

OPENING & CLOSING REMARKS
AT WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE
PARIS 5/13/98

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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OPENING REMARKS BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT WOMEN'S ROUND TABLE

SENAT
Paris, France
May 13, 1998

Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here and have this opportunity to hear from all of you this morning. I can only echo what Madame Chirac said about our day yesterday in Corrèze. It was very interesting and it was fun, and I enjoyed meeting the people and seeing that part of France. I am hoping, in this exchange of opinions, to learn more about what is happening in France, and to learn more about what we have in common, as women who are interested in issues and what is happening in our countries, and around the world. So, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be here, and I look forward to the discussion.

Thank you.

U.S. EMBASSY

(Paris, France)

May 13, 1998

CLOSING REMARKS BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON AT WOMEN'S ROUND TABLE

SENAT
Paris, France
May 13, 1998

Let me thank all of you for sharing so many experiences and ideas. I've taken lots of notes. There are some obvious similarities in our experiences and in our national life; the balance between work and family is a problem in every advanced democracy and advanced economy, and it is something that we are not addressing with the attention that it needs, although I believe that your efforts to try to provide support for child rearing and bearing are certainly essential to giving women a chance to be equal but not identical -- which I think is a very good phrase. There are some significant differences, however, between our two countries, and I wanted to go back to the question about parity, and quotas and affirmative action. Our affirmative action policy never imposed quotas, and it was never applied to our political life. It was applicable to university admissions, to job selection and promotion, and I believe it has been a great success. Now, you may know that we are having a rather vigorous debate in the United States about whether, and how to continue affirmative action, and my husband has a phrase which I think is very appropriate -- he said we should mend, not end, affirmative action, and I think that is what we are trying to do, but there are many in our country opposed to any form of affirmative action.

A very significant difference between our two countries with respect to politics, is that the parties in my country do not slate candidates, they do not select candidates. Every person, man and woman, who wishes to run self-selects. A woman who decides she wants to be in politics, decides whether she wants to run as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent, or as a member of a minor party, and then she has to contest for that position often against other people in the party, and then she often has to contest against those from other parties, in order to be elected. So there is no way we could ever have a parity or quota system, because we don't have a party system the way you have a party system here. We have also a very significant difference in that our campaigns require an enormous amount of time for fund-raising. I'm sure you've seen stories about that in your media here, but for any person to run for office, they get very little financial support from their parties, so they must go out and raise the money or contribute it, if they're wealthy enough, from their own funds in order to

be a viable candidate. I've often believed that a parliamentary system is more likely to advance women than the kind of system we have, because parties can slate women, because when you are in a parliamentary caucus as a member of a party, you can get to know your colleagues, and they can judge you, and they can advance you through the parliamentary system to emerge as a prime minister, for example. Now, I'm very interested in the comment that was made that voters don't discriminate between women and men in France, and that a woman could be elected president in France. I think that it would have been very difficult for the women who have been prime ministers in the countries I am aware of, such as England, such as India, such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Turkey, to be elected by their voters. But they could be selected by their colleagues, because their colleagues got to know them as an individual, and they could say: "she does a good job. I really like working with her". Because when a woman stands for election among a very big electorate, all of the issues about how she looks, how she acts, whether she had children, whether she was a good mother, whether she was a good wife, all of those issues are played out in a very big electorate, and unlike Madame Chirac whom I was with yesterday in Corrèze, who could go door to door in her canton, so the people could look in her eyes, they could know her, they could vote for her because she shook their hand, she sat at their dining room table, she talked about their cows, when a woman runs in a large electorate, stereotypes are very often how voters think about women, because they are not likely, personally, to meet a woman running for the president of the United States or the president of France. So I think that we have to be realistic in confronting the difficulty that women have in moving up the political ladder, in larger and larger constituencies. Now, we do have two women that represent our largest state in our Senate. We have two women senators from California, and both of them are very able politicians; we have a woman senator from several of our larger states, so we've made progress in women being elected from large electorates, but our country has many different regions with different attitudes toward women, so that it would be much more difficult for a woman to be elected from some of our states than from other states. So it's going to be a challenge for women, but I am interested in what you said that a woman could be elected president of France, and I'd love to watch and see that happen in some future date, because I think it's very hard for a woman to hold herself out to a big electorate, and overcome all of the stereotypes and the difficulties that are thrown at women in the political world.

Question: (French)

Mrs. Clinton: No. But I do believe that we will have a woman run for president in the next, I would hope, ten years. Because there are enough women in the political pipe-line -- women Senators, women Governors, and because our system is so different, women in business, women can enter into our system very easily, just by having enough courage and resources to compete. So I think that we will see a woman run for president, and it will be interesting when that happens as to whether it will demonstrate some of what we have said here today, that women perhaps bring a different sensibility, women raise different issues, because there is a political theory, that for women to be elected the leader of her country, she must be more in the eyes of the voters like a man, and she must be very strong, very tough, very decisive, very determined, and that this sense of comparability will reassure voters who vote for such a woman. We'll just have to wait and see what happens.