

3-28-00

Cedar Sinai Dinner

DRAFT -- FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
REMARKS AT CEDARS SINAI DINNER

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

MARCH 28, 2000

*As Prepared*

Thank you all. Thank you for this tremendous honor. I want to thank Tom Priselac [Priz-ah-lack], Steve Broidy [Broy-dee] and everyone at Cedars Sinai for their leadership in the fight against women's cancers.

Every day, women walk into Cedars for state-of-the art care and old fashioned caring from doctors like Beth Carlin and Larry Platt. They are finding cancers early, when they can treat them and beat them. They are getting the information and care they need to become survivors, instead of statistics. They are leaving with health. They are leaving with life.

And none of it would be possible without the support of the people here tonight. I especially want to thank Rita Wilson, Tom Hanks, Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg for your extraordinary compassion and commitment (and Steven, let me also congratulate you on your many victories Sunday night!).

I want to thank Brad Martin of Saks, Inc. and Christina Johnson of Saks 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue for showing us the meaning of good corporate citizenship.

And I want to thank the event chairs for their tireless efforts – Anne Douglas, Marion Laurie, Sandra Krause, Margie Petersen, Renette Ezalow [Rah-net Ez-rah-low], Kelly Chapman Meyer, and Jamie Tisch. Let's give them all a round of applause.

You know, as we were listening to the amazing First AME choir, I got to thinking about all the powerful voices being raised tonight. The voices of amazing entertainers like Robin Williams, Natalie Cole and Elton John. The voices of doctors and scientists. The voices of survivors, who are the real “women of courage.”

But, in this room, we can also hear the echoes of so many women who are no longer with us. We can hear the voice of our friend Liz Tilberis, who we honor tonight. I will never forget the time she came to the White House to interview me. She was very sick. She was very tired. But, she had not given up. Just as she never gave up on her life, on her work, on her mission to eradicate ovarian cancer – so that others would never have to endure what she did.

Not a single one of us has been untouched by this disease.

I think of how my mother-in-law confronted breast cancer with so much good humor and courage. She got up every morning, put on her big false eyelashes and set about celebrating life.

All of us come here with faces in our mind – a wife or daughter, a mother or sister, a colleague or friend. In the last few years alone, I have held the hands or talked on the phone with three dear women friends who have been diagnosed with cancer. I have talked to them about their treatments. I have talked to them about their fears and questions. And, I have seen in their own struggles – both the progress we've made and the work that still lies ahead.

Who would have thought in the last seven years federal funding for breast cancer research, treatment, and detection would more than double – from \$283 million to \$623 million? Or that Ovarian Cancer research would triple at the National Cancer Institute? Who would have thought we would see such extraordinary breakthroughs?

Women who come to Cedars today are reaping the benefits of a whole new generation of drugs, such as Herceptin and Tamoxifen. They are benefiting from what we've found about the genetics behind ovarian cancer or the factors that could lead to cervical cancer. They are getting screenings and treatments that could save their lives.

Now, there are some who look at this progress, who look at the breakthroughs, and conclude that we can just glide to victory. When exactly the opposite is true. If we are going to find a cure, then we must continue to dramatically increase funding for research into women's cancers. And, until we find a cure, we must work to ensure that the tools we have are accessible to all women, regardless of their race or age, where they live, or the amount of money they have.

I worked to put in this year's budget a proposal to help uninsured, low-income women who are diagnosed through the national breast and cervical cancer early detection program get the treatment they need. And I hope Congress will enact it.

I have met so many women, who are in desperate need of these kinds of services, or even just accurate information. As I've worked to educate older women that Medicare will pay for their mammograms, I've heard amazing things from them, like "I don't need to get one of those; my husband died 10 years ago." But, I've also seen what can happen when they get help. I remember the letter one of them wrote. Her screening had revealed two malignant tumors, but she caught them before they had spread.

I have also talked to women who have been forced to switch doctors in the middle of treatment because their employer is switching health plans. Or worse yet, they've been told to wait, as time slips away, and often the malignancy gets worse. When we walk into a doctor's office, we need to feel confident that decisions about our lives are being made by our doctors – not some bureaucrat in an office thousands of miles away. We need a Patient's Bill of Rights for every American in every health plan.

And I have talked to people who don't want to get a genetic test because they are too scared that the results will cost them their health insurance or even their jobs. We can make all the discoveries in the world, we can find the best treatments, the best tests, but it won't matter if women are too scared to use them.

My husband has already taken important steps to protect the privacy of our medical records. He has barred the federal government from using genetic information when making hiring and promotion decisions. But, if we want all Americans to reap the benefits of these advances, it is time to outlaw all genetic discrimination and protect the privacy of all our medical records.

Yes, we face a lot of challenges if we are going to be true to Liz and to all the other women who have courageously faced this disease. I often think about what it was like before people felt comfortable even saying the word cancer. When I was growing up, the woman who lived across the street from me was diagnosed with breast cancer. But no one talked about it.

And, of course, many of us can remember when Betty Ford first brought the disease out of the shadows and talked openly about her mastectomy. She even joked about it. She'd tell the story of the time she was playing touch football with a few members of the Secret Service. In the middle of the game, her prosthesis slipped and she was somehow able to keep it in her t-shirt without anyone knowing. But, more than that, she said she learned that day that she was still able, not only to play touch football, but also to laugh and to live.

That is the lesson so many of you are teaching by word and example. Today, the silence is gone. And in its place are the powerful voices that fill this room tonight. They sing of hope. They sing of courage and commitment. And they sing of the day when young girls will have to turn to the history books to learn about the cancers that plagued their mothers and grandmothers.

I want to thank all of you for making that possible.