

Jane Adams Women in Government  
Luncheon Chicago, IL 8/26/96

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
JANE ADDAMS/WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT LUNCHEON  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS  
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It is a great pleasure to be here to help honor women who are serving our country in the spirit of Jane Addams.

I can think of no better day -- and no better place -- for this celebration. Seventy-six years ago, on August 26, 1920, American women won the right to vote. Today, we recognize the great debt we owe to the courageous women who came before us, those who awakened the national conscience to the injustices of society, and who made their communities, their country, and their world a better place for their children and their children's children.

Those of you who have answered the call of public service are part of a proud tradition of activism that found its wings in this very city. Jane Addams and Hull House are permanently linked to most of the social progress achieved in this country over the last century.

But Jane Addams' legacy doesn't just lie in the laws and reforms she helped bring about, it also lies in her life story. Her life of courage, of struggle, and most of all action, continues to inspire those who have ever doubted their own abilities to make a difference.

I bet there isn't a woman -- or even a man -- in this room who hasn't drawn strength and motivation from the life of Jane Addams. In 1935, just weeks before Addams' death, Eleanor Roosevelt said, "So many good things are not done because people become disheartened by criticism, or discouraged by being told that they can not succeed. It takes the example of great courage such as Miss Addams has shown to spur on those of us who have less courage when we are left to ourselves."

Jane Addams saw the overwhelming challenges and problems of her time -- the soul-crushing poverty, the discrimination against newly-arrived immigrants, the undernourished children working in unsafe factories, the children playing in rotting trash heaps because they had no place else to go -- and did something about them. She called everyone -- women and men, idealistic reformers and seasoned politicians, to action.

Through Hull House, she brought education, good nutrition, music, and the arts into the lives of thousands of boys and girls and men and women living in one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. She empowered people to make the most of their own lives and to take the responsibilities of citizenship seriously.

But Addams knew that Hull House could never be an island of social progress, immune to the ills of the larger community. If the children nurtured in the kindergartens of Hull House were to remain strong and healthy, they needed to walk home through streets that were safe and alleys that were clean; they needed to be able to eat food that would not make them sick; they needed to find work that offered fair hours and fair wages.

Addams knew that lasting change could occur only with the help of government. So she got involved in ways large and small. She became a city garbage inspector and turned her ward into one of the cleanest in the city. And she became a sophisticated political operative, leading movements to end child labor and establish a juvenile justice system.

All of you who have found your callings in government and politics, are in one sense, the daughters of Jane Addams. You are keepers of her legacy. We all thank you for being examples of great courage in a fast-paced, constantly changing, turn-of-the-millennium, Information Age. We thank you for keeping alive the tradition of activism begun by the suffragists, for standing by your conscience and values, and for making a difference in your communities.

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