice. It is both/and. And if we do not begin to reorganize that, we will continue to breed cynicism. We will continue to see people giving up, and failing to take advantage of the opportunities that are offered. We do not have a person to waste in America.

The best social program is a job. The best social policy is a robust economy. But one does not live by jobs and the economy alone. There is also a spiritual dimension to life. There is a sense of connection to life.

And what we should be about the business of trying to do in all of our individual capacities, is both to make sure people have the opportunity to make a decent wage, to have incomes that will support themselves, and at the same time to try and reinforce values that support and strengthen families. That is what we have tried to in the last couple of years. It is a very big task. It is not a task that can be accomplished by any particular sector of our society acting alone. It is not a partisan task. It is an American challenge.

And it is important that we recognize that particularly when it comes to our children, children are the product of the values of both their families and of their society. We cannot draw a line between the two and expect to nurture our children in the ways that all of us would like to see occur.

If one asks, as I have for a number of years, business leaders across our country, I don't think the answers I heard elsewhere are any different from what you would tell me, about what you need to compete in the new global economy. You need an educated, healthy, productive, work force.

Earlier today I gave a commencement address at Brooklyn College. It is one of our great public colleges. It has been a gateway for Americans of all backgrounds to make a living for themselves, to rise to positions of power and influence. It has really been the door of opportunity through which men and women and minorities and immigrants and refugees walked.

And I said there and I would say again to this audience, part of the way we have secured the American dream for

generations of Americans, is to make sure that education was readily available to all who were willing to except the responsibility that comes with the offering of the opportunity.

I do find it worrisome, if one focuses on the both and that if you believe as I do, that now more than ever we need an educated work-force, an educated work force that understands and can cooperate with the new concepts that many of you in this room are implementing in your businesses.

That this very point in time, when so many American workers are finally understanding their responsibility to improve their own education and training skills, that we are threatened with the possibility of reversing a historic commitment American have made to providing educational opportunity at all levels of the life-cycle.

I'm very concerned that any retreat in investing in education, is not just going to affect our educational institutions, but it will have the ripple effect that will begin to further undermine the opportunities available for many people in the new economy, and thereby increasing the anxiety of so many Americans who now already feel left out and forgotten.

This retreat on investing in our people has to be recognized as the challenge that I think it is, to making sure that we provide the grounding that people need in order to provide the best incomes and lives for their own families.

What you have done in Detroit and southeastern Michigan, by taking up the challenge of the empowerment zone, is an example of you recognition, that we need new ways of dealing with training our people, educating our people and employing our people. It's a very exciting opportunity that you've seized. You would not have received that grant if you had not had the vision to recognize what it could mean. But I hope. (Applause.)

But I hope as you begin to implement that vision, you recognize how much more is at stake, not only throughout your state, but throughout our country, as we attempt to provide a different approach to economic opportunity.

At the same time, we do have to recognize, that there is a values issue, that people have struggled with, that I have tried over the years, to try to bring to some marriage with the economy, as my husband has tried repeatedly to talk about.

And I think it's important that we recognize the need for reinforcing the kind of ideals and values that many of us took for granted in growing up. But again, in order to reinvigorate the quality of our life. We have to treat one another as valued human beings, worthy of respect. (Applause.)

One of the trends that I find very troubling is the increasing inequality that exists, not only between income groups that has been exacerbated over the last several years, but the attitudes that go along with that income inequality. In Michigan, as in the rest of the country, 30 percent of our young people eventually complete a four-year college education. We do not pay enough attention, nor give enough respect to the 70 percent who don't. (Applause.) We send a message to them that somehow that are not worthy, they are not up to the task of competing and winning in the global economy. We send a message to the children of people who themselves have not had the education or the opportunity to be as productive as they need to be today, that probably they too will not make it.

We do a lot of things that sends a message through our media particularly, that all really counts in America is how much money you have, how many toys you own before you die, and, that consumerism and materialism is really the way we will judge ourselves and one another. A political scientist has called the climate in which we are struggling to create these new ways of thinking, "Turbo-charged capitalism." And by that, he means that we too often have pushed forward on the economic front with very little regard to what we have done to the families of people who work, to the dreams of people who work, to the connections among people that build teams and communities and societies.

So as we think through, and as you go forward in this conference dealing with all of the problems and challenges confronting business in Detroit and business throughout America, let's begin to think in a both/and way. Let's begin to say to ourselves, "What is it that will build a strong company, and a strong economy for the long run?" "How do I make sure I always have a market, with consumers able to buy my services or products, and not through my policies and practices, undermine the kind of ability that people must have to be able to have control over their lives, to be able to make the decisions that are best for them and their families and to make better livings, which in turn has an economic impact?"

Now, this is not a question that is only for business. It is not a question that is only for government. Nor one that can be left to individuals or families alone. That is another one of those false dichotomies that we are suffering with. We take a look at a certain institution in our society, and we refuse to recognize how interrelated we all are.

That's another one of the challenges I think we have to meet. Because ultimately, what we need are partnerships, building teams, building communities. We have to "reinvent," to use the President's term, the way American society operates today, and I think that it is an exciting time to be taking on the challenges you are. And it is not only important to us in

this country, it is vitally important both to the rest of the world, and to our continued leadership role.

Some of you know that I had a wonderful opportunity, a few weeks ago, to travel to South Asia with my daughter. And in those five countries, which we visited, we saw people struggling to build democracies and sustain them, and to create market economies, where just a few years ago, they were in the thrall of controlled state economies, often without any real clear sense of what it meant to be productive in the global economy.

But I must say, it is very humbling, to shake the hands and look into the eyes of men and women who have paid the ultimate price for their belief in democracy. Leaders who have lost mothers and fathers, and brothers and sons to political assassination, who themselves have been exiled and tortured and imprisoned. And to know that they have been willing through incredible circumstances, unknown in our country to us, to continue to persevere because they believe, maybe more than some of us do today, in the promise that this country has always stood for.

And I must say, when I returned home, I was troubled and a little bewildered to find as I had seen before, so many people in our country who are not committed to democracy and a better future in the same way that I saw abroad. Who are, in simple terms, in a bad mood all the time about America. Who don't really have any sense of the possibility and the promise and the blessings that we have here. And I thought to myself, in part, that is because we have been categorizing and simplifying, and in many respects, undermining our capacity to believe, our capacity to believe in ourselves and in our country. (Applause.)

So as we go forward, as we go forward in the public debates of the next months, I hope that we will do so, not as Republicans, or Democrats, or Independents, but as Americans. And I hope we will look at every proposal, every idea that is made, and look at it critically by asking ourselves, "Will this increase our security, our confidence, our belief in ourselves? Will this truly extend opportunity and truly require responsibility from our fellow citizens? Is this an investment that will pay off if we stay the course and make sure it is implemented correctly?"

If we ask those kinds of questions, and if we begin to respect one another, particularly those who feel left out from all of the wonderful changes that have occurred that people in this room have figured out how to take advantage of.

And if we keep our eye on the most important issue, and that is our children, what we owe them, what we will provide for them, then I think that this debate about the role of government, the

responsibility of business, the values of family, all of that will be good for our country. Because out of it, will come some new resolve that this country, indeed, is able to provide for its citizens the kind of society that all of us will feel proud of being part of, as we do move into the twenty-first century.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Mrs. Clinton. That was, absolutely...I don't know how anybody in the room could not sign up immediately.

As I mentioned, we're going to take some questions. And I'd like to read the questions, and then have you respond. We've received...I think the stack of questions was probably about an inch thick. So thank you all for your active participation in this case, but we had to narrow them down to just a few.

First question, what advice would you give to a woman, in the earlier phases of her career, who is trying to balance a commitment to her profession, with her role as wife and mother, or can you really have it all, and if you can, do you really want it? (Laughter.)

MRS. CLINTON: That's not only a good question, it's a question that at least every woman, and probably the majority of men, in this room have asked in some form or another.

Well, the first advice that I would give to anyone is the advice I give myself, and my friends and I give each other. And that is, you have to listen to your own heart. And you have to make the choices that are right for you. And you cannot permit yourself to be pressured in one direction or another, but to stick to what you believe is best for your life. That is what I think the glorious opportunity of being a woman in the late twentieth century of America gives us. (Applause.)

You know, I have to say with all respect to people who say this to me, occasionally when someone says, "You're a role model," I get a little bit nervous, because my life is different from every other woman's life. I have different experiences. I have different expectations.

And what I have always tried to struggle for, on behalf of myself and women, is the opportunity to have a life that, rather than using the balancing metaphor, which bothers me a little, because I always feel, when I picture it, that something is going to drop, and I don't like that, I prefer a metaphor that Mary Catherine Bateson has used, called, "composing a life," in which you draw from your many different experiences and opportunities. And we each use different notes in order to compose what it is we want our life to be.

Now, Beth and I were talking earlier, because the other, wonderful thing about being a woman in this time in history, is that we have, thanks to public health and health care advances, as women, gained about thirty years of life since the beginning of this century. Those are thirty wonderful years that can be used in different ways. And the composition of one's life can take, sort of, different movements, if you will.

For some women, it works best for them to have their families early, to attempt either to be a full-time mother and homemaker, or a part-time mother and a part-time worker, and then, at the age of forty or so, when your children are gone, to realize that you may have additional opportunities.

For other women, whom I know, they've spent their twenties and their thirties working very hard in a career, and late came to the idea and the possibility of a family. And for other women, they make the choice not to have families.

Each of those choices deserves respect. And I think that if we can reconsider what women have to offer to the workplace at different stages of their lives, then, I believe, it would be very helpful for employers to be more attentive and receptive to older women who want to enter the work-force in their forties and even fifties, (Applause.) because there are many women who bring a lifetime of experience that would be very beneficial, but I know, and you know, that there is a sense, in which, if you haven't gotten on the track early, then the train has left the station. I think that is a very short-sighted view of human potential.

So my hope is that each woman will make the decisions that are right for her, and that society and particularly, the business world will begin to recognize that each of those choices deserves respect, and that we should look at each individual and try to determine how that individual can make a contribution.

(inaudible) had huge impact on some major decisions that I've made over the last five years, so I couldn't agree with you more.

Next question, what do you find most, and also least satisfying in your position in the last two plus years?

How long do you have? (Laughter.) Let me count the ways. Well, it has been such a remarkable and very positive experience both for me personally and for our family. There is so much about this opportunity that I never even could have understood prior to my husband being elected and actually moving into the White House. There's no way, I don't care how experienced someone might think he or she is to realize the full impact.

And probably the most satisfying parts of it are the feelings

that you do have a chance to make a contribution, that you have the opportunity to try as best as you know how to work with people and at least state clearly what you believe, and try to help shape the direction of our country.

There are smaller pleasures that I get a great deal of joy out of. I love meeting people. I love listening to the stories that people tell about their own struggles and their own hopes. I love traveling around the country. I'm going tomorrow to the Upper Peninsula, a place that I haven't spent time in. I'm very excited about that.

It's also kind of nice to have your husband work, as it were, above the store. (Laughter.) He's actually home for dinner a lot more than he was in our previous life together, so there are many things about the circumstances and the opportunities that are just wonderful.

I don't think it would be any surprise to anyone if I were to say that among the things one is not prepared for, certainly, is the loss of privacy, the feeling that what made you a person, however that developed over time, is in danger of being taken away from you because you are so insulated from what you enjoy in your life, the give-and-take with people, walking down a street. I say this, and my women friends just look askance, walking up and down a supermarket aisle. I mean, there are lots of things that I took for granted in my previous life that I very much miss.

I'm also very upset, personally, and I think, as a citizen, about the quality of political coverage and political debate, particularly, in the last few years. (Applause.)

Congressman Dingell said that, you know, there is much about these times, in which we live, that are very, very difficult. It is, I do not believe, healthy for a democracy to breed so much cynicism, to permit so much of the vitriolic attacks that are part of our political scene now.

I, personally have, after being both astonished and amazed, and bewildered and outraged about the things that were said and the kind of climate that was created about my husband and me, I, sort of, moved through that. I can't say that it doesn't still bother me, but I, kind of, figured out that that's part of what's going on right now. It's done for commercial reasons. It's done for political reasons. But I just have to say, and I would say it if I were not one of the people who is an often used target, it is very, very dangerous for democracy, to constantly be engaging in the kinds of attacks of public officials that lead citizens to believe everybody who serves is some kind of a knave or a crook. They act in bad faith. (Applause.) They don't care about people. (Applause.)

So I hope that we will, in some way, come to grips with this, and speak out against it, ignore it, work through it, get beyond it. And you know, my feeling, personally, is that it will be good for the country if we get back on having a debate about whose idea about the economy or education is better. That's what I think we ought to be talking about. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: I think we'll do two more questions, if that's okay. This one's interesting. What is the one question that no one has ever asked you, but you are anxious to answer? (Laughter.) If that's too awful, we'll move on to the next question. (Laughter.)

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I don't know, probably what is my favorite hairstyle? (Applause.) People talk all the time about it, but they never ask me. (Laughter.) My answer is, the one I'm currently wearing, whatever that one is. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Okay, last question, if you could start over again, in your efforts to reform health care, what would you do differently? (Laughter.) And would you propose the same solution again? (Laughter.)

MRS. CLINTON: I have to say that, knowing what I know now, I certainly would take a different attitude about it, perhaps, starting with saying to my husband, "Are you crazy?" (Laughter.) But, I think that, actually, it would have been difficult not to have tried to pursue health care reform, because, as we now all know from watching the difficult decisions that are attempting to be made about the budget, it is not possible to deal with the federal budget without dealing with health care reform, in a responsible manner, over the long-run.

Now, it is, I suppose, one could argue, do-able, if enough votes are behind it, to dramatically cut Medicare and to dramatically cut Medicaid, but everyone person in this room should be extremely worried about doing that in the absence of some more systematic health care reform, because it will not take long, before, with those kinds of cuts, services that we have taken for granted, will not be available. But more to the point, the hard fought efforts of many of the businesses in this room to control costs will be under severe pressure because there will be massive cost-shifting to make some efforts to keep up with the existing financial imperatives of the underlying health-care system.

So I think my husband was absolutely right to take on the two big issues at the same time when he first got to Washington, with his budget plan which has had a very positive effect on the economy, which has reduced spending, which has done a lot for businesses generally and for government responsibility particularly, and to recognize that even though that was an important part of what he wanted to get done, something had to happen with health care.

Now the problem that...the many problems that we faced were tied up both with the effort to deal with the budget, because that itself was so huge and contentious that it was very difficult given the attention paid to the budget in '93 and to the needs for some kind of responsible approach to health care to do both of them at the same time, and I think that was one thing that we had not fully understood perhaps as much as we should have.

I certainly appreciate greatly the extraordinary help many of the businesses in this room gave us during that effort, with advice and support and positive and criticism, but it was difficult, because once the budget was passed, then we immediately had to move in, because of the imperative the legislative calendar, to the NAFTA debate. One remembers how contentious and difficult that was.

So all of '93 was dominated legislatively by the budget and by NAFTA, so by the time we got to 1994 there was a lot of pent-up concern, a lot of anxiety about what all this health care proposal would mean, and there was a very well-organized campaign against the kind of plan that the President chose to present. And so it meant that it was very difficult to be able to get the debate on an even keel so that good decisions would be made.

The other thing that I just totally missed, and I have to say that based on my own experience in the past on boards of large corporations and as an attorney, I always believed that in a negotiating process your first offer was your first offer. The plan we put forward was turned into an ultimatum, and we never got a chance in the legislative process to figure out how to move toward, because it was quickly characterized as, you know, the end of the world, and much advertising was done about it, and the sky was falling and all of that. And so part of it was that the dynamics of it were never what I thought they would be within the context of a legislative debate.

Having said that, I think we made a lot of progress in raising a lot of important issues, and I think that those issues are being, to some extent, worked out in the marketplace, by the millions and millions of individual decisions that are made. I still believe that there will come a time when the country itself will have to address, in a comprehensive way, how it wishes to structure the financing of health care. Because in the face of the increasing demands on Medicare and Medicaid, coupled with the political desire to cut the cost, or at least, the rate of growth of Medicaid and Medicare, we will see many unintended consequences.

We also know that there are fewer people with employer-paid or employer-provided insurance today than there were last year, and the number is continuing to decrease. So we will have an increasing number of uninsured. We will have more demands on

government programs, less able to be responsive. I do not believe that there are many, if any, states that will be able to pick up the difference. We will see a very great pressure on the academic health centers of our country, which really are the centers of excellence out of which much research and development flows. So if you list the problems that we are still confronting, I think it is important to try to figure out responsibly how even now, and maybe particularly now, in the context of the budget debate, to have some kind of health care reform that will better stabilize the public/private financing system, and protect those parts of our health care system that are really the crown jewels of what we all have come to expect as the American health care system.

So there are many things that I would have done differently. It's been a learning experience, that's what my mother used to say to me when I'd come home from the playground after somebody had pushed me down or knocked me over. She'd say, "Just consider it a learning experience," and I do. I think that it was a good learning experience for the entire country, and now, what we've got to figure out how to do is be responsible in addressing these problems in whatever way we reach a consensus about, so that we can continue to have and enjoy the kind of quality health care that we have taken for granted for many, many years. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: At this time, it is my privilege... We have a tradition at the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, and particularly, in this venue, that for special guests, and clearly, you are one of the most special guests we've ever had the privilege to join us at this conference. We'd like to present you, Mrs. Clinton, with a student apple as a memento of your time with us today, and we hope you continue to enjoy your visit, and thank you so very much for being such a wonderful part of...(Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. (Applause.)

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