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"STAR BREAKFAST"

THE WHITE HOUSE

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**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
AT THE NEW YORK WOMEN'S AGENDA "STAR BREAKFAST"  
NEW YORK, NY**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. Elly, thank you for bringing us all together again this morning. You are, as all of us who know and admire you, not only remarkable, but inspirational and something of a goad to the rest of us. So that when we believe we cannot go another day or take on another project, think of you and feel somewhat ashamed that we are not as willing as you have been for so many years.

I also want to congratulate all of the award recipients and all of the members of the agenda. This is the biggest, longest dais I've ever seen. When Elly told me how many more people had joined the agenda and how many more were going to be here this morning, I was somewhat astonished. And then she told me that there are two other ballrooms filled with people, and I want to say a special word of welcome to them and I will, along with the others here, come to see those of you in the other ballrooms as soon as the breakfast here is over.

What Elly said just now is something that I hope all of us will take to heart. We gather this morning to applaud and congratulate women and those men who are amongst us for their contributions to the economy and to our lives together, particularly in this great city.

Yet we know that we are faced with some very difficult challenges on a personal level -- in our homes, in our workplaces, and on a social level -- as we try to define what kind of people we intend to be and what kind of country we want to have.

I think there is no greater question for any of us to consider. Because while we are doing well and honoring those who do well, we also have to think hard about how in this changing world we intend to do good. And that is not just a question for do-gooders. It is not just a question for people like Elly, who have made a life of doing what she could to bring people together, to solve problems, to bring reason where reason was

often not welcome.

It's becoming an urgent question for all of us. It is not only the great disparity that Elly referred to in her phrase, "between the cave dwellers and the castle dwellers." It is the anxiety that grips all of us today. We do have problems. There's no getting around that. We do face challenges on all levels.

But I think it's time for us to quit wringing our hands and roll up our sleeves and take on these challenges and work for common ground that brings us together. We have for too long been willing to listen to the siren songs of simplism and extremism. Those siren songs are very inviting. They make us believe that complex problems can be solved easily, that we can withdraw from our responsibilities to one another both here at home and around the world. That all we need are scapegoats to point our fingers at. And that we then can go on, aiming to be among the castle dwellers, leaving behind everyone else.

The current budget battle that's going on in Washington is not just about money. It is about values. It is about where we place our priorities, what we care about and who we intend to be and what we leave our children. Yes, there are very strong feelings on all sides of this debate. But when one analyzes the feelings and looks through all of the position papers and the statistics, the choices are stark and each of us will be held responsible for those choices that are made in our names.

This morning I wanted to just share some a few of the issues and choices that we are confronting because historically, women have played a disproportional role in reminding all of us about priorities that do go beyond the headlines, that may only make stories, as Elly reminded us, on pages 10 or 11, or may never make stories at all. And if we don't raise our voices about what we believe are eternal values that withstand partisan politics -- the ideology of the moment -- then I'm not sure that any voices will be heard.

As we look at the decisions we face, it's particularly important that women like those who are gathered here, play a role in talking amongst themselves, their colleagues, their friends and their neighbors. Because we all have been very lucky, as well as working very hard.

I go in and out of communities all over this country. I meet many women who I think are talented, smart, able -- who just weren't very lucky. Maybe it was illness, maybe it was their home situation, maybe it was some other matter outside their own control. And I think to myself, there but for the grace of God go I and so many others whom I know. And what will we do to help not only the lucky, but to provide some support for everyone

else?

This is an important debate because historically Americans have thought of themselves as a country that is rooted in both personal responsibility and mutual obligations. We have had high aspirations and expectations for ourselves and we have looked to every sector of our society to play its role. We've expected our businesses and business leaders not only to produce returns for investors, but to provide jobs and opportunities, quality services and goods, and to make a contribution in their communities.

We have expected our government to be limited by our checks and balances and other constitutional limitations, but to play a role as an instrument of our will to help us solve problems. We have looked at every sector, whether it's the media or religion or education and expected in return both personal and mutual responsibility.

Now we find ourselves splitting apart with different sectors being assigned roles that may or may not have responsibility for anyone beyond their own boundaries. And this debate about the budget poses these choices as starkly as we have seen in 100 years. We have not had such a fundamental debate about what we expect our government to do, what the social responsibility of business should be, what citizenship requires, since the Progressive Era. It was during the Progressive Era that we began to put together a coalition amongst reasonable people from different sectors of our society -- all of whom developed a consensus that was bipartisan for most of the century about both domestic and foreign policy.

That's when we started doing things like creating national parks because we thought we should have a heritage that lived beyond what we could exploit for the moment. That's when we started passing laws like child labor legislation, minimum wage, and other laws to protect workers -- not because we thought business was evil, but because we knew it was run by human beings who themselves were imperfect.

We began to try to create a government -- a private sector, a voluntary sector -- that could meet the challenges of what was then the Industrial Age. There were mistakes made. There fits and starts. People had to readjust and then they had to go back and think things over again, but through the process of those decades, through leaders who looked very hard at where we were and what we needed to do, we made progress.

But every age demands new looks, demands a new evaluation of what is required, and that is what we are confronting today. Yes, we all want to balance the budget. That is a given, but there is a right way and wrong way to do that. There is a way

that sets back research and investment in what makes a country strong, but undercuts education and training that puts those who already are behind -- even further behind -- and takes those who are losing jobs in corporate restructuring and sends them to the back of the line as well.

There is a way to create opportunity for people by a partnership between business and government in which government has an appropriate role to play and businesses assumes its share as well. But if we look at the choices that are posed, we see that many of those who are advocating a move away from this consensus that took 100 years to develop -- that believes all of our problems should be put at the feet of government -- would make changes in our common life together that would not merely cut budgets, but undercut dreams and aspirations and make the American dream even more out of reach than it already is for millions and millions of Americans.

That is why this balance that was struck in this continuing resolution is so important. Balance the budget, do it in seven years, but do it in a way that protects priorities that will enable us not only to build for the future, but to look in the mirror. The President, and I don't believe any American, should want to balance the budget on the backs of children and families.

I don't believe that we should cut nutrition programs for pregnant women and babies, the school lunch and breakfast programs simply to buy 20 more B-2 bombers that the Pentagon itself says it does not want or need. I don't believe we should ask the senior citizens of America, three-quarters of whom live on less than \$24,000 a year, to go without or to pay much more for medical care that they need to live their final years in dignity and comfort.

And I also don't believe that any American should feel good about the idea that we would raise taxes by taking away from the Earned Income Tax Credit that goes to working families with children in the home who make less than \$28,500 a year with two children, in order to give many of us in this ballroom a tax cut. I don't want it, and I don't think most Americans would either.

You know there are some who argue that drastic cuts in school nutrition and education programs and college loans and Medicare and Medicaid are absolutely essential in order to secure a debt-free future for our children. That's just not true. There are many other programs of much less significance to our future that do not affect the poor, the vulnerable, and the children among us that can be cut back.

Yes, we need to free our children from the debt that was run up between 1981 and 1992, but we should not put the cart before the horse. It will do very little good to have a debt-free

society -- which is kind of an odd concept since I bet every one of us are in debt in this room in some way or another, whether it's a mortgage or a credit card -- if we do not provide a future for children because they are poorly feed, cannot read, cannot breathe clean air or drink clean water, do not feel safe going to and from school, and do not have access to basic health care.

What we should be trying to figure out how to do, as we face the Information Age, is what we figured out how to do as we faced the Industrial Age: when men and women and children began leaving rural areas and farms and coming into cities and going to work in factories and living in tenements; when immigrants came from every corner of the world trying to find their way; we worked out an arrangement, by personal responsibility could be rewarded, but mutual obligations in part delivered through the government, were there to provide a social safety net, a support mechanism, and incentives for people to do what they should do in order to make a future for themselves and their children.

As the global economy today has become even more competitive, and the current trends toward moving workers out of jobs because they are no longer needed, has hit workers who never thought their jobs were insecure.

We need to be sure that we are doing what is necessary once again to provide a common-sense, middle-of-the-road response to what people need. The efforts to dismantle the social safety net at the very time when many people in the middle class are feeling increasing economic insecurity, is not the way to go about solving social, political, or economic problems.

If we however, take a middle course -- a sensible course -- that thinks about where we will be in 10 or 20 years, that doesn't provide tax cuts that then explode the deficit eight years out, after reaping the political windfall from having delivered them, then we can begin to make sense out of the challenges we are confronted with.

I think every time we end a century, and particularly as we end a millennium, there is going to be a lot of confusion about where we go. If one goes back and reads some of the millennial literature and turn of the century literature, you can get a sense of that.

So I don't think any of us should be surprised that at the end of the Cold War -- at the movement into a much more competitive and difficult environment economically around the globe, at a time when we have rightly given up on certain objects being achieved through either government action or other ways that we have tried in the past and we're looking for new ideas -- that there should be some sense of being unsettled.

I think that is all to the good, actually -- if we use this time effectively; if we really try to reason together and if people with the kinds of backgrounds and experiences and values that all of you have, take part in this debate. And it is not just a debate in Washington, nor even just in Albany or in New York City. It is a debate that needs to take place everywhere we gather as Americans. It is a debate about how men and women define our roles, how we share responsibility for breadwinning and caregiving and homemaking. It is a debate about what goes on in our work places. It is a debate that affects every one of our institutions and in which all of us have a stake as to its outcome.

So part of the reason I wanted to come again this year, was not only to say thank you for what you are doing here in New York, what you do individually through the organizations represented here and now in this coalition, but to ask you to be part of this great American debate. I believe that just as we have in the past, a majority of Americans will make the right decisions. The answers for these challenges are not partisan. They go way beyond politics. They really require us, as Abraham Lincoln said during the Civil War, to think anew.

There has never been the kind of unlimited choices that we confront, the sort of difficulties that we wrestle with. Life might be a little easier if we had cooker-cutter roles that each of us fulfilled and we never had to ask a question. But that is not to be. There is no turning back on what we have wrought during this century. And there is much to be grateful for because we are living longer, we are healthier, we survive child birth, we see our children live to adulthood, we see untold prosperity that wasn't even dreamed of two generations ago.

There is much to be grateful for and just as those of us who are blessed should count those blessings in this Thanksgiving and holiday season, we should also take them and put them to work -- not because it's nice to do, not because we'll get points somewhere on a resume or get an award. But because we will be part of molding what this country's future will be. There isn't any more important task.

If we want to wake up in the year 2012 at the 30th anniversary of this agenda and we want to believe that America is still making good on its promises, then we have to get about the business of making hard decisions that will lay the groundwork that will enable us to say with pride and confidence, "We made it through another tough period with our ideals and our values intact, and we're ready for the twenty-second century."

Thank you all very much.

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