

Breast Cancer Coalition
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FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

DRAFT REMARKS TO NATIONAL BREAST CANCER COALITION

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Thank you. It has been one of my greatest honors over the last 6 years to get to know the members of the National Breast Cancer Coalition and see the amazing results borne of activists who stand up, speak out, and always demand results. I will never forget when you came to the White House with the signatures of 2.6 million Americans who told us they wanted a National Action Plan on Breast Cancer. With your leadership, this public-private partnership has worked tirelessly to reach one goal: the complete eradication of breast cancer.

I will also always remember my very first meeting with this coalition in Williamsburg during the 1992 campaign. Not only because of how inspired I was by your stories of courage and commitment. But, also because of what it took for you to get there -- literally. For those of you who don't know this, the bus that Fran and others took from Washington to Williamsburg broke down that day. So, did they give up, call the bus equivalent of AAA, and go back home? Not a chance. They hitch-hiked all the way to Williamsburg -- climbing into Sheriff's Cars and trucks to make it there. And I would add, on time.

Now, if there are children in the audience, none of us are recommending

hitch-hiking as a preferred mode of transportation. But what struck me that day is that, even in the face of great obstacles, you didn't give up. What I have learned since then, is that you never give up. Especially the survivors in this room, who have courageously and continuously turned pain into action...on behalf of all women, all families, all men who have a sister or mother, a wife or daughter.

As I got ready to come here today, I started flipping through some newspaper clips from the last few years. Not always the most uplifting way to start a week -- but in this case it was. Here are some of the headlines I found: From The New York Times this month: "Breast Cancer Breakthrough." From the AP May 8, 1996: "Breast Cancer Deaths Continue to Decline." And here's my personal favorite. "Formation of Coalition was Watershed in Funding." That's from the Chicago Tribune one year ago. And it's about you.

Back when we met in 1992, who would have thought that we'd see funding for breast cancer research, treatment and prevention nearly double? That the President would propose a 65 percent increase in cancer research? Or that we'd dramatically expand the Department of Defense breast cancer research program and have survivors serving on review panels?

Who'd have thought that increases in funding for genetic research would help us discover genes linked to hereditary breast cancer? That Tamoxifen would give us such hope? Or that genetic fingerprinting would offer the potential of predicting which women will relapse so that we can aggressively treat them before the disease strikes again.

Who'd have thought that the number of women getting recommended mammograms would increase by 30 percent? I am very proud that Medicare now pays for annual mammograms for all beneficiaries over 40...and that we've waged a campaign to make sure older women use this benefit.

These victories all have one thing in common: the fingerprints of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. Because you have literally changed the way we think about breast cancer. More than 25 years ago, one of my predecessors Betty Ford, brought this disease out of the shadows. You put it at the top of the agenda. And you had a President who was on your side every step of the way.

My husband has a very personal commitment to this issue, because, as you know, his mother died in 1994 from breast cancer. Those of you who knew Virginia Kelly will remember that she never wanted anyone to feel sorry for her. As with every other adversity she faced, she looked her cancer square in the eye, then put on her lipstick and went on with her celebration of life. She was always a

great inspiration to us -- and never more so than in her last moments as she crossed the country to help prevent breast cancer and heal those it strikes.

She kept a sampler by her makeup table that read, "Lord help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today that You and I can't handle." Clearly, there will be great obstacles. And clearly, our work is far from done. But, if we stick it out and stick together, there is nothing we cannot handle or accomplish.

Together, we can ban genetic discrimination -- and we should work day and night to ensure that a bill passes this year. No woman should be scared to walk into a doctor's office for fear that her genetic secrets will be used to deny her the job she wants or the affordable health insurance she needs.

Together, we can expand coverage for Medicare cancer clinical trials. And together, we can make sure that whether people choose managed care or traditional care, they always get quality care. We need a patient's bill of rights.

And we need a fight against breast cancer that uses every weapon at our disposal. Yes, our first priority should be finding a cure. And, we must do everything in our power to fund the research that will find that cure...research that will help develop treatments to stop the disease in its tracks.

But, we also need education -- education that reaches all women...especially

poor and minority women who have too often not reaped the benefits of our progress on breast cancer. We need prevention. We need mammography screenings that help us catch breast cancer early so we can treat it immediately. We need all of it -- and much much more.

If we do that, if we work together, then one day, I pray in the not so distant future, we will be able to write the best headline of all: the one that says, Breast Cancer is History. Thank you for making history every day.