

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

**2/26/96  
Network '96 Womens  
Leadership Forum**

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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For Immediate Release

February 26, 1996

REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
NETWORK '96 WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FORUM  
PHILADELPHIA, PA

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you, all. Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Thank you. I'd rather be in Philadelphia than anywhere. I was here last Thursday. I'm back today. Mayor, if you can think of another reason, I'll be back next week.

This is the most extraordinary outpouring of support and, really, a way for all of us in this room to say that we believe in an America that is inclusive, that cares about all of its citizens and the means for bringing us together.

This extraordinary new organization within the Democratic National Committee has made it possible for, literally now, thousands and I hope tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of women to be actively involved in politics. You know, sometimes people come up to me and they say, "How can you stand politics?" And I always say, "Well, do you mean 'politics' with a capital 'P', like electoral politics, or do you mean politics with a small 'p', like being a member of a family, or belonging to a church, or working in any organization, or being part of any group?" Because "politics" is how we come together to make decisions we think will further our interests. And women have an enormous stake in politics with a small "p" and a capital "P", and I hope every woman in this room, whether or not you have ever run for office or hold office, and I applaud each of you who has done that.

But I also applaud the rest of you, who, like me, has not done that, because we have an important role in politics as well. We are citizens, we have interests, and we have to make sure our voices are heard. And so thank you for being here and being committed to the political future of our country and ourselves.

But if all we were doing was coming together to applaud women who are in public life and women who in their private and personal and professional lives are involved in their communities, that would be important, but it would not bring us together in the numbers that we are joined together with tonight. Because the reason you're here, the reason Tipper and I are here, is because we have a certain vision about what we want our country to be, and we know we have to fight for that vision. We cannot leave it to anyone else. We have to be part of those who stand up and say, "Here's what we want for an America in the 21st century."

Each of us has a critical role to play in this next election, but each of us has a critical role to play every day, between now and next November and every day afterwards. Because of the diverse roles we already fill in society today, in the home, in the workplace, in our common life together, we bring both our special insights and experiences and our sense of the possible for our society.

You know, women have been catalysts for change since the beginning of our nation. I just learned the other day that the first demonstration that was ever held at the White House occurred when suffragettes chained themselves to the White House fence. Now, if you think anything any of us has done is controversial, you go back and read about what happened when those women chained themselves to that fence. It was met with the most extraordinary outrage, starting with President Wilson and spreading out to everyone. The major newspapers in the country were just indignant beyond words that women would try such a stunt to make their desires for the vote known.

So, women have been making their voices heard for a very long time. And women with education, women with sufficient income, not to worry where the next meal was coming from, women who were, frankly, lucky in their lives have been able to look beyond themselves and their day-to-day concerns to see what we as a society needed, and to band together.

We can go back and look at the role that women played in the Revolutionary War, in the Civil War, and during the great Progressive era at the turn of this last century. We can see women starting settlement houses and agitating to end child labor. We can see women not only working for the vote, but working for a voice in the labor fields of our country and trying all the ways they knew how to bring equality and justice to those who were left out. They spoke out, they lobbied politicians, they organized, they picketed, they made things happen.

And because of the work of so many women before us, we made progress as a nation. Women were there on the frontlines, lobbying for changes that ended 12 hour workdays, that took

children out of factories and put them into schools, that opened up the doors of opportunity to black women and brown women and women from every corner of the world.

We know that women have made a difference. But now we have to continue to make our voices heard. Seventy-five years after winning the vote, many women do not feel that they have a stake in our political process. Fifty-four million eligible women chose not to vote in the 1994 elections. That is a staggering number. And in that number, you can find women of every type, in every corner of our country, who think that politics with a capital "P" means nothing to them, who sometimes are stretched so thin trying to keep body and soul together, they can't imagine even taking an hour off to go vote.

We have to persuade every woman that she does have a stake in the political life of her country, because the decisions that are made will impact on the life she leads. Changes in Medicare will not only impact her, but they more immediately may impact her mother, her father, her aunt, her uncle. Changes in Medicaid might not immediately impact her, but you never know, do you? And they might lead to the closing of a hospital or the cutting back on services that that woman does need next year, or the year after. Changes in environmental regulations may mean that the air she breathes and the water her child drinks may no longer be safe. We have to make it clear that the decisions that are made in Washington have a direct impact on how we lead our lives.

I believe that this is one of the most important elections in our political history. It's not only the end of a century, and indeed, a millennium, which always causes, I'm told by historians, many different feelings to come out in people. There's all kinds of uncertainty and regret about what hasn't happened in the last century, of feeling that we didn't do as much as we should. At the same time, there's this looking forward with a sense of possibility about what we can do if we enter the future positively and with optimism. This is no different than at any time in the past.

We see a challenge in our own country between those who would turn the clock back, who are ready to throw their hands up at the future, who want somehow to stop progress and go back to some time that never existed except in their imaginations. And against those people, we have others who see only a bright future, who think that cyberspace will solve all our problems, that will honeymoon in cyberspace--I can't imagine a worse idea than honeymooning in cyberspace! I've watched those people in those space capsules. I don't understand if you're floating around, but that's another issue. And so those people see only positive coming from changes.

But in the middle are most of the rest of us. A little bit worried about the pace of change, concerned about how we will cope with what is happening around us. A little nostalgic from time to time about what seemed to be a simpler and safer past. Excited about what can be, but uncertain about how best to arrive at that destination.

So, it's understandable that in a time of great change and challenge, people would be asking questions about "What should I do?", "How will I navigate into the future?" And so we all have to work through these challenges together, because this is an era of endless possibility and great uncertainty. And here, in our country, we are posed with the difficult question as to whether the kind of America that many of us have taken for granted as we've watched incredible change over the last 50 years will be there and be available. And the American Dream that so many of us have pursued for our children and our grandchildren.

I think the answers to these challenges rest with us. We will decide whether we permit the clock to be turned back, or whether we will work together to create a future that is worthy of all of us. In the State of the Union, the President talked about seven challenges. I like those challenges--they're ones that I relate to and I think about, and I believe many of you do as well.

The first challenge is to cherish our children and strengthen our families. We cannot simply talk about family values, we must act in ways that value all families. There is nothing more important. And we know that what happens to children starts with the care and attention and love and discipline of parents. But we also know that no family is an island, that what happens in the larger society, right outside the door, down the street, across the country, and now, across the world will impact on how well a family can fulfill its responsibilities to children.

That is why this debate between whether the government or family is responsible for children is a false debate. We know a government can't raise or love a child--who said that it could? But we also know that families sometimes need a helping hand--they need support, they need the kind of concern and care that a loving society can offer a family.

And we also know that in every family, including my own, there are outside influences over which many of us feel that we have lost control. The most obvious example--it's already been referred to--is the television. It comes into our homes, it says things to our children that we would not let a stranger walk in our door and say without calling the police, would we? And yet so many parents feel helpless in the face of this overwhelming

cultural presence. Well, the first thing is more parents have to exercise more responsibility to get up and turn off the television set and find some other things for children to do.

But a lot of parents, particularly working parents, need some help. That's why it was so important that when the telecommunications bill passed the Congress, with the incredible work over many years of Vice President Gore, that the President insisted that the V-chip be in the telecommunications bill. Why? Because when you hear people stand up on the floor of the House and say: "We don't need to program television sets so that parents can screen out X-rated and R-rated material if they don't want their children to see them. Just let those parents do it themselves." Well that's fine, if you're not a single parent working hard to support your child, if you're not a two parent working family, where one works one shift and the other works the other shift.

Parents need some help. That's what I mean by the kind of cooperation between the family and society. Yes, parents have to exercise more responsibility, but yes, the government can give them a V-chip so that they can control that television set when they're not around to watch their children every day.

The government can also do something else. It can pass strong regulations and laws to try to protect teenagers from the powerful tobacco industry and do what we can to limit and eliminate teenagers and young people from smoking.

You know, every time you hear that the government shouldn't be involved in something, you can just bet somebody's being paid to say that. And that is no truer than when you look at the tobacco industry, which for years has said: "First of all, tobacco doesn't cause any problems that anybody needs to be too concerned about. And, well, if it does, than that's too bad, but adults reserve the right to do that. And, well, Joe Camel wasn't totally aimed at children." And then you have a survey that shows that Joe Camel is more recognizable than Mickey Mouse by children under 10.

So we know we have to do something to reign in the tobacco industry. That is just another example of how we, together, in our own homes, taking personal responsibility but banding together through the political process, can cherish children and strengthen families, so that they can do the job they must do.

The second challenge is to throw open the doors of learning to all children, and to reform our education system so that it works for all children. Anyone who's ever taught, and I would imagine that there are many of you in this audience, knows how difficult it is to teach under any circumstances. Well, it is harder today than it's ever been. It's harder because so many of

the problems that the school has to tend to are not the school's problems. They come in the door, and they're there, and they must be dealt with. It's harder because when you've got three-year-olds being able to operate a remote control device so they never have to do anything, they can sit there and be passively entertained, then when they get in a classroom where they have to work and where they have to deal with frustration, is it any wonder that they are mentally clicking off those teachers trying to help them learn what they need to learn?

So, we need to recognize that education today is a real challenge, but it is the most important public challenge for this country to face. And we know what we can do to make it better.

The President has said that everything needs to be considered. Today, at the school that Tipper and I visited, I saw parents in the school working with teachers. I loved seeing that, because if we don't reconnect homes and schools, we will never get the education that our children deserve to have. It reminded me of when I was growing up and my father used to say, "You get in trouble in school, you get in trouble at home." There was this united front between the parents and the teachers. We didn't like it much, but it actually helped to structure our lives, because we knew what we were up against, didn't we? And we had to behave, because if we didn't, somebody sure was going to find out about it.

Well, now we have to reassert adult authority, and parents have to be part of that. That's why the President has been advocating uniforms, and I saw uniforms in the school I visited today and I talked with the children and I talked with the teachers. Now, does everybody like uniforms? No. But do we now have positive evidence that uniforms, particularly in inner city schools, helps decrease violence, helps children behave better, helps protect children from gang violence, and eliminates a lot of the consumer pressure that kids feel. They can start worrying about how to add and subtract instead of what they're going to wear to school tomorrow.

And we need to do some other things. Every school in this country should be hooked up to the Internet by the year 2000, and the President and the Vice President are working on that. And why in the world, when we know we face all these global challenges, would some people in Congress want to cut back and even eliminate college aid for lots of deserving students who need that kind of financial assistance? If anything, we need to expand student loan and work study and scholarship programs so that every deserving student who is willing to work can have a shot at college.

The third challenge speaks directly to the survival of the American Dream. That is, the economic challenge that we all face today. And we know it's out there. My goodness, we read the headlines about downsizing and layoffs. We see the economic security in our own families, among our friends. We know that many people are working harder and feeling like they're not getting ahead.

Every American family that is willing to work must be given the opportunity to feel that they are making a contribution and enhancing their family's prosperity. That means we need, as the President has advocated, a new G.I. Bill for American workers, so that Americans who lose their jobs in downsizing will receive vouchers to pay for the retraining they need to become employable again.

It also means that the people who are struggling to support themselves and their children on \$4.25 an hour, the people who work in our day care centers, our nursing homes, our restaurants, all at jobs that may not be prestigious in some people's eyes, but my goodness are they essential. Think of what we would do without the people who are doing the work for which we pay a minimum wage. It is time to raise the minimum wage and reward work in this country.

And I would also say that economic security goes in hand in hand with health security. And we must, we must protect Medicare and Medicaid and reaffirm our commitment to society's weakest members. We now have, at least in our country, a guarantee that when you reach 65, you will have your health care needs met. We can't say that for 43 million working Americans who are uninsured. And we should be able to. That is why the bill currently pending in the Senate called the Kassebaum-Kennedy Bill that would guarantee workers when they moved jobs, they could take their insurance with them, and would eliminate preexisting conditions as a prohibition on insurance, should be passed.

It is just, it is just bewildering to me how in the richest nation in the world, we have not yet figured out how to guarantee a minimum of health care coverage to every American at an affordable price, and there are some people who are talking about a plan that would in a few years take it away from the older Americans who now have that guarantee. Let's preserve and protect Medicare and Medicaid and work on ways to extend health care coverage to every American.

The fourth challenge is to reclaim our neighborhoods from crime, gangs, and drugs. And we are making some progress on that. Thanks to mayors like the mayors you have, thanks to prosecuting attorneys like the prosecuting attorney you have, thanks to community policing, thanks to the entire society saying "We are fed up with this," the President was able to pass a crime

bill that has made a big difference. Thanks to that crime bill and thanks to the Brady Bill, we now are seeing a decrease in crime in many sectors. Not as fast as it should be, not as broad as it needs to be, and in fact, it needs to go much further. But because of the Brady Bill, which was bitterly opposed by the gun lobby, 41,000 felons and mentally ill people already have been prevented from buying guns. And I say that already shows that that bill was a success.

We are seeing more police put on the streets in communities. We know that if we build up communities, we cut down crime. Last Thursday, I visited a YouthBuild site as part of AmeriCorps in South Philly. And I met with the young people who were there, and every single one of them said they had such pride because they were not only learning how to build houses and making them available to neighbors, but they were getting their education as well. And they said when they went back to their neighborhoods and they walked by the kids on the corner who were standing there, they felt sorry because there weren't enough opportunities for those young men and women also to feel the sense of pride and accomplishment that the YouthBuild members did. So we not only need to say "no" to drugs and gangs and crime and guns on the street, we need to say "yes" to young people and give them something positive to do so that they can make a good contribution to our country.

The fifth challenge is to protect the environment. That is so important. If you go back 20 years, you can see pictures of lakes and rivers in this part of the country that were so polluted you couldn't look at them. Some were so bad they were on fire. Do you remember that? There were some cities in our country where literally you could not breathe the air. We've made a tremendous amount of progress, but we have a ways to go. The achievements that have been made were bipartisan achievements. We cannot allow this current Congress to permit lobbyists or polluters to write loopholes into our environmental laws. We have to stand vigilantly on behalf of the environment and make sure we protect it so that we can pass it on to our next generation.

The sixth challenge is that the United States must meet its responsibilities as a leader, as the leader in the fight for freedom and peace around the world. We cannot become isolationist just because we have won the Cold War. We have to remain active and involved. Now is that easy to do? Of course not. (Is it fraught with peril? Of course it is.)

But what is our choice? Both as a practical matter, if we expect other countries to help us fight against terrorism, multinational drug cartels, the spread of ethnic and religious and tribal violence, then we have to be willing to share part of

the responsibility. That's how it works. If we want others to help us, we have to be there to help them.

And as a moral matter, how can we stand by and let atrocities such as we witnessed for years in Bosnia go unnoticed and unaccounted for? Leadership is always a burden, and it's no different if it's an individual exercising it, or a nation. But the United States has always stood up against those who would oppress, those who would exercise authority against others for no good cause. And we have to continue doing that. We cannot build a wall around this country. There is no way we can pull up the gangplanks and say: "Forget it, 21st century. We're not coming." If we expect to compete economically, if we expect to see our ideas of democracy and the free market to triumph, then we have to be engaged and we have to lead. So long as this President is president, we will continue to lead and be engaged and not give in to the forces of isolationism.

And finally, the seventh challenge is that we have to reform our political system. There is no doubt that we have to reform campaign finance, that we have to continue to work against the influence of lobbyists and other interests. But you know, political reform goes beyond what we actually can get done in Congress or a state legislature. It really starts with each one of us. How active will we be? Your being here tonight suggests that you're willing to be active. Some of you have a long history of political activism, others I would bet are here really for the first time at a political event. All of you, though, have a stake in political reform and in the political process.

I would ask you to do just a couple of things. Make it your point to talk to 10 people in the next three or four months about what's happening in politics. Talk about this event, talk about what you read in the paper. Engage your friends and neighbors, co-workers, and colleagues. Try to reach out, particularly to other women to make them understand what you see, which is the relationship between your own life and what goes on in Washington or any state capital in the country. Make that part of how you will be politically active.

Secondly, educate yourself on all of these issues so that you feel comfortable talking about them. And you are willing to talk with people who disagree with you, in an effort to bring about a dialogue. Especially today, when we seem to have more yelling than talking, it is very important that all of us be willing to be part of a civil discourse about what happens in the United States. That means being willing to have a conversation with people who don't see things the same way you do. That means maybe even picking up the phone, calling a talk show, or writing a letter to the editor, or writing a letter to your representative, letting your views and voices be heard.

And finally, it means thinking about your role in all the institutions in which you are a part. Because all of us, and I speak for myself as well, can do a better job being a better citizen. We can be involved in our own neighborhoods. We can reach out to the people down the block or upstairs. We could offer to babysit for a few hours for that single mother who just seems like she doesn't have any time for herself. We can buy groceries for that older woman who may be all alone. We can say "Thank you" to the people who clean our offices and serve us our food. We can look at them with the same respect we expect from them. We can honestly begin to treat others as we would want to be treated.

I don't believe that, that any law or any government program, or even any election, will do all that we need to do to meet our challenges in this country. Those are important. Re-electing this President and Vice-President are essential for what happens in America, but just as important are the millions and millions of decisions each of us makes every day. How much responsibility are we willing to take for each other? Will we mentor or tutor a young person. Will we complain about a television show we find particularly offensive? Will we go in and ask the employers we work for whether they would consider family-friendly policies that would enable parents to be both good workers and good parents?

There's a lot of work to be done in our country, but we have survived and thrived for more than two centuries because at every critical turning point, a majority of the people made the right decision. They made a decision not only for the leadership they chose, but for their own willingness to become involved, to be an example, to stand up for what they believe. We have never been afraid as Americans to take on unfamiliar challenges. As descendants of immigrants and pioneers and adventurers, we have been willing to go where others were afraid to venture.

Well, now we face another time in our country's history. And yes, the election of '96 will be written in the history books, and it will determine whether we go forward with optimism, with a positive attitude, with hopefulness, or whether we give in to our worst fears. I believe, because I believe in America, that we're going to choose hope and optimism. And I also believe that more and more of us, women and men, will choose to stand up and be heard and even, more importantly, to act on behalf of our deeply held values and beliefs. That is what I know will happen in '96, and that's why I thank you for being part of making this great change occur.

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