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Leadership Trends

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's
Remarks at
Senator Margaret Chase Smith Leadership Awards Ceremony
Womens in Military Service for America Memorial
Washington, D.C.
June 11, 1998**

I have to tell you I would do whatever General Vaught tells me. You cannot imagine the terror that went through my heart when I realized that the day of the dedication conflicted with a scheduled obligation that I had with my husband. I avoided, as long as I could, telling him the lot. Despite the fact that I am the honorary chair, and privileged to be so, and that I had attended the very first luncheon that we had where we introduced this idea I confess that I once tried to enlist and the young marine recruiter took one look at me and said we're not interested but then again maybe the dogs are. I never understood what that meant until I moved to Washington.

And so I love that this foundation has been very important to me and the fact that I wasn't bigger when I believe there were far more than thirty-six thousand others who were there, I think it was probably closer to fifty thousand or more even I've looked at the picture just a few minutes ago. So all I can say General Vaught I take this new mission very seriously. I will do all that I can to ensure that my husband has an opportunity to come here and to tour the entire memorial. And I will do it as soon as I am able to get it done. Because I know that I will not rest easy and you will not rest easy and will not let me rest easy until it's done.

But I'm so proud of what has been accomplished. I'm so proud of General Vaught because she has really given all she has, and that's a lot, to making this count. I have been delighted over the last four years to meet so many women veterans. I know there are many of you in this crowd I see Sarah McClendon, that famous White House reporter who herself is a veteran. I'm delighted that she is here. You represent so many other women who have served our country proudly and with honor since the Revolutionary war.

This memorial serves as a reminder that women have always been willing to do our part for our country. Not all of us have served in uniform but we honor and respect those of you who have. And we can still see and feel the importance of the words that are etched in the sky by these above. The words of a World War II army nurse calling out to us still "Let the generations know that women in uniform also guaranteed their freedom that our resolve was just as great as the brave men who stood among us and with victory our hearts were just as full and beat just as fast that the tears feel just as hard for those we left behind."

I would like every American to visit this memorial. I have just learned that perhaps half a million will this very first year. It is such a fitting tribute not only, to the women who served but also, to the country that inspired and supported such service. So generations will know because

of this memorial and visionaries like General Vaught and all of you who have helped turn this dream of a memorial into a reality. Generations will now know the stories of almost two million women who have defended our nation, sometimes hiding their identity, sometimes ignored or derided, but serving as well as possible.

So many of you here have stories to tell us. I hope there is an oral history project associated with this memorial because I would love to hear the many many voices of women veterans recorded for generations to come. I would like the generations to come to hear the story for example, of Mary Hallaren. When she enlisted in 1942 a recruiter asked her what someone of her size, four feet ten inches tall, could do in the army? She responded, I'm told, "you don't have to be six feet tall and a male to have a brain that works." And she told him commanding the first first battalion at Wax to go to England.

I also hope generations will hear the story of Elaine Helene Coxhead who served in World War I. So proud was she of her service that for more than seventy years she carried her ID tag with her everywhere she went. It is now on display at the memorial. I believe her daughter, Diane Mackel, is here with us today. So I hope that all the stories of all the women veterans will be collected and used here to tell what we have all been proud of over the generations of the past that men and women have been willing to step forward to defend our country and the values that it represents.

We will also remember those women who helped use laws and sheer moral force to pry open the doors that all women in military service now can proudly walk through. And no woman did more than the woman whose example inspired the award we present today, the Senator who fifty years ago made permanent call for women in the Army, Navy, Airforce and Marine Corps, Senator Margaret Chase Smith. You know I've always admired her spunk and independence and you know when she was running for president, or talking about running for president, more realistically, in 1964 she explained to the National Womens Press Club that like every woman she didn't have the clout the money or the time. Doesn't that sound familiar? And then in characteristic fashion she said so because of these very impelling reasons against my running I have decided that I shall enter the New Hampshire primary. Well I can imagine that that kind of logic and that forcefulness was very much on the minds of many of the women who are veterans with us and even some of the women who are currently in our armed forces. Well for all the reasons I shouldn't, I'll just go ahead and do it anyway.

Even when the decks were stacked against Senator Smith she never gave up, she never gave up on the idea that the best military in the world needed the best of all our citizens, men and women. She once wrote that "public service must be born in doing a job efficiently and honestly; it must be complete dedication to the nation with full recognition that every human being is entitled to courtesy and consideration. That honor is to be earned not bought." And I wish that her declaration of conscious were printed up in thousands of copies and passed out on a regular basis to people who visit Washington. In it, she made very clear what it meant to have a conscious in the acts and public service and stand against the tide of public opinion.

We are honored today to be able to make the first award to someone who is so deserving, the former Secretary of Defense, William Perry. Bill Perry has done so much to further the cause of our national defense to modernize our armed forces but I think all of us who knew Bill Perry when he served and know him now when he continues to do such important work for our nation remember most and admire most is the way he cared so much about the men and women in uniform.

They used to joke at the Pentagon they weren't sure if he ever actually existed because they never saw him around there but you could find him any where in the world where Americans were serving in uniform. At military bases, on the Seven Seas, in Bosnia at Thanksgiving, in Macedonia during Christmas. He liked to call it Management by Walking around. He really listened to the men and women that he visited. He went to Kuwait, for example, he talked to soldiers about their confidence in their young female commander. He and his wife Lee traveled to remote bases to talk to troops about their everyday concerns like healthcare and housing. When he met the first women sailors to serve on an aircraft carrier, he asked one who was a year away from retiring why she had volunteered; she said she wanted to be able to tell her grandchildren she had been a real sailor.

What Bill Perry heard from our troops on the road, he took to heart and brought back to the Pentagon and put into action. He never demanded credit, but he always demanded results. Under his watch, more than two hundred and fifty thousand new positions were open to women. He oversaw the first women assigned to navy combat ships, the first women voted to a three star rank, and women assuming top jobs all over the Pentagon. He made it clear his support for women's progress and support for this memorial and went all the way to the top.

To Secretary Perry opening the doors to the US military to our best citizens in the finest tradition of Margaret Chase Smith was not just the right thing to do, it was the smart thing to do. He worked as hard as he knew how to make it happen. Standing by his side was his wife Lee Perry; Lee was with him on so many of those trips listening just as hard and taking back the concerns that she heard not only from those who served but the dependents who were there along with our men and women in uniform. That's when I first began talking with Lee and Bill about what we needed to do to upgrade housing and improve childcare to deal with some of the everyday living challenges that our troops have to face. So in a very real way this award is for both Bill and Lee Perry. I'm particularly honored to present the Margaret Chase Smith Leadership award to Dr. William Perry which will be accepted by his wife Lee Perry.