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REMARKS OF FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
COMMUNICATION WORKERS OF AMERICA CONVENTION
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you very much. Thank you so much Morty for that introduction and your kind words and for your innovative leadership of CWA and also for your service on the President's Advisory Council on National Information Infrastructure. I am delighted to be here with all of you, with Emmy Nichols and Loretta Bowen, with Barbara Easterling, with all of the delegates who are here representing the people back home. I'm also pleased to be on the same podium with John Sweeney and Chairman Reed Hunt.

But it is a great honor, beyond any I could have anticipated when I agreed to be here today, to be among you when you voted to endorse the President and the Vice President. Your endorsement means a great deal to us. [Applause] I want to thank the delegate who read the resolution, I want to thank the two delegates who spoke so eloquently in favor of the resolution, and I want to thank all of you for your faith and your confidence.

To reiterate what has already been said: This President believes in you and your future. He believes in your spirit and your energy and your commitment to working men and women. For more than half a century, the Communication Workers have been on the front lines, fighting for fair wages, for decent health care, for good schools, for retirement security and equal opportunity. Many of you have been following these battles for years and decades and it is we who say thank you, because without you, America would not be what it is today and we have to fight to preserve it for the future as all of us know what's at stake. [Applause]

I was thinking as I drove in that it is particularly fitting that your convention is taking place in this city. Detroit, perhaps more than any other city in America, is identified with working people. During times of war, Detroit has served as an arsenal of democracy and, during times of peace, an engine of prosperity. So I am glad to be with you anywhere, but I am particularly glad to be here with you in Detroit, a great city of working men and women now and into the future. [Applause]

I don't need to tell any of you in this great hall that America was built on hard work. It was built on an ethic of responsibility and sacrifice. It was built with a sense of both opportunity and community for ourselves and for all Americans willing to work hard and take responsibility. And America has prospered for more than two centuries, not simply because Americans are hard workers, but because that hard work has translated into opportunity, into progress, into the American Dream for millions and millions of our fellow citizens.

Three-and-a-half years ago when my husband took the oath of office, he did so promising to put people first, to reinvigorate the working families of America, and to renew a sense of economic security that was under siege because of stagnant wages, increased global competition, and downsizing.

The President felt that he had been sent to Washington to generate growth and jobs, to increase incomes and close the wage gap, to shrink the underclass and to grow the middle class. And although we still have work to do in a second term, with your help, I'm proud to say that we have made progress with this President doing just that. [Applause]

Think back if you will to the time when the President's economic plan was moving through the Congress and how he did not receive one single vote to grow the economy and shrink the deficit from the other party. No, instead they acted like a bunch of Chicken Littles -- running around Washington talking about what was going to happen if the President's economic plan went into effect. Well, now we know what did happen. We know that we have seen the creation of 9.7 million new jobs. And more importantly than that, we have begun to see incomes in those jobs slowly, slowly increase, in part because we have the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in 27 years. [Applause] The long decline in the median hourly wage has eased. And we've seen home mortgages at their lowest interest rates since the 1960s, and just this week the President proposed to lower closing costs for some first-time homebuyers. So if there are any of you out there, think about it now because you'll save about 200 more dollars to get into the home buying market. [Applause] The President's economic plan has cut the deficit in more than half.

This is a record to build on. And with your help, the President will do even better in the years ahead.

I don't need to tell the members of this union that we live in a time of exhilarating, unpredictable and sometimes frightening change. Technology is advancing at breakneck speed. And sometimes we wonder where the human being -- where you and I -- fit in to this big picture. The nature of communications has been revolutionized in less than one generation. Just think. A

few years ago, no one had ever even heard of the Internet or the World Wide Web. Now my cat Socks has his own home page on the World Wide Web. And I'm very flattered to announce that there are those who are running a page on my hairdos, if any of you are interested in checking that out.

These changes have occurred in ways that we could not even have imagined. But they've also exacted a cost. Many people have faced dislocation, downsizing, new job challenges. It has not been an easy transition, which is why all of us have to do everything we can to try to make it possible for people both to make a living and live a life. To feel that they have a place in society and security in the work place. That if they do their part of the bargain, they will be taken care of. [Applause]

That's why the partnership between the Clinton-Gore Administration and this union is so important, because neither side can do what needs to be done alone. The President knows that.

When he first took office, he got rid of his predecessors' anti-work, anti-union executive orders. Last spring, he signed an executive order that said to federal contractors: if you hire permanent replacements for your striking workers, you will not do business with the government. And when a court overturned that order, the President committed this Administration to fighting in court to preserve it.

He also believes that collective bargaining is a right, not a privilege. The President had appointed women and men to the NLRB who share that belief. And as has already been said, the President will veto the TEAM Act and prevent company-dominated unions.

Now in addition to fighting against all of the efforts by those who would undermine our economic progress and the security that it has brought to millions and millions of working men and women, the President is committed to meeting the challenges that confront America.

But again, it is not just the President and Vice President who have to meet those challenges. Every one of us in this great hall has an obligation and responsibility to meet them as well.

In his State of the Union, the President talked about seven challenges. Let me just briefly run through those with you and talk about what he is trying to do and what we and other have to do as well.

The first challenge is to cherish and strengthen our families. There isn't any more important task in any society. [Applause] Now as Morty said, I believe it takes a village to

raise a child. But what I mean by that is the responsibility starts with parents and family members.

But as a mother I know there are many influences outside my home that will affect my daughter. I know that every time she turns on the television set, people whose faces I don't know are affecting what she thinks about. I know when she goes out with her friends that the police officers who guard our streets may make a difference as to whether or not she is safe. I know that when she drinks water from our tap or eats food bought in our supermarkets or breathes our air, she is going to be affected by adults far beyond her own family. When she goes to school, or to church, or in the neighborhood, there are going to be people who will make a difference for positive or negative reasons in the kind of life she has.

So of course the primary responsibility rests with mothers and fathers and family members. But it makes a difference what the rest of us are doing as well.

That's why it is so important to have a President like my husband who understands that you can either support families in today's world or you can make it even tougher for them to balance all of the conflicts between time and money that every single family in America faces. I am very proud that as his first act as President, the President signed the Family and Medical Leave Act, after it had been vetoed by his predecessor.

It also makes a difference whether or not you have a President who on behalf of children will take on the tobacco lobby and say quit advertising cigarettes to children and teenagers. Adults are a different matter, but leave the kids alone. [Applause]

We also know, as so many of you who are involved in the communications industry are more aware of than I, and as Chairman Hunt knows so well, our mass media shapes how our kids think and what they think about. It's kind of hard if you're a working mom or dad to know what your kids are watching on television all the time, isn't it? Even if you're in the same house, it sometimes is impossible to know exactly what they're up to. And if you don't get home until late or you work a swing shift, you may not know at all. That's why the President and Vice President absolutely demanded that when the telecommunications act was passed, it included the V-chip, so that parents will have some control over what happens in their own homes.

We can't wave a magic wand and protect our children from everything. It is something you and I might disagree on: what you would let your child watch and what I would let mine. The important thing is we must do everything we can in today's world to give authority back to mothers and fathers in their own homes.

[Applause]

And this President has fought hard for child support enforcement and for real welfare reform. While the Congress has been arguing, he's been granting waivers to states so that we can get on with the business of trying to reform the welfare system.

The second challenge, though, is how do we renew our schools and throw open the doors of college to every single student willing to work hard and study hard.

Just this past week, the President proposed what he's calling America's Hope Scholarships. Here's how it would work (if the Congress will agree that there is nothing more important than making it possible for every person to go to college, if that's what the person is willing to do): A student is eligible for \$1500 at a community college for a year or \$750 if he or she went part time. If the student maintained a B-average, stayed out of trouble, stayed off of drugs, that student would be eligible for another \$1500. This would mean that the first two years of college would be as available for every American as twelve years of public education. And there are many students who will go to college because of these scholarships who otherwise could not afford to do so.

The President is also still fighting for his \$10,000 tuition tax deduction. This would enable all of you who have tried to save to send your child to college, or yourselves even, to be able to deduct that amount of money from your taxes. We should not be turning the clock back on access to education. We should be fast-forwarding it. It is one of the best investments an individual, a family or a society can make. So stand with the President on behalf of education which will help all of us in the long run.

In part this is because we have to meet the third challenge: to provide economic opportunity and security for all of our working people.

There are several things that a President and Congress can do, but you and I know that much of the work has to be done in the private sector. And the President has been calling on the leaders of American business to share the rewards of increased productivity with their workers. To reward the efforts that have gone into upgrading skills, changing jobs, and being more flexible. Let's start making it clear that when American workers are rewarded...just as Henry Ford knew so many years ago when he paid the unheard-of amount of five dollars an hour to his auto workers. And when he was questioned by business leaders, he said, who do you think is going to buy these cars, if not our workers? It is in America's business leaders' interest to reward work with rising pay checks. That is a message which should go

out loudly and clearly.

But there are some things that the government can do and they my husband believes in doing. One was to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit. To take out from under the tax burdens those individuals who worked forty hours a week and still could not live above the poverty level. That is a very clear way that the President believes we can reward work. And another way we can and we should and it absolutely must be done -- is to raise the minimum wage to a living wage again. [Applause]

As you've already heard and you already know, we were not successful in our efforts to make health security available to every American. But there are things we can do and the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill is one of those. It is sitting in the Congress, it should have been passed months ago, we must continue to work for its passage. It will help millions and millions of American workers

The fourth challenge is to reclaim our communities from criminals, gangs, drugs and violence.

All during the 1980's we heard a lot of tough talk about crime from the other side. And it always seemed to me that the tougher the talk got, the higher the crime rate rose. Finally we have a President who will not only talk the talk on crime, but walk the walk. We're beginning to see results in a decreasing crime rate. [Applause]

The Crime Act was passed, again with very little help from the other side. They didn't think it would matter that we would put 100,000 more police officers on the streets. Well, again, they were wrong. It is making a difference in communities large and small across our country.

They didn't think it would make a difference to pass the Brady Bill. Well, up until now, more than 60,000 felons have been stopped from buying handguns and other weapons because of background checks into their previous history. [Applause] And so far as we know, not a single law-abiding hunter has missed any hunting season that was available to him. It also makes a difference if you take military-style assault weapons off the streets and out of the hands of teenagers who have no business having that kind of firepower. [Applause]

Now the good news is the crime rate is going down. Police are out of their cars, they're walking the streets again. We're seeing the results. The bad news is there's been an increase in violent crime among young people. And so we have to redouble our efforts, both to take the young predators off the streets....The President has called for a concerted national effort with law enforcement from the federal to the local level targeted at gangs.

and at violent young offenders. But anyone who's ever been a police officer or ever worked in any kind of volunteer program knows you also have to give kids who are on the street discipline, some things to say "yes" to, to help structure their time. So everything from trying to provide more curfews in local communities to making it possible for recreation to be available to them is also important in making this fight against crime successful.

Now the next challenge is to protect our environment. We can have both economic growth and environmental protection. It used to be a bipartisan idea that we could grow the economy and clean up our lakes and our rivers and make our air breathable. Well, if you were watching the last session of Congress, you saw lobbyists for polluters being enlisted to write the laws that would repeal a lot of our environmental protection.

There isn't any real choice if we want to preserve the out-of-doors that we love and keep our environment safe for the future than to re-elect the only people committed to that, Bill Clinton and Al Gore. [Applause]

The sixth challenge is to maintain American leadership in the drive for peace and freedom and safety around the world.

Sometimes people ask me, "Why should we be concerned about what happens in some far away place?" And I have three answers for that. First, because we have economic interests. We want to be able to get those people to buy our products. We want to have economic growth in other parts of the world because when we do that, we will create jobs.

But it is also important politically for us to try to keep as much stability in the world as possible because we know how much instability spreads. And we also know how many of our problems are not just confined to our own country. If we expect to fight criminal cartels, drug dealers, the spread of nuclear weapons across national boundaries, we have to be there, we have to be on the job.

And the third reason is because America's leadership depends upon us leading. Of demonstrating day in and day out why we are the undisputed, strongest economic, political and military force in the entire world.

And as long as Bill Clinton is President, we will continue to demonstrate that. We are not going to become isolated, we will show the rest of the world -- whether it's our fleet in the straits of Taiwan, whether it's restoring democracy in Haiti, trying to make peace in Northern Ireland -- that the United States is a force to be reckoned with. That's the kind of country we want to have. [Applause]

The seventh challenge is to make our own democracy work better. We need campaign finance reform. We need to keep making our government more cost-effective and working better.

And maybe above all else, we need your help in ensuring that every single American who is eligible to vote, will vote.

Now I know, as you do, who are out there talking to people, that there are a lot of folks that don't see the connection between elections and their own lives. And that's where we all come in. We have a big job ahead of us. We have to demonstrate to those who are apathetic and even suspicious about politics why it made a difference that you had a President that signed the Family and Medical Leave Act. Or why it's making a difference that you've got new police on our streets. Why you want to have a President who believes in immunizing children and standing up on behalf of labor's hard-fought rights. This is not something that anyone can afford to just sit out this year. This is a turning point election. It will largely determine what our country will be like in the century to come.

Now some of you may recall that I was recently in Bosnia with my daughter. I had gone there to meet with our troops, and also to visit with people who had survived those terrible, terrible years there. I met first with a group of men and women who told me what life had been like. They were still somewhat bewildered because they said, we used to get along pretty well. What happened? All of a sudden there were knocks on the door and neighbors that they used to say hello to and even maybe share a meal with were there with strangers to drag them away from their houses. I talked with wives who hadn't seen their husbands in years and children who hadn't seen either parent. I visited with doctors and nurses who had kept clinics open during terrible bombardment. I met with a teacher who tried teaching those children that would come out and gather together to learn. I saw the pain in their eyes and I heard it in their voices. And they were grateful that under American leadership they were at least being given the chance to have a normal life. And I thought to myself, how we take our blessings for granted. How we [end of tape, section missing]....

....races against one another, men against women, to try to narrow opportunities so the already successful get to have even more and everyone else has to be satisfied with less. A vision that is fundamentally at odds with America and its history and our deepest beliefs. A vision that fuels peoples' fears and rests on a pessimistic view of the future.

In contrast, we have a President and a Vice President who believe in our future and in us. Who want to appeal to what is best in America, not what is worst. Who want to talk about the real issues, not the diversions and the trivial. Who have a

fundamentally optimistic view about what we are capable of doing.

We know what the challenges are and we know that it won't always be easy trying to navigate into the future. But I am absolutely confident that the best bet on America is one that is optimistic and confident and hopeful. That gives us the feeling that we can solve our problems. That we can work together. That is what you do in this union every day. And it is what you will have to do in the months ahead -- to reach out to your own members, and to friends who are not part of this union but share your own background or experience -- to talk about why this election is so critical.

Because when you voted to endorse the President and the Vice President, you voted to endorse that optimistic and positive view of what we can achieve together. We have to remain in solidarity. We have to be committed. But we can do it. And with your help, this President and Vice President will keep doing it in a second term. Thank you all very much. [Applause]

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