

Howard Air Force Base

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PRESERVATION

Hillary Rodham Clinton, First Lady of the United States
Remarks at Howard Airforce Base
October 10, 1997

Thank you so much Colonel. And thank all of you. I am delighted to be here and I want to thank the Colonel and Mrs. Trebon for being here, General and Mrs. Kensinger, General and Mrs. Wagner, Captain Long, Lt Col Miller, Lt Col Warmold, Captain Leslie and Ambassador and Mrs. Hughes, and all of you. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to look out at all of the Americans in this hangar. I've had a wonderful two days here in Panama. I have met some people, not only in Panama City, but just now in a small village called Chica, and I have fulfilled a lifelong dream of seeing a ship pass through the locks of the Panama Canal. I actually opened the locks and for any of you who have ever a chance to do that, you know that it is very exciting moment. I will always treasure that. I got a certificate naming me as an honorary lock operator.

But as much as I have enjoyed the last two days here in Panama, my visit would not be complete without coming here to see all of you. The men and women and families of the United States military stationed here in Panama. On behalf of the President, I want to thank you for your outstanding and dedicated service on behalf of our nation. You are helping to fulfill a sacred pledge: to keep the United States the greatest force in the world for peace and freedom security and prosperity. And I want to applaud you and thank you, and I think you should all give yourselves a round of applause because you are the ones who really have earned it today. I understand that this is the 24th Wing Appreciation Day, so let me add my congratulations on the hard work you have done supporting the wings and USSOUTHCOM's change of command and Albrook Airforce base's transfer to the government of Panama.

I also have been told by the Colonel that this is the end of a month-long celebration of our Hispanic heritage. And I want to add my congratulations to you for celebrating what makes up the greatness of America, which is our diversity, which I can see first hand as I look out at this crowd. And what better place to celebrate our Hispanic heritage than here in Panama.

You are serving at a very historic time. As our two countries' partnership at the Canal comes to a close I hope you are proud of the crucial role you have played, are playing, and will play in this transition. Our armed forces have always shown the world what is best about America. You come from all corners of the United States, from every racial, ethnic, and religious background. I remember very well when I was in Bosnia and I went out to two of our outposts, Camp Alicia and Camp Bedrock, and as the helicopters landed, and as I went out to greet the men and women who are representing us there in that very important mission, I saw the faces of America. And as I shook hands I could hear the accents of America and to me it was as important to see America represented there as in any place in the world and I see it again here in Panama.

I want to say a special word of thanks ... that I think we should thank ... thank the heavens for the

rain because I know there hasn't been enough this year in Panama. But I also want to thank the families who are gathered here. Our nation asks military families to live with a lot. Long separation, uncertainties and dangers, and an amazing amount of packing and unpacking. As I have been privileged to travel around our country and around the world visiting bases, I always thank those who stay behind, who have given the troop the support that we need. And I want to thank all of you. And also to tell you that the President is committed to doing everything he possibly can to make the burden on military families as light as humanly possible. Whether it's providing the best child care around, improving schools, or fighting to raise pay.

So I came today to join in your celebration and to thank you for what you do; those of you who are in uniform and those of you who support the men and women in uniform. And to tell you that I will be thinking about you as we go forward with this important transition that will mark yet a different and new way that the United States will continue to show leadership as the greatest nation in the history of the world. Thank you all very much.