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transcript

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS TO THE WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA
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Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here in this magnificent opera house, one of the architectural wonders of our world.

I want to thank Mrs. Howard for the warm hospitality that she and the Prime Minister have extended to my husband and me in Sydney and Canberra. I also want to thank Senator Newman for her words. Which I deeply agreed with, in terms of the agenda that confronts us and our mutual need learn from one another as we work on these problems. And I would be honored to take the message back that perhaps we could even strengthen our relationship. Thank you, too, Ambassador Dalrymple, for chairing the host committee. And I want to thank someone else -- Kaarn Weaver -- for the wonderful job you do every day in representing the United States in Australia.

Let me also thank our sponsors this afternoon: The Australian Center for American Studies at the University of Sydney, the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, and the Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific, also at the University of Sydney.

Finally I want to thank the Australian people we have met and seen waving in crowds along every street we have traveled. You have made my husband and me feel so welcome and have only increased our desire to return with our daughter to this extraordinary country. The timing of our next visit, and whether we come in disguise, may depend more on the outcome of the golf match my husband is currently playing than on scheduling concerns. He may wish he had encountered a shark in the harbor -- rather than on the fairway.

This is my first visit to Australia. I must confess that, while growing up, I was like many Americans who had a sense of Australia from seeing movies, images of the vast outback: Much like our Wild West, a place occupied by roguish types like Ned Kelly and filled with kangaroos. Just as, I assume, Australians who have not yet visited the United States might perhaps think that our country is one long-running episode of Melrose Place, not to mention that all our children like to dunk basketballs and wear baseball caps backwards.

I was thinking about our countries when my husband and I

arrived here the other evening from Honolulu. A few years back I had read Jill Ker Conway's memoir, The Road from Coorain, which included a memorable passage about her return home after a long sojourn in Europe. In it she describes flying into Sydney and seeing -- from above -- the beauty of the harbor, the golden beaches and the "grey-green city" lying at the edge of a continent.

At that moment she finally understands Australia's unique orientation in the world. The country, she writes, looks "across the vast expanse of the Pacific, not to Europe, but to Japan and Continental Asia."

Having read that passage, and being here for a few days now, before I travel to the Philippines and Thailand -- the Near North, not the Far East -- I feel better oriented in our world too.

Despite the thousands of miles of ocean that separate your country and mine, we are bound together in friendship and partnership based on common experiences and values.

We are united, not least, by our commitment to democracy and the values that democracy seeks to uphold. As proponents of freedom, we rejoice in recent developments around the globe: There is no Iron Curtain any more. In country after country, dictatorships have crumbled and democracy has come alive. The threat of nuclear war no longer hovers over us. As my husband said yesterday in Parliament, opportunities for peace and prosperity are greater than ever before. And the prospect of a new and even more dynamic century beckons us.

Yet at the same time, many people in our countries and around the world feel the strains caused by global competition and the rapid pace of change. The superficial cultural homogenization of the world means that people from Boston to Brisbane, Paris to Perth, and Moscow to Melbourne may wear the same jeans, eat the same fast food, and listen to the same music. But these surface similarities do not and cannot override a longing for identity and meaning in their own lives. Despite improving material conditions in advanced economies, families seem under stress. The gap between the rich and the poor grows wider. Even in the United States and Australia, the social safety net -- health care, education, pensions, good wages and good jobs -- is in danger of fraying for those less able to navigate this new world.

These pressures pose unavoidable questions for all of us as we approach the 21st century: Questions about how to balance individual and community rights and responsibilities; about how parents will raise children in the face of the influences of the

mass media and consumer culture; about personal identity and work in an age of globalization, information overload and high technology; about the roles of women in society; about how people will preserve their ethnic pride and value their national citizenship; about how nations will protect their sovereignty while cooperating regionally and globally with others.

Thinking about these challenges, and how free nations like ours will respond to them, we may need to be reminded that democracy is not just about our legally protected rights, elections or even free market economies. It's about the internalization of democratic values in people's hearts, minds and everyday lives. It's about how, in the absence of either hot or cold wars, democracy is rooted in the experiences of our young people. It's about developing among democratic nations what I call "an alliance of values" that withstands tyranny and terrorism. An alliance based on the shared values of freedom, opportunity, responsibility, community and respect for human rights.

Building and sustaining democracy has always required a balance of power that allows those values to flourish: A balance of public political power, private economic power and the power of civil society, those formal and informal networks that bring people together to make decisions for themselves and for the common good.

Democratic values are at risk when that balance shifts to the extremes: When government becomes too cumbersome or too intrusive or too restrictive. When the marketplace, which by definition knows the price of everything but the value of nothing, lures citizens into becoming merely consumers who care only about satisfying their personal wants. When civil society, which consists of local organizations, and philanthropies, and volunteer associations, and neighborhood groups and individual families, is weakened by larger political and economic forces.

Every generation faces the task of achieving the proper balance of power so that democratic values can survive and thrive.

Whether we succeed at this task is particularly important for women, whose voices are still too often silenced in too many parts of the world. It is equally important for women in countries such as ours who are still striving to attain and define their place in government, the economy and civil society and claim their share of personal, political, economic, and civic power.

During the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, I said that women's rights were human rights -- and

human rights are women's rights. One would think that at the end of this century that should be an unremarkable statement. I have been overwhelmed by the response that speech received. And also bewildered that the proposition should be open to question.

A few months ago I appeared on a radio program for the Voice of America. I fielded questions from all over the world. And many callers referred to my Beijing speech. And one male caller asked what my statement about women's rights really meant. I told him to imagine the rights men had and wanted and to apply them to women: the right to be valued as a member of a family, to be protected from violence and exploitation, to be assured equal access to the tools of opportunity -- health care, education, legal rights, political participation, economic empowerment -- tools that equip an individual with the capacity to make responsible decisions for one's life. Where women are given human rights they help create conditions in which they, their families and communities flourish.

Yet we know that even in advanced democracies such as ours, where these conditions are present for the vast majority of women, women's roles and rights are still being debated. They are being debated among women as well as between men and women, with implications for whether our democracies will meet the challenges of the future.

I know that some of you may recall we recently had an election in the United States. Many critical issues were raised during the campaign. But for the first time in America, a new set of concerns took on political importance -- concerns about enhancing the quality of our lives, about raising children, about meeting the demands of work and family.

Why were these issues suddenly at the heart of American politics? Because they are real issues on people's minds -- kitchen table issues -- and about how public and private power should be balanced to address them.

For example, will a new mother and her infant be allowed to stay in the hospital as long as a doctor deems it necessary -- or will private business considerations determine when they are ready to be sent home?

Will parents be allowed to take time off from work to care for a sick child or a loved one -- or will they be forced to choose between meeting their responsibilities to their jobs and meeting their responsibilities to their families?

The Family and Medical Leave law, the first piece of legislation my husband signed as President in 1993, took on greater political significance because my husband's opponent and

leaders of the other party in Congress disagreed about the law and the need to expand it. Family leave became a leading issue during the campaign, along with maternity stays for new mothers and how to protect health care coverage for older and poorer Americans, the majority of whom are women.

Even the book I wrote, *It Takes a Village*, became an issue in the campaign after it was attacked as an endorsement of government taking a dominant role in the raising of children. Anyone who reads the book knows that was not its theme. Rather, I argued that, although families bear the primary responsibility for child-rearing, each individual and institution in society has a responsibility toward children as well. The village of which I wrote is not a geographic location but a community of shared values and relationships.

People all over America started coming up to me at campaign appearances I made on behalf of my husband wearing buttons that said "It does take a village" or "I am a villager" or "Welcome to our village." They recognized that building a sense of community based on mutual responsibility not only helps all of us to work for our own ends - but also to help each other succeed as well. From what I know of your country, that is an unassailable tenet of your social contract even though you may disagree over the specifics.

Many observers in America, however, were perplexed that these issues were so important to voters this year. Accustomed to discussions of defense, diplomacy, economics and trade, some commentators never really caught on that so-called "women's issues" mattered because -- at root -- they were about the way that men and women live together and in society.

Such issues instead were often dismissed as marginal to the larger challenges our nation is facing or derided as "the feminization of politics."

What an unfortunate term. After all, don't fathers worry about how long their wives and babies can stay in the hospital when they need care? Don't men want to be able to take time off when a family member is gravely ill? Don't sons want to ensure that their elderly parents have health care coverage in the later stages of life?

Instead of the "feminization of politics," I prefer to think of this phenomenon as the "humanization of politics" in America. What we saw being played out in the political arena was how in a democracy people's personal concerns can become political if they use their voices -- and their votes -- to define them.

That represents a maturing of politics. The gender gap we

heard so much about in the American election was simply a measure of how women, who are experts on the hazards and vicissitudes of life, voted their self interest and their values. In so doing they delivered a clear message that the issues they care about deserve to be on the front burner of national politics.

I have come up with my own term for this phenomenon. Like some of you, I studied political science in college. I have followed politics closely in my years as a citizen activist and political spouse. And I have come to a fairly good understanding of the historic concept of *realpolitik* among and between nations.

What women are saying today -- loudly and clearly -- is that national politics is not just about *realpolitik*. It's also about *real life politik*, how we live together.

I realize there will be women who disagree with me and with each other about specific issues and where the balance of power between and among institutions and individuals should rest. In my country, some women believe the President and Congress over-extended government's power in legislating family leave and the length of maternity hospital stays. In contrast, other women think government needs more power to control economic forces that can disrupt the lives of families and communities.

And some women are just plain squeamish when the subject of power arises. It is something, they believe, that should be discussed quietly behind the scenes and exercised -- if at all -- by women only within the scope of their personal lives.

Regardless of where we stand on any particular issue or on the larger question of balancing the powers in our lives, we must acknowledge that much is at stake for women collectively in this debate. Not just in the United States but here in Australia and around the world.

Will democracies on every continent come to understand that issues affecting women are not soft or marginal, but are central to the progress and prosperity of every nation?

Will public and private institutions help empower women with the tools they need to expand their choices and take responsibility for their lives? And by that I mean, among other things, will education be affordable and accessible to all women so that they can acquire the skills and knowledge they need to help themselves and contribute to society? Will businesses initiate policies that make work more family-friendly, like child care, flexible hours, or parental leave? Will employers value women by paying them equal pay for equal work?

Will law enforcement and justice systems act more

efficiently to protect women from violations of their legal rights, particularly from violence in their own homes?

Will financial institutions provide credit for women -- especially poor women who, with access to small loans, can lift themselves and their families out of poverty?

Will individual women be respected for the choices they make about family, work and personal growth -- and will they be able to make those choices free of the burden of other people's and society's expectations? Will we stop pigeon-holing women and invoking stereotypes that limit their potential? Will we admit that there is no formula for being a successful or fulfilled woman in today's society? That one can choose full-time motherhood and homemaking. Or be committed to work outside the home without marriage or children. Or, like most of us today, balance work and family responsibilities. And that each of our choices will be supported and respected.

Yesterday at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra my husband and I visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. One of the honor guards was a woman. I was heartened that she had the freedom to choose military service as a way to fulfill her aspirations. This was the right choice for her. It would not necessarily be the right choice for me, or for many of you. But we should all be able to celebrate the diversity of experiences that women are choosing for themselves today.

And finally, will we acknowledge, once and for all, that issues of concern to women do not just affect women but affect men too?

These are the questions we are struggling to answer. They are about the balance of power and about the balance we seek in our lives and in the larger community we share.

I welcome the debate. It is a great debate. It is a contentious debate. It is a necessary debate for any democracy on the eve of a new century.

And I am optimistic that women will help to shape the answers we seek. I'm optimistic because I have met women throughout the world who have seized this moment to make their voices heard on behalf of themselves and democracy's values. I have met women in Northern Ireland -- Catholics and Protestants -- who are working together to address the root causes of sectarian violence. I have met women in South Africa -- blacks and whites -- who helped lead the struggle to end apartheid. I have met women in Bosnia -- Croats, Serbs and Muslims -- who are transcending long-standing ethnic hatreds to keep the peace in that war-torn land. I have met women in Russia, Poland, the Czech

Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, the Baltic region and in Mongolia who are leading the effort to build democratic governments, free market economies and civil society from the ruins of dictatorship. I have met women in South America who are joining forces to improve literacy and health care for women and children throughout the continent. And I have met women in South and East Asia who are working to provide economic opportunity for the poorest of the poor through small loans and credit.

I have met women in my own country who have come together to make their streets safer, their schools stronger, and the environment cleaner. And just in the few days I have been here, I have met women who are enriching this nation through their contributions to politics, law, science, education, the arts, journalism and so much else.

Some of the women I have met are famous. But most are not. They are not high-level diplomats or professional negotiators. They have not been elected to office. They aren't wealthy or connected in the right social circles.

They simply took it upon themselves to get organized and to make their voices heard. They had faith in their own capacity to affect change. And they were not going to wait around for someone else to do it for them.

So I am hopeful. Because every country and every time has its Caroline Chisholm, Edith Cowan, and Mother Mary McKillop -- women who, well known or not, understand that we must find common ground. And that on that common ground we will build a society that is in balance, where our democratic values are alive and where individuals can live up to their own God-given potentials.

Mary Wollstonecraft once said "I do not wish women to have power over men, but over themselves."

That is what we are all striving for. This is what will ensure progress for women and their families, safeguard democracy, and make the world a better place for our children and ourselves. That is the challenge women face in the 21st century.

Thank you very much.

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