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**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton  
at the University of Minnesota Commencement Ceremonies,  
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you Senator Wellstone for that introduction delivered in your usual low-key manner. Thank you all for making me feel so welcome here at the University. Thanks to the President and the Dean and administrators, faculty members, regents, alumni and friends of this university. But most of all, thank you, the members of the class of 1995 for inviting me to share in this celebration with you. I also want to congratulate the parents, and relatives, and friends of the graduates gathered here. Your support, your encouragement, your sacrifice are all reflected in the degrees that will be awarded today. I want to thank you, not only for investing in your own children and family members, but thank you for investing in the future of our country, because it is the soundest investment you can ever make by educating the young men and women before us today.

I am so pleased to be here in Minnesota. I've never been to a sporting event here, but I walked in and it was like deja vu all over again. I grew up in Chicago, where I was a rabid fan of both the Big Ten and Penn State where my father went to school and played football, and I couldn't help but think as I sat here looking at all of the names of the schools and seeing Minnesota up there so proudly, the very first time I came to this state when I was a very small girl, on the train with my mother and my father and my baby brother. We came in the middle of the summer, in what was then at least, in the very early 1950's, a real heat wave. And my earliest memory of Minnesota was holding my father's hand as we got out of the train station, looking for I suppose a cab, and seeing a crowd of people, going up to see what they were doing, and apparently there had been bets about how hot it was, since it hadn't gotten that hot for a long time, and somebody, maybe it was Roger's radio station, had said it was hot enough to fry eggs on the streets of the Twin Cities. And there was a crowd of people surrounding some men who were trying to fry eggs on the sidewalks of this city. So for years, I thought Minnesota was in the hot part of the United States. I never could figure it out geographically, because it was north of Chicago which was really cold.

As I grew older I learned a lot about this state, and I learned about its commitment to solving problems and investing in a better future. And that is something that the people here have always acted on. And so for me, coming here is a way of reiterating not only the belief I have in the importance of education, but in applauding this state for what it has stood for with its support for education over now 125 years with this college. Minnesota has always stood out for its leadership in ideas and moral purpose. If you think about the alumni that have made their marks, there are so many it would be difficult to list all of them. But certainly it is hard to come to this University without thinking about Hubert Humphrey, who learned and taught here, and was one of our nation's most beloved leaders. Or to think about Vice President Mondale, now our Ambassador to Japan, another Minnesota graduate. The list could go on and on, because the contributions you have made of the names we recognize, and the names we may not know but those who are giving service every day, stands more eloquently than anything I could say.

But I think it is important on this 125th anniversary, to take stock in where we as a country, where Minnesota as a state, happens to be. There is a lot of talk today about how government can do no good, how government is to blame for all that is wrong in our society, and I think it is worth a moment or two of reflection, as to what government has meant in the lives of all those who have learned and taught and gone on to lead and build from this college and university. Tens of thousands of people -- immigrants, refugees, rich, poor, of all cultures, races, and backgrounds, have come here and educated themselves. And it all started because of one federal act signed in 1862, the Moral Land Grant Act, that established our remarkable system of land grant universities. Think of the vision it took, at the beginning of the Civil War, when certainly people's anxieties and fears were at a fever pitch, to pass an act that thought not about the war at hand, or the next year or two, but about continuing to build this country we treasure and love. We need to be reminded of our history. We need to realize that we did not just get here in this country with so many blessings by accident. Many, many others have gone before.

But instead of support and appreciation for education today, we see a movement among us to undermine education. We see some among us who would knock down the ladders of opportunity after they themselves have already reached the top rung. For generations, education has been the gateway to opportunity and, when married with responsibility, has been the recipe for the American Dream. Education is not just about acquiring facts, or even about acquiring skills to prepare oneself for a career. It is also about learning how to meet the challenges of one's time. How to solve problems and adapt to new circumstances. How to go forward into the world with the spirit and optimism that Eric talked about. It is about building a deeper understanding of the

complexity of human civilization. Understanding our history, knowing that there is much we can learn from those who came before. Defining one's place in the world, and figuring out how to live in a way that does honor to those who have believed in us.

Education is also not, if it ever were, a one-shot deal. There are all kinds of people in our society today who need to learn and want to learn. They range from the very young to the very old. They are all kinds of people who recognize that the challenges of the global economy are such that they can only be met by a spirit of learning. But tragically as we all know today, there is a movement afoot in state capitals, and the nation's capital, to retreat on America's historic commitment to education funding. It is a retreat marked by a rather unusual argument. One that says, slashing education funding is for the good of our children. Under this skewed logic, cutting back on education will enable us, in some miraculous way, to provide more and better opportunities than we now enjoy. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we sound the retreat on education in America, we deny the opportunity of preschool and Head Start to thousands of children. We deny tens of thousands of elementary school students the resources they need to improve their reading and math schools. We deny summer jobs and learning opportunities to young people. And most cruelly of all, we deny the opportunity for college to millions of Americans by decreasing the availability of loans, making them less flexible, and raising interest payments and tuition beyond the reach of many working families.

Denying opportunities for all Americans to further their educations will not help our country cope with either internal challenges, or ones beyond our borders. We now have limitless possibilities in the world. We are all grateful for the end of the Cold War and the rise of democracy in places where totalitarianism was once the rule. We see people all over the globe seeking to emulate American ideals and to have the kind of education that we take for granted here. And yet we ourselves are suffering from questions and concerns about how we shall move into the future.

We have seen vividly in the last months forces working here and abroad to undermine the values we hold dear. The values of civility and community, of sacrifice and service, of peace and unity. We see antipathy replacing empathy. Shouting replacing listening. Cynicism replacing hope. And we all suffered to see terrorism explode in the heartland of America.

And yet I don't need to say to this audience that many of our citizens feel their lives are out of synch. As families try to cope in today's world, they are confronted by burdens and pressures that were unknown and even unimaginable in the past.

From the fears that come with corporate downsizing, to the reality of stagnant wages, increasing college tuitions, shrinking financial aid, two-parent working families, single-parent working families...all of the problems we live and know so well. It is no surprise that many Americans feel under stress. Our lives today seldom evoke images of Lake Wobegon. Instead there is a sense that nothing is permanent in our society -- not families, not neighborhoods, not jobs, not relationships. So instead of a working class or a middle class, we have what is now referred to as an anxious class. We find ourselves in a society that has accumulated more material wealth over the years. We are bombarded with knowledge about our world. But in many ways, we are far less hopeful and secure than our parents and grandparents who had so much less.

So how do we address the stress and anxiety? How do we try to create a sense of permanence in a time of unending change? How do we recreate an ethos of civility? How do we build character? You cannot do it without believing in and investing in education. You cannot do it without understanding the direct connection between the quality and availability of education in this country, and our being able to once again ground ourselves.

It is particularly ironic that those who profess to worry most about values in America are on a crusade to diminish federal support for education and obliterate the National Service program known as Americorps, that the President launched last year. It is a false debate to pit a discussion about values against the real economic concerns of the American people. It is not either/or. It is both/and. We need both a strong economy that protects jobs and values that we want our children to be raised by. And what better example than National Service of what we mean by taking economic and educational opportunity and marrying it with values. The values you get from tutoring children, building homes for the elderly, working with police officers, cleaning up the environment, immunizing children. National Service is built on very old-fashioned values of hard work, discipline, and community service. The men and women who serve do so because they want to help people. And in return they get some small assistance with their education that not only helps them, but helps us as a country.

But there are some who say, "We don't need to do that." They want to send a message to these young people that caring about the larger community isn't valued much in our society. Education and service are not in their view, important goals. But education and service, as you know so well at this college, are about building character and civility and permanence. It is not that Americans lack character or the ability to be civil. It is that our society too often has stopped rewarding those things. Just look around you. In our political debates, it is the person who can be the meanest, the nastiest, the quickest with the

insult who gets the attention. Any reasoned debate, any discussion as you would have in a family or in a business is too boring even to get much coverage.

Just look around you and you will see what one political scientist has called "turbo-charged capitalism." Consumerism and materialism going unchecked. Running rampant through our culture, dictating our tastes, our desires, our values and dreams. We are fat, not by the government, but by the market. A daily diet of sex, violence, social disfunction and unrealizable fantasies. We do live too often in a disposable, throw-away society where the yearning for profits and instant gratification overshadows the need for moderation, restraint, and investing for the long-term. So the question for us as an individual or as a society is, do we define ourselves by our style or our substance? By the logo on our sneakers or the generosity in our hearts. By the celebrity we crave, or the reputation we earn, by the education we have. We were reminded with Oklahoma City the sense of responsibility that emerges in times of crisis. When barriers of race, ethnicity, religion and region suddenly vanish as we are joined in a common pursuit to help one another.

Many of you know that I recently returned from a trip to South Asia with my daughter. I had the opportunity to visit countries that are struggling to become full-fledged free market economies, that are democracies providing real opportunities for their people. It was humbling to shake the hands of men and women who have paid the ultimate price for democracy. People whose fathers and mothers and brothers and sons and husbands have been assassinated. People who have been tortured, jailed or exiled because they believed in the American ideals of democracy and freedom. When I came home from South Asia, I couldn't help but wonder why we do spend so much time in a bad mood in America today? We have so much to be grateful for, we have so many blessings and opportunities.

So I hope that as all of us go forth from this celebration today, we each will think of ways we can demonstrate our fundamental belief in the vision of our country. How we can support education in the debates that are raging all over our nation today. I hope that you will also challenge the negative stereotypes of young people that were so eloquently discussed by Eric. You are not a slacker generation. You are filled with potential and promise and goodness and intelligence, and I for one am tired of seeing the stereotypes that suggest every young person in America is a criminal or on the verge of becoming one. We need to stand up loudly and clearly and say we have the finest young people in the entire world. What they need is our support and the belief that we are investing in them and their futures. They will not be cut adrift by people already made it in this society.

So whether we belong to Generation X, Y, or Z, each of has the opportunity in our own way to make clear what values really matter. And we also can make a difference with those values in the lives of people we love and care about. Education matters. Kindness matters. Truth matters. Patience, hard work, tolerance, empathy, discipline -- all of these matter. Forgiveness matters, and gratitude matters, especially on a day like today. So I hope you will take this education, all of you who graduate today with the hopes and dreams, and I suppose some anxieties as well, value this education that so many have sacrificed to give to you, and stand up for the education of others.

I have no idea what "Ski-U-Mah" means, but I know that it must mean something very uplifting and encouraging, since you yell it all the time. And so whatever it means, fill it with meaning for your life, and use it as a technique. Whenever you feel flagging, whenever you think the world is too much with you, say to yourself, "Ski-U-Mah," and let it mean whatever you want it to mean. And at the same time know that we celebrate today not only the promise you hold for your own lives, but for the promise we know you hold for this University, this state, and our country. Thank you and God speed on your journey.

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