

Gay Men's Health Crisis
Event New York 1/22/97

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS EVENT
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
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(Transcript)

Thank you so much, thank you Rosie, thank all of you. I am just delighted to be here among so many friends, to honor two very special friends. Joan and David are two people who have contributed immeasurable time, energy and resources as well as heart to this organization and the fight against AIDS.

For nearly two decades now, AIDS has claimed too many of our brothers and sisters. Too many of our children, too many of our neighbors, too many of our co-workers. I don't know if there is, I would doubt if there is, any person in this hall and very few in this city who can say that their lives have not been touched in some way by this terrible disease.

That is why every segment of our society, every individual, every family, every community, every business, every level of government, must join in partnership to prevent the spread of AIDS, to care for those who are ill, to give hope to all who are HIV positive, and to make every effort, and to spare no expense in trying to find a cure.

It is a privilege for me to have this chance, to thank Joan Tisch and David Geffen, for their contributions to GMHC. And to thank them as well for the special example they set for all Americans through their generosity and compassion.

As the President said in his inaugural address on Monday, each of us has a stake in the endurance of this democracy. America is renewed and sustained because for the better part of our history, Americans have embraced a tradition of reaching beyond themselves, and giving back to their country that has blessed so many of us with so many opportunities.

Through their work, Joan and David exemplify the noblest qualities of citizenship and of humanity. They not only make financial contributions to the causes they believe in, they give of themselves, and they give unconditionally, never expecting anything in return.

I've heard the stories of how Joan started volunteering anonymously at first. How she did every job asked of a volunteer. And of how a few years later she was persuaded to join the board and has since helped make this organization one of the most effective AIDS organizations in the entire world.

Her work has been compassionate, and she leaves no doubt about the impact that one person can have. But she doesn't just work in the abstract, as important as that is -- going to meetings, being involved in the organization, helping to raise money -- she knows the people who are reached and helped. As we were watching the video, she turned to me and as the young

woman ended the video, said "we just lost her." That wasn't just a face or a voice on a screen, that was a person that Joan knew.

Like Joan, David Geffen has made unparalleled contributions to this organization and to the fight against AIDS and so many other important causes in our country. I want to tell you a story that I believe helps explain David's motivations to work so hard on behalf of others.

Last year David introduced me at an event in Los Angeles. And he talked about his mother. He talked about how when she passed away her will was probated and David and his brother discovered she had kept a secret safety deposit box. They couldn't imagine what she had owned that she thought was so valuable. Maybe, they thought, some money she had saved or some jewelry or family heirloom they didn't know about. The key was nowhere to be found so David and his brother had to go to the bank and have the box drilled open.

Inside the safe deposit box was another small box and inside that was an envelope. And inside that was another envelope and then something wrapped in saran wrap. They opened all those letters to find their mother's and father's American citizenship papers.

David told the crowd gathered that evening that that so illuminated his mother's belief that there was nothing more valuable than being an American, nor any greater opportunity than being able to live and work in our country. He also learned, and I know his mother would be very proud, that to those who much is given, much should be expected. There is no doubt that David is keeping his mother's dream of the American dream alive by making it possible for others to pursue their own hopes and dreams.

Through the work and support of these two wonderful friends, thousands of men and women and children living with AIDS have found compassionate counseling, hot meals and legal assistance. Countless other citizens have gained greater understanding of the disease and the ways to protect themselves from it.

And thanks to the contributions of Joan and David and the many others who share their vision of a better America, we are gathered tonight at a time of hope in the fight against AIDS. New treatments approved in record time are showing remarkable results in arresting the development of HIV and are beginning to improve the health of those who are living with AIDS. The number of infants born with HIV has declined since 1992, and scientists believe that pediatric AIDS can be virtually eradicated by the end of this century.

The President has strengthened the federal government's commitment to the fight against AIDS, and over the last four years funding for AIDS research prevention and care has increased by more than half. The President hosted the first White House conference on HIV and AIDS, and let me thank David Geffen for sponsoring the trips of some of the attendees.

But there is still much that has to be done. We all need to recommit ourselves. I believe that if we work together, as you are doing this evening with this incredible outpouring of support, we will reach a day in this new century ahead of us where AIDS has been conquered and lives

and futures have been saved here and around the world. And when that day comes, certainly the Gay Men's Health Crisis and friends like David Geffen and Joan Tisch will have their names emblazoned among those who were willing to stand up and lead the fight against AIDS. And I want to thank all of you for what you have done, encourage each of us to continue our efforts, and to make it possible that in future generations, young men and women will look back and say, when a crisis occurred there were those unafraid to meet it. That will be a great tribute for all you have done.

Thank you very much.

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