

Renaissance Weekend
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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AND MRS. CLINTON
AT RENAISSANCE WEEKEND

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THE PRESIDENT: First of all, let me say, we're delighted to be here, Hillary and Chelsea and I, and we love the remarks that were just made and the songs. And we have, for the last couple of years, answered questions from the audience and, normally, started by saying a couple of things.

It might be interesting for you to know that I thought a lot of good things happened in 1998. And so today -- (applause) -- this is not a complete list and it's just in my hen-scratching, but I just sat down and wrote a list of things that happened this year that I was grateful for.

I'm grateful that we had the first balanced budget in 29 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, and 17 million new jobs since I took the oath of office; the lowest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years, home ownership for over two-thirds of the American people for the first time ever; the biggest wage increase in 20 years, the lowest African American poverty rate ever recorded; the lowest crime rate in 24 years, 90 percent of our kids immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time; cleaner air, cleaner water, record number of toxic dumps cleaned up; the largest amount of land set aside for protection in the last six years, counting 1998, than in any administration except those of the two Roosevelts. We had our 100,000th AmeriCorps volunteer. We had the President's initiative on race, which I thought was a wonderful thing in communities throughout the country. We had—the Congress passed a bill to put 100,000 teachers in the classrooms, and to provide after-school programs for 200,000 kids in difficult circumstances.

Hillary and I got to go to Africa. We went to China to strengthen our relationships there. We saw the completion of the peace process—almost the completion—in Northern Ireland that we worked on for years. We had the Wye peace agreement with the Middle East. I went to Russia when they were in terrible shape economically to try to show our support. I'm grateful I had a chance to do it.

We spent 53 percent of the money that was spent in the entire world last year trying to rid the world of the dangers of land mines that are buried throughout the world.

Hillary led a Millennium Project entitled, Honoring the Past and Imagining the Future, that among other things, that is leading us to record investments in research; saving Old Glory, the homes of people like Thomas Edison and Harriet Tubman, and bringing people to the White

House to exalt all kinds of learning -- the physicist, Stephen Hawking; the jazz genius, Wynton Marsalis; Robert Pinsky and the last four Poets Laureate of America.

I'm grateful for all those things. I think that's a pretty good year and I'm pleased by that. (Applause.)

What I want to say to you is I don't really think it's a time for self-congratulations—not for me, not for our country—because America is working again, but we still really haven't come to grips with those challenges of the 21st century which we do understand, which we know will be there. And I'll just mention a few.

Our population will age rapidly and we have to do something to save Social Security and Medicare in a way that doesn't bankrupt our children; and to deal with long-term care and other challenges of getting older. Our average age went above 76 this year. That is a high-class problem. I like it more as I get along. But we have to deal with it.

We have challenges of children, especially as more and more of our children are immigrant children whose first language is not English. I go into school after school after school where kids speak—elementary schools -- 8, 10, 12 languages; school districts where they speak 50, 60 languages. And we don't have 21st century schools for all of our kids, and we can't stop until we do.

We have a number of environmental challenges, the most serious of which is that of global warming, climate change. There is virtually no scientific dispute about it anymore; it is clearly the most serious challenge that these young people will face. And closely related to that is the rather dramatic degradation of the quality of our oceans. And I hope that young people will be able to reach across partisan and philosophical divides to create a unanimous consensus for doing something serious on this. It doesn't exist, unfortunately, among your parents' generation, but you can help us to do it.

The economy will have a number of challenges for you. We have to put a human face on the global economy. The global economy creates more millionaires, but too many average citizens don't believe it benefits them. They think it plunders the labor of children, the environmental resources of some countries, it doesn't benefit ordinary working people and others. We have to put a human face on the global trading system.

We have to stabilize the global financial system, which is moving \$1.5 trillion worth of money across national borders every day, and risks running out of control, as you've seen in the last several months. We still have to bring the benefits of free enterprise into the poorest neighborhoods of America.

Finally, the United States will have to continue to bring the benefits of stability and peace and prosperity wherever it can. It is in our interest to do so and it is our obligation to do so. There are all kinds of pressures on national governments today, but you've seen what happened in Russia when the government is not strong enough to do the basic things government has to do. We can talk more about that later if you want.

But we have to be a force for peace—between Greece and Turkey; between India and Pakistan. We have to finish the work in the Balkans. We have to continue to fight against the proliferation

of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons. And we have to do it because it is our responsibility to do it and because it is in our interest to do it.

Finally, let me say that I think—I heard what the previous speaker said—if you ask me what I have learned as President, working in the Middle East, working in the Balkans, working in Northern Ireland, dealing with the conflicts among people, the religious, the racial, the ethnic conflicts, I have learned, I believe, that at root they are psychologically identical to the racial conflicts I saw as a boy growing up in the South in the '50s. And I think the single most important decision any person has to make in life as a citizen—it has a lot to do with personal happiness, too—is whether you will define your life in terms of what you share with other people or in the terms of what about you is different from them and superior to them; and whether you really need somebody to look down on.

Because if you look at what's going on in the religious

- how in the wide world could my people in Ireland still be arguing over things that happened over 600 years ago? When the children of the Protestants and the Catholics were—they were wanting to get together a long time before their adults followed suit.

If you were living in Bosnia, would it be rational to you, if you were a Muslim, to fight with the Croatian Christians or the Serbian Orthodox Christians, when together you could make the place a garden spot in the Balkans; and when you fight, you just turned it into a desert for everybody? It doesn't make any sense.

But if you go back home and you listen to the way people talk about their neighbors, the way they deal with people who differ with them, it's at bottom all the same. You have to decide in the end whether you believe that your common humanity is more important than your discreet differences. And I believe you can only fully relish your diversity, your differences, what's unique about you, if you appreciate at bottom your common humanity.

I have worked and worked and worked to advance the cause of community in America and throughout the world. And down to my last day in office I will do so, because I believe that the planet's ability to come to grips with any challenge, whether it's climate change or putting a human face on the global economy or dealing with the challenges of terrorism, depends at bottom on having a critical mass of people who know at a fundamental, gut level, that what we have in common is far more important than what differentiates us one from another.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. LADER: Thank you very much. There are lots of things we want to talk about tonight, but I have a certain bias. Living in London, may I just quote our older daughter, to her embarrassment, I'm sure. But after we'd been there a few weeks she said, Mommy, the news is so different here—in America it's all about us; and here, it's about the world. And those of you who have traveled and lived overseas or are from other countries know how we can be so preoccupied.

Another thing I hear often in London is, we need you, as the one world power, we need you to focus on the things that are important. And so I'm going to focus first, questions tonight on

international issues or scenes. There are two here that I'm going to give you to read, while I ask the First Lady one or two. They focus on the Middle East, they focus on Africa, that—you reflected on your visit to Africa. And I know that you, as First Lady, Hillary, went and visited in Central America, to the suffering that was there. And I'd like you first to comment on your trip there, and then perhaps the President could comment further on African and the Middle East.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I did go shortly after Hurricane Mitch wreaked its terrible havoc on four countries, principally -- two very dramatically, Nicaragua and Honduras—and then El Salvador and Guatemala. And I was struck by the extraordinary reaction of the leaders with whom I spoke because, of course, they were dealing with the day-to-day emergencies caused by losing so much of their infrastructure, such a great loss of life. But what they were particularly worried about were several things that they raised with me and, again—going to what Linda just said—showing the interconnection that many people outside of our country feel toward us, whether we recognize it or not.

And the first was the problem of all of the immigrants from Central America who live in the United States. Every leader with whom I met—all four of the Presidents raised with me their grave concern that the United States not continue to deport to Central America citizens from those countries because they had nowhere to house them, nowhere to put them to work; but even more than that, because they were working in the United States they were sending home a great deal of money that was important for the continuing economic opportunities that they would need to rebuild.

The second was their request that we treat our neighbors in Central America more favorably with respect to trade, so that they could begin to try to reestablish their economic foundations. The third was that we try in the United States to remember how much time, money, effort and political will was spent in the 1980s, particularly in Nicaragua and El Salvador, to try to bring about democratic regimes. And now that those countries are democratic—and in the case of El Salvador, have been at peace for six years, and in Guatemala for just two years—they were extremely worried that this terrible natural disaster would set back the economic and, in particular, the democratic reforms and gains that have been made.

And they just were really imploring me and any other American with whom they met—members of Congress, other members of the administration—to please recognize how interconnected and interdependent they felt they were with us, whether or not the United States even covers what happens in those countries.

And, of course, they're right. The grave concerns that they expressed were rooted in reality. And I think it will be a real test of how mature our political system is and how well we recognize that interdependence as we in the next month or two think about what we're going to do to help our neighbors in Central America.

Clearly, many people there will help themselves by trying to continue the journey north, to come across our borders -- they have nowhere else to go, they think, to escape from the combination of economic depravation and now, natural disaster. And I think we have an extraordinary opportunity to demonstrate that we recognize that what we spent all that time and money on in the 1980s to try to ensure that they were democracies was not just a passing fancy, but a commitment to democratic principles, and a willingness to stand behind them to help them

recover from these disasters and to go on with the kind of reforms that were making such a difference there.

So I came back and, of course, talked with not only my husband, but other members of the administration and members of Congress. And I'm hopeful that we'll be able to have a positive response that will really mean something to the people in those countries after the disasters had passed and the immediate humanitarian aid is over. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Let me just say on that subject, I'm very proud of the fact, and so should you be, that tonight while we're here in this beautiful, comfortable place, there are several thousand American men and women in uniform who are still working in Central America to rebuild the roads and schools, the hospitals, to make sure that life can return to normal as quickly as possible. And I do think we should make a substantial investment in the long-term rebuilding of the country. We have a big investment, I agree with what Hillary said about that.

I have two questions here. One is: I would like to know what your administration can do, or is planning to do, to help stop the suffering of the African people. This is someone writing me a letter saying he was glad we went to Africa.

Let me say, we are working on several fronts. First of all, we have an aggressive effort to improve health conditions in countries that have health problems. We have a very important effort to build economic self-sufficiency in remote African villages with a program that Hillary has been very involved with, to provide small loans primarily to village women to start their own businesses. We have invested a lot of money in trying to promote democracy and systems of justice that would protect people from human rights abuses. And when countries have turned away from a bad history toward a brighter future, like Uganda, we've done a lot of work with them to try to help them succeed.

Right now, the biggest problem in sub-Saharan Africa is the turmoil in the Congo. And we are involved with a lot of countries there, trying to settle that down and prevent another major humanitarian disaster from occurring. And over the long run, we've got an Africa trade bill that I hope the Congress will pass, that will help us to do more business with African countries that are doing well. A lot of these countries, last year—eight or nine of them—grew at more than six percent last year. And we can do a lot of business there in a way that builds them up and helps them and helps ourselves.

Finally, let me say we have strongly, strongly supported the restoration of democracy in Nigeria. It's the biggest country on the continent. It's very hard for Africa to do well if Nigeria is in turmoil. And I'm looking forward to the transformation of Nigeria back to genuine democratic rule that observes human rights. And I think if that happens next year as it's scheduled to, you will see a lot of progress in Africa in a hurry.

The most troubling thing going on right now is the terrible impending conflict that's been impending for months and months now between Ethiopia and Eritrea, two countries headed by young leaders that both Hillary and I know well, who once were great allies and now seem determined to fight with each other—and both of whom, by the way, another harbinger of the 21st century, have hired former pilots of the Russian Air Force as mercenaries to fly their airplanes, so that people who once flew in uniform together may actually be fighting each other over the skies of Eritrea and Ethiopia—in my view, a totally uncalled for war.

But, on balance, in spite of that, Africa is going in the right direction. It is more democratic and has a more open economic set of possibilities than it did a few years ago.

Now, the Middle East questions are, very quickly: Is it fear of each other and the unknown, or the inability to accept half a loaf that keeps extremists on each side from allowing peace to go forward in the Middle East?

The answer to that is, a little bit of both. Basically, everybody knows, I think, who's ever thought about it, that there will never be any ultimate peace in the Middle East between the Palestinians and the Israelis until there is some sort of land for peace for security agreement. And it's really land for peace with security.

They have so much to give each other that they have not given. I was in Gaza recently—you know, we went to Gaza for a meeting of the Palestinian National Council, where they voted to irrevocably get rid of all the things in their Charter that call for the destruction of Israel. And Gaza is a very poor place, with a whole lot of people. But they have 47 kilometers of beautiful, beautiful beachfront on the Mediterranean. If we could ever settle the place down and get everything going all right, they could make a fortune there, I think, in new investments. I invite you to invest in Gaza. (Laughter.)

But I think that ultimately both sides are going to have to understand that they're either going to live together in armed camps and mutual isolation with occasional eruption of terrorism, or they're going to find a way to get land for peace and security.

The real problem is that every time something bad happens it helps the extremists to shut it down. And the extremists on both sides have a big stake in having something bad happen. So every time Mr. Arafat tries to do the right thing, then the people in Hamas or the Islamic Jihad want to have a terrorist incident. And every time Mr. Netanyahu would want to try to move toward peace, the people on the right wing in Israeli politics would try to force him to do something like build a settlement in a place that would inflame Arab opinion or do something else that would make it harder to keep the process going forward.

So the answer is just to keep working at it—like we did at the Wye.

The other question is: Is it time to involve Syria and Lebanon in the peace talks under the same land for peace agreement? The answer to that is, not while elections are pending in Israel, probably. Maybe after the elections they can also take up the Syrian issue and the Lebanese issue. I would like that very much.

MS. LADER: I would like to go on with international issues, but I think we should turn to another, and that is education. Again, I'm going to give you some education questions to peruse, Mr. President. I will tell the crowd that it has to do with science in schools; two questions on foreign languages in schools; and some general questions, especially on how to get and motivate young people to go into teaching.

While the President is looking over that, I would like to ask you, as I think others would like to ask you, what you would do—the number one thing you would do, Hillary, if you could, to change the educational system or improve education in America. That was one of the questions.

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know where to start, other than to say I think that there is irrefutable evidence that parental expectations and parental attention have more to do with educational

outcomes than any institution -- (applause) -- and that if we could do more to invest in parental education and provide more opportunities for families to understand how they can best be their children's first teachers, it would set up the rising expectations and better prepare children for the challenges of schooling that we would all hope that they could meet.

And there are a number of programs and ways of doing this, and I'll just quickly mention a few that are very promising and I think deserve more support and involvement. For the last couple of years I've been trying to support programs that did reach out to families that, themselves, did not have much experience with the education system. We now know, for example, that home visiting—and I've talked with several of you about this in the past—home visiting by trained people, such as experienced nurses or former teachers, others who have the expertise to communicate effectively, has had an incredibly positive effect on increasing parental confidence and competence. And there's a long-term research study out of Elmira, New York, which shows that it also has positive social benefits as well as increasing parental involvement with children.

And I think that we should do more to identify families that might be in need of such continuing assistance early on. Hawaii used to have a great investment in a healthy start program where families would be visited shortly after a baby was born in the hospital and asked if they'd like somebody to come around and help. And it was a total voluntary program. And many families said "no"; but the families which said "yes" were often young families, families that faced multiple challenges and the controlled research demonstrated clearly that having a responsible adult interact with such families was a very stabilizing influence and led to some positive results.

Secondly, there has been some wonderful work done, started in Boston by a group of pediatricians, where reading is now being prescribed to families that bring children in for their vaccinations and other kinds of well-child visits, or even to the emergency room. And prescribing a book and encouraging families to read to children may seem like a very simple thing, but we know that it is one of those small, simple ways that can really enhance vocabulary and better prepare children for school.

Organized programs, like Early Head Start and Head Start and good early quality programs—whether they're in a center setting or whether they're in a home—like a program that I'm fond of, the Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters, which started in Israel—all have the effect of not only involving the child and perhaps conveying certain skills to that child which will then be useful in school, but, more importantly over the long run, raising the educational expectations of parents and enabling parents to feel comfortable with the education process, to know what to demand from their schools. Because certainly parents, whether they're in public or any other school setting, have to do more to make sure that the schools are responsive.

So if I could do one thing, it would be to imbue with long-term consequences each parent with the understanding that that parent is a child's first teacher; and then to have that parent acquire the skills to be able to prepare his or her child and learn how better to interact with the school system so that every child would have a chance to be supported at home and at school, which would have the best educational outcomes over the long run. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Here are a couple of quick questions:

Do you think the country can support foreign languages in K-6 schools? My district teaches French, Spanish, Italian and Latin in all our elementary schools; Japanese and Russian and others in other schools. That's pretty impressive.

What I believe is that every district should have either a language center where the kids can go, starting in elementary school, or one elementary school in the district that specializes in foreign languages, so that children that have a particular interest can go there. But I think we ought to try to get all of our students to taking foreign languages when they're in elementary school. And it may be that, economically, the only way a lot of districts can afford it is to create a language center and then bus the kids in for a couple of hours a day. But I think it's very important.

The next question: How can we encourage the best of our college students to enter the field of teaching? I think, first of all, by honoring it. Everyone knows they're not going to get rich as a teacher. So if the money is important, then you can't do it. But I think, really, we try to honor the Teachers of the Year every year at the White House; we try to really emphasize the Master Teacher program and the National Certification Board for Master Teachers.

And then one thing that I have been able to do that I feel very strongly about is giving scholarships or giving young people a chance, in effect, to pay off their college loans by teaching in underserved areas for a period of years. I think that's very important. (Applause.)

We got enough through the Congress last year—I can't remember—for a few thousand teachers, and I'm going to try to get several thousand more through in this year's budget, so that we can go to young people and say, look, if you will go into an underserved area, an urban or rural area, and teach for four years, that's how you can pay your loans off. And I think that that's a very good thing to do.

We just talked about language instruction in the schools. We're having some problems getting enough qualified teachers to teach all these different languages. And I think in those areas it's very important that every—a lot of these things have to be done at the state level, not the national level, but I think every state should have an alternative certification procedure so that if there are people who know the language and haven't been to an education school in the state, they can still find a way to get certified so people can be taught.

But I think the answer to the English-only movement in America is to say, well, of course, English is the language of the United States, but all American kids should be taking other languages, as well. Everybody should be able to read English and speak English; but kids whose first language is English also ought to be studying other languages, and not a year is too soon to start.

So I hope we can see more of that. I think that you will, just by virtue of the increasing diversity of the school districts. The children will be interested in learning one another's languages. And if the teachers are there and the courses are offered, I think that they will be taken.

MS. LADER: Next, let's address Social Security. "Mr. President, you've made a commitment to Social Security and the remainder of your term offers an opportunity to make necessary changes in the Social Security system. What lessons did you learn"—and I'm going to ask the First Lady to comment first—

"in the health care reform initiative, which will allow you to avoid the pitfalls which made that effort difficult?"

And then, "What are we going to do about Social Security? What role will you play in saving Social Security?"

But first, the First Lady.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, me first?

MS. LADER: Just reflecting on health care and Social Security.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, two little subjects that—

(laughter) -- they may be little, but there are those who love them both. (Laughter.)

Well, I'm not sure we could have passed Social Security in 1993 and 1994. (Laughter.) I'm not sure that Franklin Roosevelt could have passed Social Security in 1993 and 1994. (Laughter and applause.) But we sure couldn't pass a complicated health care plan in 1993 and 1994. So the first advice I would have anyone who's interested, is whatever you do, don't make it longer than a paragraph. (Laughter.) And if anybody asks you what it means, just say—as they did when they passed Social Security in the '30s—we'll just fill in the blanks later.

And I think that there is some real truth to that, because you cannot in a democracy make any kind of big changes if people don't understand them and if people can't follow where it is you're trying to head. And so certainly there is still a very big need for health care reform. But the next time it is tried or undertaken, there will have to be a much greater consensus in the country and a much greater awareness of what the proposed changes would mean for there to be any kind of agreed upon legislation.

And I think the same will have to be true in the upcoming Social Security debate. People know Social Security now. It is something that has been organic. What it is today is not exactly what it was in the 1930s. It serves a variety of purposes. It is a fundamental guarantee for not only older people, but, importantly, for people who also derive benefits from some of the ancillary programs that are now part of Social Security. So I think that the debate will have to be as broad as possible to involve as many Americans as possible.

And my only concern is, that just like with the health care debate, there is a great opportunity for vested interest to dominate the debate through paid advertising and through other means of communication that tilt the debate in such a way that all the voices are not heard equally and not given weight in terms of their legitimate interest in the subject. So I'm hoping that with Social Security there will be a better opportunity for all of the various issues to be explored.

And the only other thing I would say—because it's a particular concern of mine—is that the particular burdens that women bear as we age and because there are more of us living longer than men, means that this debate over Social Security is particularly important to women. And it may not be something that many women yet recognize, but the decisions made about what will be done with the Social Security system will have a much greater, a disproportionate impact on the lives of women. More than half the women in America over the age of 65 would be living below the poverty line were it not for their Social Security payments.

So whatever is done to Social Security, I hope we'll pay a special attention to the needs that older women face now and into the future. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say a brief word about health care. Health care in some ways presented a more difficult challenge than Social Security because 85 percent of the people had health insurance and were pretty happy with it in 1993. Now you have seen—but what we were trying to do is to protect people's quality of health care who were going to be in managed care plans and might lose certain rights, and find a way to get the other 15 percent of the people health insurance coverage. And doing it was complicated and it was easy for people to become scared.

I would like to point out, however, that now there's an overwhelming consensus across partisan lines that we ought to have a patients' bill of rights for people that are in HMOs. (Applause.)

The second thing I'd like to point out is that there is a significantly higher percentage of people without health insurance, adults without health insurance today, than there was when we tried to pass a health care plan. So we're either going to have to find a way to insure these people or, otherwise, to make health care affordable to them.

Now, Social Security—very, very briefly, I'll tell you, we need to understand what the problem is. The problem is that we're all living longer. And a lot of us who are living longer aren't having as many kids. In 30 years there will only be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. And as Hillary said, a third of the Social Security benefits go to people who are disabled or who are survivors of people who die in their wage earning years.

And the Social Security checks will not be sufficient to cover the Social Security payments—that is, the taxes won't cover the payments—in about 17 years. In 34 years, the trust fund will be out. If we do nothing for 34 years, then in 2033, my successors in interest will have to either cut Social Security benefits 20 percent and drive tens of millions of people into poverty, or raise your taxes 20 percent and lower the standard of living of middle class families all across America. If we move now, we can make modest changes.

There are only three ways to deal with this. You can cut taxes. You can cut benefits. You can raise taxes, you can cut benefits or you can increase the rate of return of the investments in Social Security. Everybody wants to get as much of this problem solved by raising the return as possible. Right now all the Social Security money is invested in government bonds. They pay low interest, but they're 100 percent certain. The question is, how much risk are you willing to take to earn a higher rate of return? Who will bear the risk? Will the fund, itself, invest in the stock market? Or will we give all the young people here individual accounts and let them make their own decisions.

There are problems with all that. What am I going to do about it? I will do one of two things. I will either propose a plan specifically or have a process in which I get an agreement from the Republican and the Democratic leaders. I don't want to be like the cat that sits on the hot stove and gets burned and then won't sit on a cold stove. But I want to point out for the record, I offered not to present a health care bill. And Hillary and I asked the Republican leaders to join and draft one with us. And we were told, no, we should send one in, then they would send one in, then we would put on together. Then they got a poll that said they could win the Congress if they didn't put anything in it at all and just beat ours. They turned out to be right, but it wasn't good for America.

So what I want to do today, I told the RepublicanS—we've been very open about this now. I said, look, I'll do whatever you guys want me to do—I'm not running for anything, I'll propose a plan and then you guys can modify it, or I'll wait and we'll present one together. But what I'm going to do is what I think will be most likely to fix the problem, Because almost more important than what details are involved in the solution is that we fix the problem. We do not want to leave our children with this burden. None of us in my age group want you supporting us by lowering your income through increased Social Security taxes. We don't want that. Neither do we want to see people our age who, unlike Hillary and me, won't have good retirements, be thrown into poverty.

So we owe it to you to fix this now. And the details are not as important as getting the job done. So you watch the debate, it will be interesting. But it will be, how do you get a higher rate of return? Should it be done with investments by the Social Security fund as a whole? Or should it be done through individual accounts? If you have individual accounts, is there too much risk, and can you keep the universal benefit that keeps all of our seniors—or most of them, at least—out of poverty because of it? It will be a fascinating debate. And I predict that it will be resolved one way or the other within six to seven months. (Applause.)

MS. LADER: Mr. President, I'm going to give you some very thoughtful questions on race relations and cultural diversity. And for the First Lady, there have been a number of questions about your travels.

“In your travels around the world as First Lady, have you seen how different cultures, societies or governments operate that you think our country—in ways you think our country could benefit?” And also there have been questions about your view of the role of women in the world and women in the United States, and what advice you would give to young women today.

—
So as a bit of a catchall, we're trying to combine questions at this hour.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think we should—it's nearly 1999. (Laughter.) One of the things that has been fascinating to me in the last several years in being able to travel around the world is to see very visibly changing roles of women, more opportunities for women and, in some places, to see the backlash against increasing empowerment of women.

I think that, historically, we will look back on the Beijing Conference sponsored by the United Nations in 1995 as a real watershed in the history of women and particularly women's rights around the world. Because there have been very many spin-offs from the conference, based on the platform for action that was adopted. Issues like domestic violence are now on the forefront of political agenda in countries where, until a few years ago, domestic violence was not viewed as a problem, it wasn't a critical matter—it was simply considered cultural.

In El Salvador recently, they have just passed some significant legislation about domestic violence and the First Lady of El Salvador, Mrs. Calderon de Sol, took me to an extremely sophisticated operation that is now dealing with police calls and follow-up and working with both victims and perpetrators—something that would be considered first rate in any city in

America. And it only came about because of the increasing attention paid to that particular issue, starting in 1995.

There have also been a lot of changes in legislation on family matters, on issues relating to inheritance and property rights. When I was in Africa on the trip before the one that Bill and I took, I met with women leaders and political leaders in countries like Tanzania, that were still debating whether women could inherit property and even own certain property.

So there are lots of positive changes. In Senegal, when Bill and I went back this time, and I met with a group of people that I had met on my first trip there, there was an incredible effort made to reverse centuries old customs having to do with female castration that ran against a lot of attitudes and beliefs that were ingrained in the way people had been raised over centuries, but that women were now standing up and being heard and being able to see change made on their own behalf.

We in the United States, I think, took a very major step forward when we made it clear that women's rights were going to be part of our foreign policy agenda. And Madeleine Albright and I spoke jointly at the State Department two years ago, after her appointment, in which we elaborated on the ways in which women's rights could be a part of America's foreign policy. And a number of things have happened because of that.

Our government has taken a strong stand against the trafficking of women—whether it's in Thailand where girls are sold into prostitution, or whether it's in the former Soviet Union where girls answer ads and are put into brothels or otherwise misused—we're now raising that in bilateral and multilateral negotiations. I hope we're never going to recognize the Taliban until they treat women with some dignity or respect or at least that's a position I will take for the foreseeable future. (Applause.)

(End tape, side A.)

(Begin side B.)

MRS. CLINTON: -- (in progress) -- not just marginal issues. They are very important because it's not only a way of recognizing our commitment to human rights, it's also a very practical way of making clear that everything we know about development and progress today has rested on both research and practical experience that concludes the single most important investment that any nation can make in its own progressive development is investing in the health and education of girls and women.

So it is in the United States' interest to promote that. And it's also in our interest to claim, as Madeleine Albright has on many different occasions in many different settings, that many of the restrictions and oppression that still visit the lives of women are not just cultural, but in many instances they are criminal and we should stand and be vocal against them.

So I've been very heartened by what I've seen in every one of my visits. And one of the great visits I have is meeting with women in all different walks of life and all different levels of society and learning once again what we heard from our previous speakers about the common

humanity that links women across the world, regardless of what position we're in or what country in which we live.

So I'm hoping that women's rights is human rights is not just a slogan, but that it becomes a living reality in the lives of girls and women; and that the United States, as part of both our human rights agenda and our development agenda, continue to stand up for the basic principle that women deserve dignity and respect, and that every young girl should be able to have the same opportunities as every young boy. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: "What would you say concerning race relations if you were on a panel tomorrow afternoon?"

I would say, first of all, that it is no longer a question of just of the relations between blacks and whites in America, or even blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and whites. But it is now a question of a multiplicity of racial and ethnic groups in our country, which whites traditionally have been in the majority, people of European heritage will often find themselves in the minority.

California, within a very few years, will have no majority race. And that, therefore, it is urgent that we both resolve whatever unfinished business there is in America between African Americans and whites, but understand that this diversity of ours is a great advantage in the world in which we will live in a global society.

And, furthermore, that America will increasingly find itself unable to be a force for good around the world unless we are good at home on the issues of race and religion and all these other diversity issues in our society.

"What do you think you can do for the remaining time you're in office to help race relations?" I've got a little book coming out on that. It's too late to talk about it in great deal -- but a lot.

"What would you do to improve race relations in a work environment that has deep-rooted racist attitudes towards African Americans, but is still within the law?" I would find the highest ranking person in that work environment that is sympathetic and I would start woodshedding everybody. I would have meetings and meetings and meetings and I would force people to talk and be honest and I would flush out all these attitudes and feelings until there was a level of honesty and candor and commitment that permitted people to enjoy being at work together. And I find, you know, that when this happens more than half the problems can be cured.

"Considering the circumstances under which Supreme Court justices are appointed, do you think there's any chance of getting an African American judge who is able to identify with the concerns of most African Americans?" (Applause.) Depends on who quits when. (Laughter.) That's all I can say. It depends -- it's an appointment for life, it depends on when the vacancies occur and who happens to be President.

MS. LADER: For our wrap-up round here, since the New Year is approaching, there were a lot of questions on your legacy, for both of you—and especially on your future plans and the year 2001.

And while you're thinking about that, let me ask you a question. I was determined we weren't going to have anything bipartisan or divisive tonight, but this was too good to pass up. "I am a Republican pollster" -- (laughter) -- "I am a Republican pollster who helped create the Contract

With America. It worked really well and made me a lot of money. Do you have any ideas that I could pass along to the Republicans? I need the money?" (Laughter.)

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, I think you should send them a video of Tony Campolo's speech. (Laughter and applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, the Contract With America, it worked for you in '94, it worked for us in '96. (Laughter and applause.)

Now, my idea is, frankly, the kind of partisanship that I would like to see America have that I think is constructive would be—is the kind that could come about in this Social Security debate. For example, the Democrats are very concerned about preserving the universality of the benefits because almost half the seniors in America are lifted out of poverty by Social Security.

The Republicans are concerned more with the fact that a lot of individuals will never get a very good return on their Social Security tax investment because there will be so many people drawing Social Security compared to those who are working and because a third of the money goes to the disabled. So they'll favor more individual accounts, even though it has higher risks. The Democrats will tend to favor having the Social Security trust fund, itself, invest in the stocks to minimize the risk and maximize the protection for all the people who would otherwise be put in poverty.

Now, this is an overstatement—there are a lot of Democrats for individual accounts and a lot of Republicans who favor protecting everybody at the level of benefits they've been promised. So I don't want to oversimplify.

But my point is, here's a case where we could actually have six months of a very important debate, an honest debate with honest differences of opinion by people with shared values trying to reach a good result for America. And the voters would be gratified by it, they would think more of both parties. It would generate more support and more turnout at the election. And it wouldn't hurt—you know, moving away from the politics of personal destruction toward building a policy that will build our society and increase civility and give a concrete manifestation -- as Hillary said to Tony Campolo's speech—would be my advice to both the Republicans and the Democrats. I think that's what we ought to be doing. (Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I don't need a legacy, I was on the cover of "Vogue." (Laughter and applause.) There is nothing, nothing I can do in my life that will ever exceed that. (Laughter.) Health care reform is but a distant and lost memory.

(Laughter.) So I think the epitaph should read, "She made it.

She was on the cover of 'Vogue'." (Applause.)

But I also think that there is a real opportunity when I think about the future—which for me is usually about 24 hours ahead of time—to think in terms of what we can do to sustain the kind of positive energy that we are seeing in our country today that has created so much good feeling and so much opportunity—the good feeling outside of Washington, the opportunity everywhere.

Because I think that that is what both Bill and I care most about, is that whatever energies we've put into public life, we have a chance to continue in some way or another; after his presidency is

over, building on these same issues—issues of education, our public education system, we could have talked about that for hours; issues relating to race, and I think that the book he referred to will be, we hope, filled with not only grand ideas, but really, more importantly, the simple ones, what each of us can do to build better race relations, how each of us has to change how we think stereotypically about each other. Or whether it's these big debate about Social Security and health care, how they're not just left to people in public life, but how all of us have an opportunity to participate.

You know, I said the other day that I think those of us who are Americans are particularly blessed right now because we are going through a period that is uncharted, we're not sure what the 21st century will look like; we're coming out of the 20th with a lot of accomplishments as Americans. But we have to continue to work to keep up with what we need to stay true to what we feel about this country and this great experiment that it represents.

So I don't think in terms of legacy because I don't think that as an American the journey is ever over. And I would hope that we do more to give our young people that idea that there are many, many ways that each of them can contribute in this next century to build on the best of what those who have gone before have done and to perhaps learn from the mistakes of all of us, as well.

So I'm looking forward to not having a legacy, but to continue to be part of doing what I believe is important and significant in making this country all that it can be and playing whatever small role I can play in passing on my own strong feelings about what it means to be an American and the responsibilities that come with it to those who come after.

A friend of mine had a great line the other day. She said, you know, this generation and this country as we end this century have a rendezvous with responsibility. And I think that if we think about how we can be responsible to this country and what it represents and to our obligations here and around the world, we'll do a pretty good job in the next century. And that's what I hope to be part of. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I would like to say, ditto, except I was never on the cover of "Vogue." (Laughter.) And absent plastic surgery, I'm not likely to be.

Let me say, very briefly, when I ran for President in 1991 and '92, I had the idea that we would have to make some fundamental changes to prepare our country for the new century. I feel that in the last six years we've really got America working again. I didn't do it all by myself, or me and the Congress or anything else—the country did it. But I think that the policies and the changes we adopted made a major contribution. And for all of you that helped that, I appreciate it. For the very large number of people in this audience who have been a part of this administration, I appreciate it, what you did.

But I feel that the country is working now, and that's good. But I think that we have not fully resolved a lot of the longer term challenges we face—the aging of the population, Social Security and Medicare reform—really, what do 21st century schools mean, what would they look like, what it would be like to prove that you could get a universally excellent education; how will we have a system of lifetime learning; what are we going to do about climate change and the degradation of the oceans.

What I want to spend the next two years on is getting America riveted on these big, long-term challenges that we know are going to be with us and getting off to a good start dealing with them. The country is working now; we've got to deal with the hard, long-term challenges.

And then, you know, when I get out I'll try to either get my handicap under five or do something else that's useful for society -- (laughter) -- and I'm sure there will be something to do.

Happy New Year. Thank you all. God bless you.
(Applause.)

END

11:45 P.M. EST