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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
TO VALENCIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Orlando, Florida

Q I'm Paul Gianini (phonetic), president of Valencia Community College, and it's my great honor to welcome all of you students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends to be with us this morning.

We also are very proud to have our nation's First Lady in attendance with us this morning. It is, indeed, a great honor that you have bestowed upon us by being here. We extend our warmest greetings to you.

The topic this morning is of extreme importance to all students, but especially those in community colleges. The availability of financial aid is critical to many of our students attending any type of institutions of post-secondary education. Indeed, at this institution over 13,000 students a year receive financial aid. You can see that President Clinton's proposed America's HOPE Scholarship Program will open up an important dialogue about student needs.

The students with us today are representative of the real lives that can be impacted by new financial opportunities. Mrs. Clinton, we again welcome you to Valencia, and I would now turn the forum over to you.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. Well, I am delighted to be here. I am a great fan of community colleges and the work which they are doing around the country. And I'm very excited about the chance to come to this institution, which has quite a reputation. And I was very pleasantly surprised to open the newspaper this morning and see a big article about community colleges that prominently features Valencia, because I hope we can bring more attention to the work of community colleges and to the needs of the students who attend these colleges.

I think that we all know we're living in a changing world -- a world that is quite exciting. My husband calls it the age of possibility, but it is also fraught with many difficult challenges for all of us. And, although we cannot stop the pace of change and we cannot turn the clock back, there are ways each of us can be better prepared to meet these challenges. And education is one of the most critical investments any individual can make, any family can make, and any community, state or nation can make.

We are very committed in our country to making it possible for any person who is willing to work hard and take responsibility for obtaining an education to do so. There should not be financial obstacles to the pursuit of an education by those who are willing to do their part. Just this week the President announced what he's calling America's HOPE Scholarships, which he really believes could transform our economy and the opportunities of millions and millions of Americans by making the 13th and 14th years of education as universally available as the first 12 are.

And it would work like this: Any person, not just young people, but older people as well, who were to choose to attend a community college could apply for one of these scholarships. It would be worth \$1,500 a year, and if a person attended part time it could be worth \$750. And if the individual stayed out of trouble, stayed off drugs, got a B average, there would be another \$1,500

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scholarship the following year. It's meant to encourage and to help support individuals who have already made up their minds to attend school but have a hard time piecing the financial resources together. And it's also intended to recruit others who may not have thought about that as being within their reach.

In addition to these scholarships, which, as the President said would be fully paid for, it would not add to the deficit, there are cuts that would be made in other programs that are not as important as ensuring that education be as universally available as possible. In addition to that, the President has also proposed a \$10,000 tax deduction for the cost of education, vocational training, four-year institutions.

The combination of the HOPE Scholarships and the tax deductions, along with expanded Pell Grants, other kinds of scholarships, merit scholarships for the top five percent of high school graduates, making sure that student loans remain available and at as low an interest rate as possible -- all of that together fulfills what my husband believes is one of the commitments we should have to each other in America, but it's also a very smart investment.

If you look back at what has always enabled our country to be successful at different periods of time, you can see commitments in education. In the middle of the Civil War, President Lincoln and the Congress passed the Land Grant College Act, an amazing commitment. There they were, worried about a war, but they were also thinking about the future. The GI bill, which revolutionized access to higher education.

Well, America's HOPE Scholarships can do the same for community college students. So I am just delighted to be here at an institution that has contributed so much already. But I really wanted to come and listen to the experts, the people who are going to school now, who are making the hard decisions, trying to figure out how to balance work and study and all the other demands that are on their lives, to have a chance to listen and learn about what will work and what your own experiences have been.

And they've all promised me they will talk. (Laughter.) They won't be shy, because I know that sometimes it's a little bit difficult, but just pretend nobody else is here. And we will have a chance then to visit about what's on your minds and what your experiences have been.

So with that, maybe I could ask you to begin.

Q Sure. Well, I believe that this is a very important move. I believe in commitment toward education. I think it's the most important thing we can do for our children as a country -- and for the future of our country, not just for our children, but the country as a whole. I can't stress it enough.

And there's a gap between the people who qualify for financial aid and those who can afford to fund their own college. So this will help fill that gap, I believe.

MRS. CLINTON: What's been your experience? How did you end up being a student here and what kinds of trade-offs and balancing have you had to do?

Q Well, I'm a returning student, obviously. I got married young, had a couple kids, and got divorced later. And it was very hard to fund my way through college. I was working full time and just trying to keep food on the table, basically.

So when I started school I was trying to work full time, go to school full time and -- very tough. But it's important and I

was committed to do it. I dropped back to part time and came and applied for financial aid. And because of the two kids I was able to get some, luckily. And that's basically my story. Actually, I'm looking at this for my children -- (laughter) -- who now I've got to put through college, and I'm hoping that this will help me do that.

MRS. CLINTON: Hazel, what brought you here and how have you managed?

Q Okay. In order -- when I was first graduating from high school the first thing that was on my mind was, I'm definitely going straight into college. The sad thing was that I was always faced with, instead of, "Congratulations, we're proud of you," everyone around me would say, "How are you going to pay for it?" And that, ultimately, did have a damper on my plans.

Luckily, I came to Valencia. I worked my way through. My family had to make a lot of sacrifices in their own goals and their own aspirations in order for me to have a future. So I could safely say that that's how I managed Valencia. I was one of the few lucky ones that their family would put their own lives on line for me.

For the future, this is a wonderful plan. It will completely help everyone in the circle. There's financial aid for those who don't make enough; and then there's -- obviously, now there's going to be help for the people that are in that gray area. And that is great. And soon, hopefully, that question, instead of "How are you going to pay for college?" Well, it should be, "I hope you reach your goals."

MRS. CLINTON: That's a nice way of putting it. But you make a good point, too, because one of the most frustrating experiences for my friends who are administrators or involved in some way with community colleges is to try to figure out where people fit in all of the categories of possible financial aid that's available. And we just heard that actually more money goes out in financial aid from Valencia than tuition comes in.

And so I know there's an enormous effort made to help everybody who can be helped. But there are still people, as you say, who fall into the gray area. They, you know, they either make too much money or their families have too much money, so they don't qualify for some of the loans or scholarships that might be available, but they don't have enough money to manage on their own.

So it's a real Catch-22 for a lot of people who otherwise would be very good students and be committed.

I meant to ask you, what are you studying for?

Q Well, I want to get my bachelors in business administration/finance -- my love is the law. I will probably be 92 by the time I graduate -- (laughter) -- but that's my dream, is to go through law school.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you could be an expert in gerontological law. (Laughter.)

So you would take your two-year degree here and go to a four-year school and then on to law school, if you could get all that together?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: And how about you?

Q I'm looking forward to Florida State in the fall, thank God, to get my bachelors in international business -- probably either that or psychology. Beyond that, my ultimate goal is to be a corporate lawyer, and definitely go to Stetson University here in Florida. And hopefully I'll have enough money to pay that. (Laughter.)

MRS. CLINTON: What brought you to Valencia?

Q What brought me to Valencia? It's right across the street from my house. (Laughter and applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: That's good. Well, you didn't have any transportation costs, then.

Q It's cheap on gas. (Laughter.) I've grown up in this area for the past 17 years. I moved from Puerto Rico and we've been living here. And my brother came to Valencia for a little while. I needed to go to college, because that's my mom's dream for me, to go to college. She never went to college, but she's been pretty successful in her life; and she's always wanted me to go to college.

So right after high school I stopped a semester and then I'm like, well, okay, I'll go to college. And I came here to Valencia. It was great, you know. I didn't have the best grades in school, in high school, because I was a jock and I played, you know, all the sports. And all you needed was a 1.5, so, you know, that's a D average, really. I mean, I didn't have a 1.5, but -- (laughter) -- I was a little bit smarter than that.

I came here to Valencia and started, and then I quit. I didn't want to go to school, I wanted to work, I wanted to see what work was all about. And I worked for a couple of years after I came here for two semesters and I'm, like, I'm working too hard and getting no money. I need to get my education.

So I came back to Valencia and started getting involved. I got involved in student government and other things here on campus. And that brought my grades up and I, you know, accomplished a lot of things here at Valencia. I just recently graduated in April and, you know, it was just amazing. I mean, my mom saw me graduate, you know, from two-year college. And, you know, and in about a year and a half, hopefully, I'll go to UCF in the fall and I'm going to zip through there and graduate from there. And I want to go to law school because my dad is a lawyer in Puerto Rico and he would love that. And just, you know -- money is tight and I'm already, like I say, five grand in the hole because of Stafford loans.

You know, if something was around like this, that would help. That would alleviate some of the cost, because, I mean, I would probably be only about a thousand bucks in the hole because it would total out to about \$3,000. So it would help out. It would be a great thing.

MRS. CLINTON: Do you see any of your friends from high school who have made a different decision and they, you know, haven't gone on with their education?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: Do you all ever talk about? Do they have any idea about what lies ahead for them, compared to what you see?

Q Well, it's sort of funny because I have my good friend, Paul. You know, he was the best dude that I knew. You know, my mom compared me to him when we were in high school, "You need to

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be more like Paul." I'm like, I'm Juan, you know -- I'm a little bigger than Paul. (Laughter.)

And we just kept on going along and now, you know, Paul went to college for a little while and he's working now full time. I thought he would have graduated and been successful -- and he works for a company that he's happy with, but I'm the one getting my education for the future and I'm the one who, you know, who put his value in education and to get my education to become more of a success in life so I wouldn't have to have people helping me out all the time -- so I could help people out.

MRS. CLINTON: That's great. That's a great story. Well, I know that your mom is proud of you.

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: Say hello to her for me. (Laughter.) Sarah, what brought you to Valencia?

Q What brought me to Valencia? I'm a mother of five children, all graduated high school. One's a college graduate from Florida State. And it's always been my resolve to go to college. And I did attend Valencia some years ago -- this campus, as a matter of fact -- but I was working full time. Also, I was divorced and a single parent at the time, so it was very difficult with the hours that I had because the schedules were always changing.

But I was unfortunate enough to be diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and I had to stop working. But as my condition got better, I decided that I wanted to go to school, you know, because I said well, if I go to school I can eventually work my way off of disability, which would be good for me and could bring me more income. But because of the disability I was unable to get financial aid, because it's not taxed.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I want to make sure that people hear that and understand it. I mean, you were on a hundred percent disability?

Q Right.

MRS. CLINTON: Because of your rheumatoid arthritis?

Q Right.

MRS. CLINTON: And because disability -- was that your only income at the time?

Q Along with my husband's, but that's my only income --

MRS. CLINTON: That was your only income.

Q -- was the disability.

MRS. CLINTON: And the disability is not taxed.

Q Is not taxed.

MRS. CLINTON: So that took you over the limit for financial aid.

Q Right. And so, well, you have all this money where you can afford to go to school. I said, well, where is it. But this is why I'm very excited about this proposal from the President, because it could help me. Even more so, it can help my children, my grandchildren. You know, I think it's a very good thing for a bill

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like this to be in place where, when students come out of high school, ones that say, well, I know that my parents can't afford to send me to school, I don't have any money to go to school, they didn't save. I'm not going to get to qualify for financial aid because of the fact that their income may be a little bit over, or whatever.

But they have something to look forward to, to know that two years they can continue. And if you go for the two years, you'll find a way to get through the rest. You know? You know, you'll find a way.

MRS. CLINTON: And what are you studying?

Q I am leaning toward education. I haven't totally made my mind up, but I feel like next to God, or whoever your supreme being is, education is the key.

MRS. CLINTON: I think that's a pretty good thing to believe.

Q I really do.

MRS. CLINTON: Because it really has made a difference in so many people's lives. That would be great. You have a lot of experience with kids, too. (Laughter.)

Brian, how about you?

Q I come from a non-college oriented sort of environment. So when I was growing up my parents never went to school, so they don't really understand the benefits of college. And so they never really saved for it for me.

So I got out of high school, not thinking anything of it, in '91, and I went to work for four years, almost four and a half years. And my salary was going down and I had friends that were, you know, graduating from UCF and such and they were just going places. And I was like, well, geez, I need to do that.

So the first thing I did -- I wanted to go straight to UCF, but I couldn't. So I saved up my own money from working and came here and I just took one class and I, you know, paid cash for my one class and my book and I was astounded at the book prices, too. (Laughter.) But after two semesters, or a semester and a half of paying for it out of my wallet, I applied for the Stafford loan -- and I got turned down for the Pell Grants and stuff because my parents made too much money -- but then I got the Stafford loan.

And now, just like she said, now that I'm in school I don't want to quit. It's kind of like an addiction: You'll do anything you can to get the money. And I'm doing really well as far as -- my GPA is like a 3.6 but, still, I haven't been able to get a scholarship yet. So I have problems understanding that.

But as far as this bill, it's kind of nondiscriminating. I can get it and that would benefit me and my sister, also, who is younger than me, who is going to be coming through, doing the same thing.

MRS. CLINTON: Now that you're in school and doing so well, what are you thinking about for your own future?

Q I'm trying to avoid UCF. I hope there's nobody that's really into UCF here. (Laughter.) I have some problems with that from friends that I know there. But I'm going to be forced to kind of go there because of finances. I've already borrowed money for the community college. I don't want to borrow so much more to go

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out of state or wherever I really want to go. But I want to study botany and maybe specialize in plant pathology. And I think I need a scholarship for that or something to help out with that, because that's really big and I don't want to stay in town for that.

MRS. CLINTON: But that's a really good field. I'm convinced that, you know, learning more and more about plants and particularly their uses in the future is going to be not only academically interesting, but commercially important.

Q Right. Well, right now -- well, the baby boomers, they're the largest segment of the population --

MRS. CLINTON: Now, don't get personal. (Laughter.)

Q By the time I get out of school and maybe after about five years of my experience in the field, that should be at a pinnacle and we're going to need medicines and stuff like that.

MRS. CLINTON: That's right.

Q And, you know, every day we have all the people who are taking the herbal vitamins and such, well --

MRS. CLINTON: I think you're really on to something.

Q Well, I hope so. Thank you.

MRS. CLINTON: Good luck. That's great.

And what brought you here to Valencia?

Q Well, first of all, I am the fifth child out of 10 in my family. And as I graduated from high school I knew money would be a very big issue, because the four ahead of me already were in school or had graduated. And a representative from Valencia West Campus came and talked to me about a scholarship program that they had called Reach's and Bridges to Success, which would pay for your tuition for you if you kept above a 3.0 average.

And so I entered through that program and I had a 3.0. And that covered tuition, but I still had books and transportation and other costs that needed to be paid. And so I had to take out a -- I applied for the Pell Grants and all those things, which my family made too much money for. So I had to take out a Stafford loan, which put me in debt. Now I'm about \$3,000 in debt. And if this program, you know, would have been in place at the time, I would not have been in the debt that I am in now.

And this is the end of my second year. I'm going on to the University of South Florida, so I would have been debt-free going on and starting my debt down there. (Laughter.) So I think that this is a really good program, and it will also benefit my five younger brothers and sisters who are still ahead and growing on up and going through college, as well.

MRS. CLINTON: What are you going to be studying, do you know?

Q Well, I have two majors in mind, which is business administration or education.

MRS. CLINTON: It's a good combination.

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you know, the stories that each of you has just told us really could be repeated millions of times

around the country, because the kind of life situations you've found yourself in and the family financial situation, as well as family expectations -- all of that combined together really does explain many people who are in community colleges now, because of the variety of circumstances.

You know, one of the issues that we're going to have to look toward -- and it was mentioned in this article from the Orlando paper this morning -- is whether or not we're going to be able to keep up with the demand. I mean, suppose we do increase the numbers of people -- and this is really, I think, a question for the President -- we increase the numbers of people who follow the advice of all of our speakers and go back to school, start improving their education. Are we going to be able to keep up with that demand? I mean, is there some problem that we need to plan for in the future?

Q I don't think so, especially if you tie what we're doing to the economic development. If we have a well-educated work force, a better-educated work force than we have today, I know that Central Florida can boom in terms of its offering to industry, business and industry to locate, to grow and to offer high-tech, high-wage jobs. We're primarily a service sector in Central Florida. We live on tourism in the state of Florida; it's our major industry. It would be nice to put more legs on our economic base and draw into this area and be able to say to a company, if you locate here we will provide you with a well-trained, well-educated work force the day you open your doors.

We have done that with the film industry. When MGM and Universal opened their sites in Central Florida, we were fortunate enough to compete successfully at the federal level for some demonstration grants. And by the time they opened their doors, thanks to the work of our staff, there were a cadre of well-trained technicians ready to go. And that industry has boomed here.

It can be the same in other areas. There's also in the state of Florida performance-based funding, which we compete for, in terms of turning out graduates who have significant skills and can get high-wage, high-tech jobs, get them out of just the service sector -- and we need service sector people too -- but also to provide what I would call an opportunity for the future for those who want to seize it.

The vehicle of America's HOPE Scholarship that President Clinton has introduced would -- this would be the catalyst to allow it to happen. And as you heard from these people around the table, this forum this morning, what they're all doing is getting themselves slowly into irreversible debt. And what we need to do is put something in there, put a base -- debt is not all bad. I had it. I'm sure you probably had it, too, when we went through school. But sometimes it's overwhelming.

MRS. CLINTON: Right.

Q And people drop out of school because they can't make their car payments, make their tuition payments and buy those overly priced books. (Laughter.) America's HOPE Scholarship, I think, provides that base that would almost guarantee in this country a universal grade 13 and 14 -- and, you know, sometimes we in the profession don't like to address it that way because it sounds like an appendage to high school -- but it is post-secondary education and it's something we could all benefit from very well.

MRS. CLINTON: Your point about debt is really a significant one because I think most of us -- at least my friends and my husband and I -- had debt when we finished our education. But it wasn't as significant, and the interest rates, at least then, were

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not quite as high, they were somewhat lower. And it took a while to pay it off, but that was doable.

But your point about the kind of debt people have to acquire is, I think, a significant one. I want to ask all of you, I mean, how are you thinking about that? I mean, do you see an interruption in your educations while you work to pay off what you've already incurred, and save money so that then you can go on? Is that how you see it?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: That's why you'll be 92? (Laughter.)

Q That's why I'll be 92; that's how I see it. But I'll do it. Yes, I'll do it.

MRS. CLINTON: Right.

Q But it would be nice if I didn't have to.

MRS. CLINTON: I mean, I think that, you know, some debt is probably inevitable, a good thing, keeps you honest, keeps you going, you know, makes it clear that this is really important to you. But I think the other side of it is that if it gets to be too much, then it does --

Q It's overwhelming.

MRS. CLINTON: It does. Hazel, how are you handling it?

Q At first, when I didn't -- I knew my plans, and I didn't know how I was going to pay for it. And at first, you know, I looked at it this way: It was an investment in my own future, no one else is going to take that investment in myself, so I might as well do it for myself.

What I didn't -- when I thought I couldn't apply for financial aid because I got denied I said to myself, well, the next best thing -- the worst thing that could happen is I'll go to a bank, get a loan on my life and -- (laughter) -- you know, law school is very expensive, you're looking at \$30,000, \$40,000 for three years.

At first I said, oh my God, that's so overwhelming, how am I going to pay for it? And that does have an impact on your studies, it does have an impact on your hopes and dreams. Now that I look at it and I sit back and look at the whole scheme of things, I see it as it pushes me to do the grades; it pushes me to do a little harder, to do -- instead of go halfway, go the full nine yards.

If I don't do that then the future for myself and whether I have a diploma or not is not going to be good. If I don't work harder to pay off that debt in the future, then I'll be poor without a diploma and still with this debt, so -- (laughter.) So that's -- it goes both ways. It's very stressful, it's very frustrating when only a few people have supported you and the only thing you're looking forward to is paying it yourself.

It is frustrating. And I could tell you, it's hard. You know, it's hard to work 40 hours, which I've done, and I'm sure a lot of students do -- work 40 hours, put another 24 hours in school, and you have family, and you have your sanity to keep under control. That's all hard, but I think in the long run it pays off. I mean, there's so many gray areas with financial aid. There's so many slots where you just slide right through and you're at the bottom and you don't know where to go. So that's definitely something to think about.

There are some students who -- their parents have financially -- they're okay, but they won't get that money to pay for college, so they're standing on their own. And if the people with financial aid in all those programs out there will look at the fact that students are -- have multiple responsibilities. Yes, you do have this income, but, yes, I have five kids. There's five members in my family. They have other worries. They have to put food on the table. That amount starts decreasing rapidly. So if they would look at the whole picture, not just the individual asking for money for school, I think that would be more of an asset as well as the program.

MRS. CLINTON: I think that's a good point. Sometimes, you know, because of your family income you're denied financial aid, but it's really not income that's accessible to the student. So, you know, really to be somehow given credit for that doesn't reflect the true picture.

Q And not all students are 4.0 students. Not all students -- I mean, it would be great. I'm working at that, but I'm a -- I have a 3.0, and that's not going to really guarantee all the scholarships that are out there. Everybody says to me, well, apply for a scholarship. Well, I don't have a 4.0, but why can't I move on to a higher education? Why does that have to -- I mean, you know, I'm trying my hardest. Why does that have to hold me back from getting a diploma, being someone? So that's another thing that has to be looked at.

Q I think it's actually harder, too, for people who are operating under the strain of trying to put themselves through college to maintain a 4.0. I mean, that was my goal coming in --

Q Was. (Laughter.)

Q Was -- (laughter) -- but it's very difficult. And just the time trying ferret out scholarships, it's not as easy as some might make it sound. With a 3.75 -- I've got a 3.75, and it's hard to fit into the slot to get the scholarships.

Q Yes, so it's not as easy. Even if you have a 3.0, I think you should still deserve the opportunity to move on. I don't think people should cut your dreams that short. I think there's a lot of great people out there that academically they don't have a 4.0 but in other areas of life they could contribute a whole lot to society. And you're cutting out a lot of people that way if we're just looking at that certain criteria. I think there's more to life -- of course books -- and education, but the ability to do everything else along with that goes hand in hand. And cutting everybody's goals a little bit short just because you don't have academically that is sad in itself.

MRS. CLINTON: I agree with that. You know, I think if you live long enough, you realize that, you know, there are many other kinds of attributes that people should be encouraged to have. And the 4.0 may or may not be a predictor of either your contributions to society or the kind of person you are.

Juan, what about you and your debt? I know you mentioned that you had it. How are you going to handle that? Are you going to be --

Q I don't think about it right now. (Laughter.) I mean, I'll think about it when it's time to pay it. I quit school for two years, and I -- that's my investment in my future. And I'm not going to worry about that debt until I have to pay it. And then I'll worry about it and it will be a big worry. I don't know how I'm going to pay it. Hopefully I'll have a good job and do whatever, but -- you know, if it wasn't for Valencia, I really wouldn't be in

school. And I wouldn't graduated in two years, because out of all the institutions around the area, Valencia is -- has the greatest education at the best price. I'm not going to go around looking for schools that are cheap and don't have a good education. This is the best education in central Florida and the lowest price.

MRS. CLINTON: While you've been here, have you also gotten advice and help from people on the faculty and in the administration?

Q No. (Laughter.) They're no help. (Laughter.) I was the student government president last year, and from that, Dr. Stone, I mean, Mr. Castellano, everybody in here -- I guess everybody knows who I am. I'm the big BMOC, the big man on campus. Everybody saw me around. (Laughter.) You know, and everybody is helpful. I mean, you could walk up to any administrator and any faculty and just talk to them. They'll help you out in any -- I mean, it could be personal or it could be school. They're willing to help here. I mean, that's the greatest thing about Valencia -- everybody is willing to help everybody else.

Q And that cuts off when you get the universities, sadly enough.

MRS. CLINTON: You think what, Brian?

Q When you get to the universities, from what I know, the personal level just gets cut off. So --

MRS. CLINTON: That's one of the reasons why I was asking Juan because I think that's another misconception. A lot of people who don't have firsthand experience with community colleges, I think sometimes have the view that they are kind of impersonal. You know, they're just moving people through for two years, letting them get their associate degrees and then either enter the job market, onto additional education, or whatever.

Q The opposite.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. And it's been my experience that there's a real commitment on the part of community college teachers and administrators to their students' success in a way that may or may not be present at the university level.

Do you have personal experience with that or --

Q Well, again, from the UCF thing -- I hope there's nobody here from UCF -- but the teachers, from what I have known -- and I've met a few of them, because I have some very close friends that go there and see the professors with them sometimes -- they're very blank-faced, very just to the point. If you've got to come see me, come see me between 1:05 and 1:08 and don't be late. And it's to the point. And that's not the way, especially with trying to study and go to school -- I mean, trying to go to school and work, everything else like that. If you need help with something, that's not the kind of treatment that you need. And at the two-year colleges, it's so much better. And if somebody could use this bill to get them into this and see what college really can be like before the -- instead of just going to a four-year without knowing what's going on, you know, they could have a whole different outlook on what school is all about.

And I have friends that have witnessed that. They go straight to UCF or they've gone straight to FIU or Miami, anything like that, and they're just -- they have such a low --

Q They're not ready for it.

Q Yes, they're just not ready for it and they have a low outlook on what school is. They hate their classes. They hate

their teachers. And here -- I wake up in the morning early and I'm ready to go. So --

Q I wouldn't go that far. (Laughter.)

Q (Inaudible.)

Q I think the best thing here is the relationship that you build -- it's like you start out this relationship as teacher-student, but by the end it's just a friendship. I mean, it's -- there's a camaraderie, a love.

Q Yes, the teachers are willing to talk to you. When I graduated from high school, I was not the most studious person in the world. And I really -- honestly, my GPA was so low that I couldn't get into one of the universities. And I looked to Valencia and I completely -- this place gave me the opportunity to grow as a person, not only academically but mentally. Any other way -- emotionally. This place gave me the opportunity, said okay we're giving you a clean slate, whether you were academic or not before, we're giving you right here. Do what you can. This is what you're being given. And I got the opportunity, and with the help of many administrators, faculty members, I completely changed around.

I'm now accomplishing something that I never accomplished before. I let go of some of the fears that I had in high school. And I learned a lot of things that I was able to do and never knew I could do. And this place right here made me -- gave me that foundation. And I could safely say that I am not afraid to go on to Florida State. I will not be afraid. I would have been afraid if I would have gone out of high school. Frankly, I don't think I would have gotten that far.

But this community college in itself does give you kind of, okay, you are able to do this: You could be social. You could contribute. You could -- you have talents. They're inside, you just have to find them somehow and use that and roll with that. And Valencia Community College definitely gave me that opportunity from public speaking, which I was never able to do. And going for jobs and things that I would have never been able to do, the old self. So definitely community colleges change your life completely, completely.

Q Mrs. Clinton, we'd certainly like to go on, especially -- and I love this part of it because -- (laughter) -- my evaluation is next week. (Laughter.) But unfortunately, it's nearly time for you to leave us. And this has been a very informative and interesting conversation. And I think we've learned a lot through the personal experiences of these students. We're very encouraged by President Clinton's America's HOPE scholarship. And I think you can realize that we stand ready to serve, to assist this program in its development in any way that is deemed appropriate. And we would like to thank you for being with us today. It has been an honor and a privilege. We are truly flattered. And we thank you.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you all very much. And I want to wish each of you continued success and hope that you're able to continue along the lines you've outlined. It's very exciting to hear the stories and the testimonials that you've given to this experience. And I just want to heartily endorse that. It makes a big difference.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

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