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**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
TO THE ASSOCIATION OF JUNIOR LEAGUES
THE WHITE HOUSE**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much, Nancy. I am so pleased to be here with all of you who are the leaders of the Leagues around, not only our country but, I understand, three other countries. And I owe a great debt of gratitude to the League, both in its corporate capacity through the years, and individually to many members because of the work that the League has done.

It is very important, as you know, that the League continue to speak out on this concept of community that Nancy referred to. To try to bring to life some of the issues that you know because of your work affect the lives of children and families everywhere you live. To put a human face on the political debates. To make sure that all of our citizens know what is at stake.

As Nancy referred to the book that I've written, there are two things that I think as a matter of full disclosure should be mentioned. One is that I talk in the book about the Lynn County Child Care Center which happens to be in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which happens to be where Nancy is from, as an example of a public/private partnership principally relying on subsidizing child care for working parents, young parents who need to try to get their education, women who have been divorced and don't have adequate child support who need to work and can't manage good child care at the same time. I could have listed hundreds of good facilities around the country but only had room for one, and I had recently visited that center, so I wanted to include it.

The other is that, at the beginning of one of the chapters on health care, I talk about having attended, around 20 years ago now, a Junior League meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas. And, at the meeting, a woman name Betty Lowe--who was then a pediatrician on the staff of the Children's Hospital--and I were talking about child advocacy, which the League was getting into and very concerned about. And I write about how struck I was at the end of our presentations when one of the League members in attendance asked Dr. Lowe what, if she could do anything, she would do in order to make sure children in our country were healthy. And I didn't know what to expect, but what I heard was not what I expected, when she said "I'd make sure that they had good food

expected, when she said "I'd make sure that they had good food and they had exercise and they had clean water and they lived in places that valued them, and their parents were supported so that they could do what needed to be done for their children." And she went on to talk about how so many of the problems children face are because adults have failed to do what we need to do on behalf of our children.

And that was as good an explanation of what advocacy meant as any that I had heard. And so for many years afterwards I worked often with League members both in my own state and around the country. And I come today in part to thank all of you for your commitment to children and to our communities.

I think it's important as we look toward the future to realize that we have many challenges. Some of them appear at times to be quite daunting. But part of the reason I wrote this book is because I honestly believe that we know what we need to do. And that there are solutions to all of these problems that we worry about. That right now somewhere in America and in the other countries represented, parents are learning how to be better parents, doctors and nurses are reaching out to care for children who would otherwise go without care, teachers are adjusting how they teach to deal with the problems children bring with them into schools, communities are providing recreational facilities and trying to provide some kind of support for teenagers so they just don't wander aimlessly through malls and video arcades.

We can look and see so many efforts now under way that are bearing fruit. But one of the great frustrations that I see, sitting where I am today, is that many of these solutions and ideas are not linked up together. We don't learn well from each other. We keep repeating the same efforts. We don't move beyond and understand that what worked in Cleveland or in Denver could work in Dallas or in New York. And we have to do more to bring together the state of our knowledge about how to strengthen and support families. We also have to communicate that more effectively to families themselves.

One of the great issues that we will confront in the coming years is how, in the blizzard of information that we are now deluged by, any of us will make sense out of what we hear and see and put it to use in our own lives and communities. I think about that a lot because, I often do little tests of my own to sort of check and see what the state of knowledge about something as simple as talking to a child on the first years of life might be. I started doing this about 15 or 16 years ago when, during a campaign day with my husband, and I guess it was probably 1982 because Chelsea was about two, we were in a community and walking up and down the streets visiting with people. And I went up to a group of women who had a lot of little children, some in their

arms, some hanging onto their legs. And I started talking with them, and I said to one of them, "You must be having a great time talking with your daughter." And she gave me this totally blank stare. And she said, "Why would I talk to her? She can't talk back."

I now say that to nearly everybody I see with a child in a situation, whether it's on a campaign trail or in a supermarket aisle or wherever I might be, because I'm constantly surprised how many parents who want to be good parents don't know something as simple as what it takes to build a vocabulary that will enable a child to be successful in school.

So many of them also don't know what it means to read to a child or they might be embarrassed because they don't read well. And when I think about the endless times that I've read the same books that you've read to your children, so that you could recite them by heart, and then you try to skip a page or a paragraph, and "no mummy, no mummy, back there." And I see the results in my own child's life and in the lives of the children of my friends that they know words. They know how to speak. They know how to read. They may not read as much as I would want them to read, but at least they read their computer screens, so they are reading something. And there are so many children whose parents still don't know that is essential.

In the book I talk about an incredible study that I came across last year called "Meaningful Differences," where some researchers at the University of Kansas went into homes of different educational and economic backgrounds. But, all kinds of dysfunction was screened out, so you didn't have parents who had problems with alcohol or depression or any of those difficulties. You had stable parents trying to do the best they could, living on welfare, living on very low wages from jobs that didn't pay much, and then you had parents who were well-educated and well-remunerated for the work that they did. The researchers went into these homes once a month and watched and recorded every word that was said. And it wouldn't surprise you, I'm sure, that the number of words was so much greater in the homes of the more educated, more affluent parents. Even where both parents, mother and father, worked, the number of words was so much greater in comparison to the next level of education and income and in comparison to those who were on welfare.

In addition to the words themselves, though, the positive, affirming messages that the children heard were also much greater the higher the level of education and income. There were lots of "Good girl," or "That's a boy," or "Oh, I'm so proud of you, look what you've done today." When you dropped down--again these are solid, stable families, parents who want their children to succeed--in the next level of income and education you had far more words of prohibition and negative messages. "Don't do

that," "Stay out of there," "Don't get into that," "Come on, come sit down." Lots of messages of stopping, boundaries. Much fewer messages of affirmation.

And then when we got into the actual interactions going on between mostly mothers and children in homes that were on welfare, again the number of words was much lower, but the number of positive messages was dramatically lower. These parents saw the world as quite threatening to themselves and their children, so they were constantly trying to reign their children in, to tell them not to do things: "Don't do that," "Get away from there," "Come sit down." All of those messages which not only sent the words to the child, but sent the signal as well that the world was not a very open place to be explored, to deal with in a curious way that we want our children to learn.

And the researchers concluded, and I think absolutely on target, that when they followed these children into school, into elementary school because this study went on for a number of years, you could track the vocabulary richness, the openness to learning, from those first years and see the relationship between how a child was talked to and what the nature of the words happened to be.

Now just think, if we could, knowing what we now know, knowing what all of us in this room try to do with our own children and the children that we care about. I have a nephew staying with me now, and the poor child is just overwhelmed by affirmation and positive words. You know, he's only six months old. And sometimes I look at him and I have this feeling he's saying, "Leave me alone, enough is enough." But just think of what we could do if somehow we could empower and educate every parent to do what so many of us do as a matter of course.

That's a simple example, but it's an example that I wanted to share with you because it clearly points out that if we do not help parents and families with better information, with the kind of home visiting programs that I know a number of Leagues have been involved in, if we don't use our media to deliver positive messages about how to parent and the kinds of simple lessons that anyone can learn and apply, we will continue to have many children doing very well because from the very beginning they are given the tools and skills that they will need in this new world, and we will see many others, from families of good, decent, hard-working people, just fall further and further behind because they can't manipulate the tools that are necessary for success in the Information Age which are primarily symbolic, linguistic, logical kinds of skills.

So, when I think about what the League has done over the years that I have been knowledgeable about the League's work, I'm encouraged because on the local level so much of what you have

done has made a difference. But I'm also discouraged because, as with the League's work and with the work of so many other advocacy groups, we have not yet reached a critical mass of being able to demonstrate convincingly to people what we need to do in all of our communities at the family level, the neighborhood level, the school level, and on up through every institution.

Raising healthy, happy, and productive children begins at home. But it does not end there. We all know that our children are not raised in a vacuum. We also know that many of us need hands-on instruction. Even if we've read all the books, we lots of times don't know what to do when it comes to actually applying that information.

I tell in the book the sort of embarrassing story of trying to learn how to breast-feed Chelsea. And I had read the books. I had watched my friends. I thought this was easy, you know? So there I was, the day after she was born in the hospital, trying to do what I thought should be just a snap according to what I had heard about, and all of a sudden the child starts foaming from the nose. I thought she'd gone into convulsions. I thought I'm a failure already, I've only been a mother 24 hours. I start banging all the buzzers. The nurses come running.

And I'll never forget the expression on this one nurse who got their first. She sort of just stands at the side of the bed. And I'm saying, "What's happening? Help me, help me!" And she goes "Well, it would help if you lifted her head up a little bit." I had her at one of those odd angle so that, you know, the milk was going in and then coming back out. And I thought to myself, "I need help, this is not easy." And I think that for many of us, even those of us who have a lot of blessings in our lives, it isn't easy. But then think about so many others in the larger community and the challenges they face in raising their children. There are many ways that we can help all communities do better by their children.

If I could ask anything for our children today, it would be that we begin to try to strengthen and educate not only parents, but we also assign more accountability to the rest of us, as well. I would ask that any teacher not ever think of any child as being dumb, but instead try to figure out what is necessary to enable that child's intelligence to flourish and to recognize there are many different kinds of intelligence and that we too often narrowly define intelligence and try to quantify it in some kind of IQ test, thereby overlooking children who have visual and artistic skills, even kinesthetic skills that enable them to share their talents with the world.

I would ask that doctors and nurses and health care providers and insurance companies be sure that we really try to make it possible for every family to have the health care that is

needed. I know that is controversial but, I have to tell you that, from my travelling around and visiting so many parents, in such difficult situations with sick children, I know that, there but for the grace of God, go any of the rest of us.

And when Christopher Reeve is going to hit his insurance limit, and when I sat just two weeks ago in the Boston's Children's Hospital with a very well-insured family whose eight-month-old daughter has had eight operations and they're about to hit their million dollar limit, I know that this could happen to anyone--to me, to you, to people we love. And I also know that we now have more than 40 million Americans without insurance. And many of them, more than 10 million, are children.

I would also ask that those who control our media and our entertainment channels, particularly television, think harder about what we are doing to our children, and not continue to hide behind the First Amendment. But instead to say, "We are damaging children. There is more evidence than we can possibly ignore." And we know that it's not just the content, there's been a lot of talk about the content of television particularly, as well as movies and music and video games. And I am very concerned about that and I wish that broadcasters and programmers would not put anything on the air they didn't want their own children to watch or their own grandchildren to watch. But it's also the process of television watching that we need to be paying more attention to.

I am convinced that many of the problems our children have with learning, with postponing gratification, stem from being involved with the television from the very earliest stages of their lives. Think about what it means for a two-year-old to control a remote control device. I mean, that is something that has never happened in the history of humankind. Children had to learn little tasks as part of their development, whether it was learning to tie a shoelace, which I'm totally in favor of, instead of just giving them velcro, because I think that the manual dexterity makes a difference.

That was one of my big problems with my mother-in-law who thought I was crazy about this. A wonderful woman who knew that I had this pet theory that Chelsea needed to learn how to tie her shoelaces because I really did think the effort was something children don't have enough of today and that she needed that frustration and the impatience and having to keep trying over and over again, instead of being handed velcro or being handed a remote control so that nothing had to be worked for. So my mother-in-law goes out and buys her a pair of velcro shoes because, as she said, "She needs to have fun." And I said, "Well, I know that but I want to see the look on her face when she achieves this." And that's one of the things that I don't think we give our small children enough of--feelings of

achievement. And one of the reasons is because of the omnipresence of television.

The process of television watching has changed not just what children think about, has not just created desensitization to violence, has not just given them the idea that dysfunctional families are the norm, but it has changed the way they think. Talk to any veteran teacher, and I'm sure there are some in this room, but not many who taught for 30 or 40 years because of your age, but I talked to teachers who taught for 30 or 40 years and they tell me about how different it is to stand in front of a class of kids from the same socioeconomic background that they have always taught, but to know that they are being tuned out, that the channel is being mentally switched on them, that the work it takes to learn how to do things well is not something they're willing to invest in anymore.

I would ask, too, that we do more through our religious community to reach out to encourage the innate spirituality that our children have, but also to do more mission work here at home. There is much we could do in many of our neighborhoods through religious institutions that is not being done now. And many churches and synagogues and other institutions could stay open longer, the facilities are there, they could provide a safe haven for our children.

I also think employers have to recognize that every business is a family business. When an employee is laid off a family is laid off. When an employee is not given time off to go to a parent-teacher conference, a child is left to believe that he's not as important as he should be. There are so many companies now that have done exciting things to make their businesses more family friendly, and I would like to see that adopted more widely so that we have more leave programs in addition to the family medical leave which has made such a difference in so many Americans' lives.

I also think certain industries have a special obligation. It is absolutely imperative that the tobacco industry quit marketing tobacco products to children and do so as soon as possible. It is very discouraging that Joe Camel is more recognizable in many neighborhoods than Mickey Mouse. And that's because there has been a deliberate, concerted effort going back years to figure out how to addict children to tobacco products. We know that that is something that is not good for children and should be stopped.

I would also ask everyone who's in public life at whatever level to think about the decisions they make as parents as well as public servants. I know that you have reviewed the state legislators' survey about how they view child advocates. I thought that was kind of discouraging when I read it, not

surprising, that so many of the state legislators interviewed don't see children's issues as a priority and don't really see those who advocate on behalf of children, from the League and from other organizations, as being very influential.

Whether or not our advocacy is influential, the issues should be of the highest priority. And every person in any decision-making position should be asking themselves, "What am I doing to advance the cause of children? Or what might I be doing that could undermine their future?" Voting against regulating pollution or voting against standards for keeping our meat and food safe is not good for children. Voting against preschool programs like Head Start or voting against funding proven programs like the school lunch program that started after World War II because there were so many people being inducted into the military who had such terrible nutritional deficiencies. All of these are part of what it takes to build a strong community for children.

I hope that each of us, as we look toward the future, realizes that, whether or not we are parents, we have responsibilities for children. Parents have the primary responsibility--there will never be a greater influence in a child's life than a parent. But parents can not do it alone, they never have. It takes a village, it takes a community, it takes a nation committed to making sure families can be responsible for their children.

And I hope that the work that the League has done and continues to do will be even more significant as we try to get adults to pay attention to what our children need. There's no way any of us can escape this responsibility, we live with the results of our neglect, and I believe that if we build our futures with children's needs in mind, whether it's in the family or in the larger community, we help ourselves. This is not only for the sake of our children, it is for our own sake.

And I'm actually, despite a lot of the headlines of the moment, optimistic because I sense a growing appreciation of our interdependence and that we all recognize, as I say in the first line of my book, that children are not rugged individuals. And they depend upon adults they know and will never know, and that we should be a nation that not only talks about family values, but values families. And that's what the League has tried to do. Thank you all very much.

NANCY EVANS: Mrs. Clinton has agreed to take a few questions, so, if you're by one of those mikes and can wave to me, how about right here? Thank you.

Q: My name is Mona Steele and I am the state public affairs committee chair of the Junior League of Wisconsin. And my

question for you is, given your experience in the public eye, what advice would you have for women who are taking on a career in public life, or a career which puts them in the public eye?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, the first thing I'd say probably is the advice that Eleanor Roosevelt gave, which is to grow skin as thick as a rhinoceros. It's not very attractive but it does help.

I actually have gone back and read a lot of the advice that women like Eleanor Roosevelt have given to women and it sounds strikingly familiar. There are so many of the same challenges and obstacles that women face today that we have always faced in the past. And I think, more than anything, I would urge any woman who is going to get into the public arena, either seeking office or being actively involved on behalf of someone else, in today's political climate, to take criticism seriously but not personally, to believe in what you're doing and the kind of person you are, to refuse to permit other people to define who you are and what you should or should not do.

I have another favorite Eleanor Roosevelt quote--you can tell I've spent a lot of time with Eleanor Roosevelt writings. I said a few years ago when I was at a benefit to raise money for a statue of Mrs. Roosevelt in New York which I'm delighted is going to be, I think, installed within the next year, I just jokingly said, you know I have these running dialogues with Mrs. Roosevelt where I will kind of roll my eyes and say, "Well, what now?" And then some passage from one of her writings will come back and it will be something like, "Well you know, a woman is like a tea bag. When you put her in hot water she gets stronger." You know, things like that. Well, I sort of made that point and the next thing you know I was being attacked for having delusional conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt. So, I can only tell you that she's been a great source of advice and comfort to me.

And I suppose the final thing that I would say about this is that it is not pleasant nor easy in today's political environment to be involved, particularly if you are the target of some of the political attacks that go on. But there's something about the ferocity of the attacks which suggests to me that we're playing for very important stakes in our democracy right now. We are really trying to figure out what we should do as a nation, how we should define ourselves, and there are very serious differences. And, if we kind of dismiss the extremists of all sides and look at the debate that is carried on between people who are acting in good faith but just have very different points of view, then I think you get a sense of why it's important to stay involved even when it is not, often, personally easy to do so. So I would urge as many of you as possible to think seriously about, not only elective office--there are many other ways to serve--but going ahead and getting involved and trying to hammer out differences.

There was a recent experiment a few weeks ago down in Austin, Texas, where a randomly selected group of Americans came together to work on a lot of these issues to decide where they would come out. And in an atmosphere of mutual discussion, freed of, you know, television attacks and the soundbites and the screaming that goes on on these TV shows and all of the stuff that we otherwise see, people who came from very different political points on the spectrum found common ground. Because they were able to work through problems without being barraged by the media coverage and the personality contests and all that we have to put up with otherwise. Which makes me believe that if enough people can just work hard and concentrate on these problems and not let the atmospherics interfere, we can really make a lot of progress in the next several years. So, despite the challenges I would hope that many of you, as I know Nancy has, being recently elected, I hope many of you would look for opportunities to serve.

NANCY EVANS: A question over here.

Q: Good afternoon, Mrs. Clinton. I'm Mary Beth Essa from the Junior League of London, England, and I had the pleasure of meeting you while you were in our country in November and it's great to see you here today. My question for you is, given your vision of society, and given the vision of Junior Leagues and the mission of our Leagues, if you were to mentor young people today, what skills and ideas would you encourage in them in order for them to become leaders that can build communities and embrace diverse perspectives?

MRS. CLINTON: That's also a very good question because I'm actually quite concerned about young people in the United States. I don't have any information about young people in England or in Canada or in Mexico--I think, though, that some of the same may, may hold. We now know that a lot of our young people have very little trust in any institution, starting with their own families, because so many of them have had to deal with divorce or other difficulties. They are quite discouraged about their own futures. They feel somewhat besieged by what they view as the economic challenges they're going to face. So, one of the first things I think we're going to have to do, starting in our families, is to restore a sense of stability and trust for children and young people so that they feel comfortable participating with people unlike themselves and that they are willing to work together to solve common problems.

Of course it's not universal--there are many exceptions to this rule--but there's been a lot of very troubling research in the past couple of years which has demonstrated this tendency for us to withdraw from one another in the simple things--that we don't gather together so often and so our children don't see us interacting with other people. We're more likely, instead of

going out to entertainment together, to have the video inside our own house. We're less likely to gather on the porch and get to know each other and, for better or worse, have some judgements about our neighbors so that kids can learn how to judge real people instead of the caricatures on television. There's a famous work that was written by a very knowledgeable social scientist in which he says that we don't bowl together, there's actually more bowling going on in the United States, but not in leagues. People do things alone. So, our children are getting the feeling that it's really every person for himself and that there's really very little common involvement anymore.

So, I think that one of the first things is that we've got to re-establish a sense of community, and there are some, maybe hokey, things that I believe we should try to do, whether it's, you know, neighborhood potlucks, or more community service efforts where our children are involved alongside of us with other people--but certainly I would urge us to do more of that.

With respect to our children and our young people themselves, I think that we have to give them the feeling that they make a difference, that they are important, that they have a reason to hope for the future. And that again means that all the rest of us need to be more sensitive to what the needs of our fellow human beings are. If your father, for example, has worked for the same company for 30 years, has gotten up early every morning, has showed up, has never been in trouble, and then all of a sudden one day, he's handed a pink slip, and told "don't come back"--that's new in the way that we treat each other. That is something that didn't happen a generation ago. People went to work and thought they could work for the same company until they retired, and one salary could support a family. Now, it's just this constant, hectic rush for people to try to stay one step ahead of their economic problems. So, I think trying to slow our lives down, trying to be more sensitive--those who are in decision-makers positions--as to what they're doing that effects families and children would send more messages to kids than anything we could tell them directly.

I don't know if any of you have read some of the work of Uri Bronfenbrenner who is a wonderful psychologist who has studied children in their environments for many years, not only here but around the world. And he says that, you know, our modern society is so fast-paced that children never get a chance to really feel they belong anywhere. And no matter how hard we try in our own families, so many of the other messages run counter to that. And he quotes another psychologist who says that sometimes it appears that American children are being raised in cars, because, you know, we put them in there, we get them to day care, we put their clothes on half the time, we feed them in cars, there's this constant motion. So, I would hope that we would do more to build the trust and confidence and hope of children, that we would then

hold them responsible for doing what they need to do in school, that we would turn off the television and spend more time with them, that we would find worthwhile projects--particularly service projects--for them to be involved in to help their communities, and to begin to rebuild this sense of common ground that any democracy, whether it's here or in England, needs to be able to survive.

Q: . . . And I thank you for the work you're doing to publicize what I agree: that "it takes a village to raise a child." I've only begun your book, but already on page 8, for personal reasons, you brought tears to my eyes with when you quoted Elizabeth Stone, who said that "A decision to have a child is one to decide forever to have your heart walking around outside your body." I loved that.

A number of us have discussed an increasing concern among volunteers that more and more is being requested and expected of the independent sector. I'd love to hear your opinion on the balance between public and private, and the role of the volunteer, and the potential for organizations like the Junior League.

MRS. CLINTON: I think that's also a really timely question because we're certainly looking at the possibility of quite drastic cuts in many government programs that have helped to provide the safety net, particularly for children and other vulnerable members of our society. And, I know that there isn't any country, anywhere in the world, that has a more active volunteer sector than we do. The money we give in charitable contributions, the hours we give in helping other people, is just unparalleled anywhere, in human history or anywhere else. But I don't think there's any way to make up the difference, and that's what concerns me.

Let me just give you a few quick examples. I recently hosted a large gathering of people who are big givers to children's hospitals, and I'm giving all of my personal proceeds from this book to children's hospitals because I'm a longtime supporter of the work that they do. And I brought together about, oh I guess, maybe, six or seven hundred of the biggest givers--you've had to have given 10 thousand dollars or more to a children's hospital to come to this because we're trying to increase the amount of private giving to children's hospitals. And, in my conversations with these people who are very sophisticated, many of them leaders in their fields, I said, "You know, I think it's wonderful what you're doing, but I want to explain to you that, in children's hospitals, the average is that 46 cents out of every dollar that supports a children's hospital comes from Medicaid, which is many billions of dollars."

There's no way for the private sector, through charitable giving, to make up the cuts in Medicaid, which means to me that we will see services cut in children's hospitals and then we'll see a kind of ripple effect that goes out into the rest of the health care system. Many of those people had not really understood the connection between Medicaid, which they thought of as taking care of poor children on welfare, and didn't really understand that, not only does it do that, but it also helps provide needed medical care for many people who have higher incomes but whose medical bills for their children are astronomical. And so they didn't really make the connection before, but once they heard about it, I think it was a very sobering fact, because they want to do more themselves but they can't really make up the difference.

That's on the money side. On the volunteer hour's side, one of our real challenges, and I've seen this as I've visited social service agencies around the country, is that we're kind of in a, I hope, we're in a turnaround period, but we have a backlog of a lot of problems. We have many, many children who are being abused at a higher rate--the fastest growing number of children who are being abused are under four, and the fastest number in that group are children under one. We have a lot of backlog problems with our foster care system. We have many children in need of tutoring and mentoring because the schools can not give them all of the help that they need. We have many young men and women who are desperate for some one-on-one contact with some adults who care about them. And then we have all of the services needed for adults, whether it's "meals on wheels" for the shut-ins, whether it's ministering to people who have serious diseases that need some kind of volunteer help, on and on.

I think volunteers are essential, but if they are not organized and leveraged by paid, professional people, we don't get the kind of service we need from them. There has to be an infrastructure in place for me as a volunteer or you to fit into. And what is in danger of being cut, in addition to the direct funds for the services, is the capacity to really well use volunteers. So it's a very troubling phenomenon to me, and I hope that we won't go so far that we create more problems than we solve. I think there has to be a federal safety net. It should not matter whether you are born in New York or Massachusetts or California what services you and your children are entitled to as an American. And that's my principle worry right now: that we have to keep that safety net, not only the dollars, but the infrastructure, so that we can well use all of the many volunteers that we have.

NANCY EVANS: I'm sorry. We can only take one more question.

Q: Thank you. Good afternoon, Mrs. Clinton. My name is

Beth Simons. I'm the president-elect of the Junior League of Buffalo, and I'm sure I speak for everyone in the room that we really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today. My question is that I was privileged to be part of a group of association members that attended the National Women's Conference in Beijing. And I would be curious to know what your observations are on the commonalities that we have with women worldwide, and how we can collectively work together to develop a shared vision for building a global community.

MRS. CLINTON: I hope that you all will think about this too because I think that's a wonderful question, because, I do believe that there are ways that we can work together more than we have, and learn from each other. The travelling that I have done, including the trip to Beijing in the last year, has really opened my eyes. I had not really travelled a lot before Bill was elected President. And so, being able to go to South Asia, being able to go to China and Mongolia, being able to go to South America, European countries, Canada, has been a real eye-opener. And I have spent most of my time in those countries talking with women, looking at projects that women are doing, talking about children, and I come away with two very strong feelings.

The first is how blessed we are. I just cannot stress that too much. You know, when I took Chelsea to South Asia on that marvelous trip we had, I wished I could have taken every American teenager. I wish I could have just brought them all along so that they could have, not only seen the richness of the culture that we were able to see, although in much too short a time, but they could have also seen what real poverty looks like and how brave and courageous people are against odds that we think of as insurmountable.

I was in a place called Islamabad and we were meeting with women, some of whom had walked 15 hours from the desert to come and visit with me. And I was sitting there looking at these faces of these women dressed in multi-colored saris, and I thought, "You know, if I had been born here, would I have had the courage, the confidence, to eek out a living, to raise a family, and then to try to enhance my life by taking on a small job or getting a loan to do something?"

So, the courage of these women has been very striking to me, but also our blessings, and how kind of sad it is that we spend more time in our country wringing our hands and kind of moaning about our problems, instead of realizing how blessed we are and getting about the business of fixing a lot of what goes on around us.

I also thought that there are things we have to share with women around the world, but also things we can learn. Let me just give you a few examples. There's a concept called micro-

credit, which some of you may have heard about, but which I saw first-hand in places like a Hindu village of Untouchables in Bangladesh, or in the barrio of Managua, Nicaragua, where very poor women have banded together to get little loans--that's why they call them micro--to make businesses for themselves. And maybe it's something as simple as buying a milk cow, or moving from being a wonderful baker for her family to beginning to sell baked goods. But the confidence that came from that economic activity as women began to make their own incomes has transformed families and communities.

We could do some of the same here--we are doing. We have projects like this, but we don't have enough. So, we could learn from what has been done in very poor countries and transplant that into some of our poor neighborhoods where we bring women together, where we teach them some skills, where we enable them to make some income for themselves.

I also saw how some of the problems that we suffer here, whether it's domestic violence or some of the difficulties that women confront in being willing to be confident and take responsibility for their own lives, are very common in other cultures as well. And we can learn from each other and take some comfort from what others are doing as we attempt to try to build a better life for ourselves.

And I guess, finally, there's a wonderful opportunity now because of mass communications for women to learn about what's going on in other places. You cannot imagine the impact that American culture has--unless you have travelled in some of these countries--on women who themselves are illiterate, who've been denied schooling, been denied health care, have had no control whatsoever over their lives.

I was sitting in a very small village outside Lahore, Pakistan, by a small school that had been built for girls, which is a real step forward for that country--trying to build more schools for their girl students. And there were a group of girl students and their mothers sitting with me, and one woman said that she had 10 children--five boys and five girls. If she had known about family planning she would not have had as many children, but no one ever told her about that. But now that she's had these five girls, she wants them to be educated the same way as American girls are educated. So, she is standing up for the right of her girls to be educated.

In a small village outside Jessore, Bangladesh, I saw a little play acted out by the children of the women who were part of this micro-credit group. And one little scene stuck in my mind. A little girl was acting as a mother, and another little boy was acting as a father, and then there was a girl child and a boy child. And the boy child said, "I'm going to school." And

the father and the mother said, "Good. Study hard." And the little girl said, "I want to go to school." And the mother and father said, "Girls don't need to go to school. You do your chores. You don't need to go to school."

And then all of a sudden, a woman who works with the micro-credit, another child dressed up, came in and said, "Your daughter wants to go to school. Why don't you want her to go to school and learn how she can be a better wife, a better mother, and make money for the family?" And they proceeded to have this little argument. And you could tell that it had been an argument that had happened probably dozens of time in this village. And finally the woman from the micro-credit group said, "You can not have a loan if you do not send your daughter to school." And so all of the sudden the daughter was going to go to school.

And the final story I would tell is from Santiago, Chile, where I visited another micro-credit group. And this one woman talked about how she had never been educated, she'd married very young, she'd had a number of children, and she just wanted more out of her life but didn't know where to turn. And then this program was available. And she said, "You know, I've always been a very good seamstress, so I began making clothes to sell in the market. And now I have two people who work for me making clothes. And then I could buy a new sewing machine. I kissed that sewing machine when it arrived!" She said, "And I felt, looking at that sewing machine, like I were a caged bird that had been let loose."

We are not in any way burdened by the obstacles to education and health care and political participation, but sometimes we act as though we are, don't we? We have too many women who don't vote, too many women who don't believe that they are worth as much as somebody else, too many women who lack the confidence to stand up for themselves, for their children, for a better community. So we have much in common, even though we have so many more blessings. And I hope that one of the results of the Beijing Conference will be a continuing rise in awareness among women everywhere about what we are capable of doing. No woman should be forced to choose any life that is not her choice. Every woman should be free to make the choice that is right for her.

And part of the next chapter in making sure that women's rights are human rights is to ensure that if you wish to be a full-time mother and homemaker, that is a respected choice. If you wish to be a full-time professional and do not marry and do not have children, that is a respected choice. And, if, like most of us, at some point in your life, you will try to have a family and work outside the home and work in the community, that that kind of effort that it takes to balance all of those obligations will also be respected. And so I hope, I hope women

support each other. I hope we call a cease-fire in sniping at one another about another woman's choice. I hope we respect each other and I hope we do what we can do to make our communities and our country better for women, children and men.

Thank you.

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