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PRESERVATION

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Office of the Press Secretary

**REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT THE DNC WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FORUM LUNCHEON
WASHINGTON, D.C.
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Thank you all very much. One of the great pleasures and great adventures of being part of a team that includes the Gores, is that there is still spontaneity left and lots of enthusiasm and fun which is more than an antidote to some of the days that we endure and deal with on a more regular basis.

But I am so pleased that Tipper, as your honorary chair, has been able to impart to each of you in her contacts with you -- the meetings particularly with those of you who are co-chairs and in the leadership of the WLF -- the commitment and the conviction that we share about what we are doing and why you're being a part of what we are doing is so important.

I thought a lot about what I could talk about today because you've had two terrific days of meetings and seminars, and I know you are going to end with an excellent panel this afternoon when we finish here. You heard the Vice-President and the President last night at the White House, and you are just probably filled to the brim with information and programs and comparisons and statistics and all of the reasons why it is so crucial that you are part of this leadership effort -- not to re-elect the President and the Vice President, but to carry forth in a broader way the values that we share in common.

So rather than plowing old ground that others have already done -- and done so well in the last two days -- I wanted to talk for just a few minutes about some of those values and some of those reasons why I think you are here and why I am grateful you are here and why we have to redouble our efforts in the next year.

I have often thought over the past several years that we are in America at a watershed stage in history -- not just with respect to politics and presidential elections or congressional changes, but across the board. There is so much that is going on that is challenging every institution of which we are a part, that is forcing changes in our relationships, how we see the

world, what we think of ourselves, how we even envision the future.

There is a convergence of a lot of historic forces and it may be that that is predictable. We are at a point of change, and certainly with the Information Age and the break up of the Soviet Union and a lot of other events that have occurred, that's understandable. It also may be that we're about to end a century and, as I look back in history, there seems to be some convergence between rather significant transitional events and the end of centuries. And here we are, not only ending a century, but also ending a millennium.

So for whatever combination of political, social, educational, economic -- all the other explanations -- we know that we are at the great point of change and challenge.

Now when that happens in our own lives, we kind of get a funny feeling about it -- whether it's a big decision, something having to do with our personal lives, or a business, or an investment, or a choice we have to make. And we know how much effort it takes to muster the courage to change directions. And that is what many of us, on a broad scale, are feeling today.

We know that there is so much good happening, so many changes that are improving people's lives, opening up doors -- possibilities that could never have been dreamed up before. But we also know what insecurities are bred because of all those changes.

And in thinking back about American history, it seems to me there are many parallels between our ending this century and beginning a new one and the ending of the last century and the beginning of this one. There are parallels in the changes that are occurring economically as the last gasps of the agricultural economy seemed to disappear and as people had to make adjustments to what was known as the Industrial Age and flooded into cities, seeking new kinds of work, trying new ways of living.

We see it also with much of the discussion of immigrants -- immigrants coming to America particularly at the end of the last century, filling our cities, living in tenement houses, working in sweat shops -- your parents, your grandparents, your great grandparents.

My grandfather who came as a child and went to work at eleven and worked six days a week, twelve hours a day -- there were no child labor laws, there were no protections. He was there for fifty years.

Before then, his people had done other kinds of work. But when one thinks about what was going on at the end of last

century, you can feel the ferment as lives were changing, as new possibilities were opening, but also doors closing -- and there were many people wondering what the future would hold.

At the same time politically, there was a conflict between those who believed that our only obligations are to ourselves and maybe those nearest and related to us, and that all we had to do for ourselves was to maximize our economic opportunity. And there were no ways that could be devised, so the thinking went, that could reign in economic growth without undermining it.

That's what caused the conflict between Theodore Roosevelt and the monopolists, the robber barons, as he would rant and rave about the need to bring social responsibility to economic opportunity.

When I was in Chile a few weeks ago, the rector at the University of Chile at Santiago introduced me by saying there had not been an American connected with the White House who had spoken at that University since Theodore Roosevelt had spoken at the University.

And then the rector recited some lines from President Roosevelt's then out-of office speech in Chile, in which he warned people everywhere about the need to keep a constant tension between private power, property rights, personal satisfaction, the public good, public needs, and public satisfactions. Was he positive that one must always reign in the excesses of human nature when they occur in business, when they occur in government? There has to be a tension because otherwise too much power will go to one side or the other. That's why he was such a strong believer in preserving wilderness and environmental protection to take away from development some of our most beautiful lands so that they would be there and preserved forever.

So when I look at what is happening today, I hear echoes from these earlier years -- speeches by people like Theodore Roosevelt. I see images of women, like Jane Adams starting Hull House in Chicago, walking the streets of that city seeing children who had nowhere to go while their parents and their older siblings like my grandfather went to work; finding little children tied to the legs of kitchen tables because there were no such things as day care centers and everyone was doing the best they could.

I know that much of the positive change that we have come to take for granted, and that some among us would turn the clock back on, was motivated by women like us at the turn of the century. Women with education, women of privilege, women who through a combination of their own hard work and frankly luck -- were able to look out and above the day-to-day concerns and see

what their neighbors, see what immigrants, see what people they didn't even know needed. Women who could talk with the industrialists that they were married to, or that they taught, or that they mothered, or that they neighbored, about how to make work have some human dignity as well as subsistence wages attached to it.

Women who spoke out in favor of child labor laws, women who led the way for laws that protected our food safety, who were the real precursors of both the environmental movement with respect to preserving land and with respect to protecting our own environment. Women who were influential in promoting education for those children in those tenements. Women who worried about child welfare. Women who never let our new found explosive growth at the turn of the century cloud our obligations to one another.

I think it's time once again for women to be those voices of progress. We need a new Progressive Era as we end this century. We've learned a lot of lessons about what works and doesn't work in a hundred years, but the basic needs have not changed. People still need one another. No matter what information technology does and no matter how we explore cyberspace it cannot replace the need to change a baby or teach a child to read or play catch with a teenager. It cannot undermine the fundamental relationship people have one to the other.

So as we look at our political landscape today, I see that the political debates are repeating fundamental issues that I thought had been decided a hundred years ago. I didn't think we would ever have to debate whether or not we wanted to inspect our meat efficiently. I didn't think we'd ever debate whether or not we'd have a national park system that was open and available to every person without regard to their income. I didn't think we'd have to debate whether we'd make college accessible to the children of workers and poor people. I didn't think we'd have to debate that we'd keep in tact a system of health care with Medicare and Medicaid that at least took care of the most vulnerable people amongst us.

But if one listens to the debate, you can hear Theodore Roosevelt in the background. That's what Republicans used to believe. This debate that we're having on Capitol Hill now is not between Republicans and Democrats as they came to be identified in this century. It is between people who think there is such a thing as the public good and those who believe there is only private good.

And part of what we have to do with our voices and what each of you is doing because of your involvement in this organization, is to replay the words of women like Jane Adams, of the early suffragettes. Women who believed that America could live up to

its ideals, not have to retreat from them in the face of change. So I hope that all of you recognize that your being part of this is something much bigger than yourself. I honestly believe that the forces at work and the conflict we are seeing now are on a historic level -- that we stand in the shoes of those women progressives a hundred years ago. Women like Eleanor Roosevelt who went into the settlements to learn what it was like to live there and work with those children and their mothers. Women who are not afraid to look at all of life, who did not let their privilege blind them to the full range of human experience.

And there are too many among us now, men and women, who have been blinded. They have lost the full vision they were given and, as a result, they have no vision of what our country should be and can be.

When a Republican congressman goes home to North Carolina, as one did last week, and tells his local newspaper and civic clubs that he feels poor and bedraggled making a \$133,000 from Congress and \$50,000 from a police pension, which he thinks puts him in the ranks of the lower middle class in America, I want to say, "Well, obviously you don't know the people I know. You don't see the people I see. You don't have any idea that the average woman in America over the age of 65 lives on a median income of less than \$9,000 a year. You don't know that 75% of the people on Medicare whose benefits you're getting ready to cut and cost raise live on less than \$25,000 a year. You seem to forget that ten million more aren't poor enough to qualify for Medicaid but don't have any insurance. You don't know what it's like to have to face choices that too many Americans face every single day about whether they can pay for food or prescription drugs, whether they'll get the health care they need for their parents or their children -- and what the Republicans are about to do would only make matters worse."

So part of what I think each of us has to be ready to do is to help our friends and neighbors -- people like us, women like us -- broaden their own vision. We have to talk with each other about the kind of country we want and what each of us owes to each other and to that vision of a better country.

And there is no contradiction between being practical and dreaming. There's no contradiction between taking care of people and taking care of one's self. That is a false choice that has been posed by those currently in power in the Congress.

And so much of what we have to do is very simple. It may not be glamorous, but like those women of that earlier era, it will work if we do it. If we talk to the people we know, if we confront them with the facts, force them to think beyond this year or next into the future, ask them to describe the world and country they want for their children and grandchildren, reach our

hands out to the people who are being left out in our society, do what we can to help lift them up; we will start, not just this forum; but a mood that I believe like a one hundred year flood will fill our lives and our country with a new sense of hope and possibility.

The time is now to confront what we are and want to be. If each one of you -- I know so many of you, I know of others of you -- is capable of being an agent for positive change and that's why I'm grateful you're here today. Because you are part of something I honestly believe will not only win an election but will, in this period of change and challenge, help all of us find our way. So that when we do turn into that new century, we do so with confidence and we do so with a feeling that we're fulfilling our deepest beliefs about the kind of world and people we want to be and that we're willing to commit ourselves to help make. Thank you all and Godspeed.

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