

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

**Women's Leadership
Forum 6th Annual Issues
11/9/99**

Women's Leadership Forum 6th Annual Issues Forum
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Thank you, I am so pleased to see all of you; I was out in the audience, and I saw so many friends and workers in the vineyards of the Democratic Party. I want to thank Julia for her introduction, I want to congratulate her on the award she received, well deserved, and I wish everyone could have the experience I did campaigning with Julia one day in Indianapolis and meeting a lot of constituents and going to some of the places that she worked so hard to support. It has been a privilege and a lot of fun, Julia, to be your friend and to be your supporter. Thank you for all your (inaudible)

I am delighted to be here for this annual event and to see the ranks of leadership of the (inaudible) filled with people who have so much experience and commitment to the values of the vision and to make (inaudible) visible toward victory in the 2000 election. I want to thank Janet (inaudible) for her leadership; she has been a stalwart leader of (inaudible) and her father Andrew, the 1999 conference chair and national board member, thank you. And for your hard work (inaudible). The conference committee I'm sure has been acknowledged and introduced, but I want to thank Susan (inaudible) and Cynthia Friedman, and maybe everybody else can stand up, Sara (inaudible), Alicia (inaudible). The National Issues co-chairs Pat Evington and Trudy Low and Chris (inaudible) and Molly (inaudible). Catherine Kennedy Townshend, I'm so glad always to see you, Willis Edwards of the (inaudible) Parts Foundation, thank you for your work, Laura Ross, who has been so helpful to me in New York and on behalf of her (inaudible). I could introduce literally every one of you; I look around this room and I see people who have been such great supporters and wise counselors and vigorous advocates of what we have tried to achieve together in the last seven years.

And it truly is an honor for me to be able to come and address you, because if I look back on what has been achieved in the last seven years, I know, and I hope you know, that none of the progress we have made would have been possible without your leadership, your voices, and the votes of so many millions of American women who followed your example and understood what was at stake in the presidential elections and in the 1998 Congressional elections. Many of you have been on the frontline of the hard work that is required to move a political idea from rhetoric to reality. You have certainly changed the Democratic Party, and by doing so, you have changed the priorities of our nation as a (inaudible). Because of your very hard work and your commitment to the Democratic Party, we are living at the end of a century in a time of unprecedented prosperity and abundant opportunities for America and for American women. We have now nearly 20 million new jobs; many of you remember when the President made his campaign promise in 1992 that if elected he would change the direction of the American economy, and with a lot of hard work on the part of millions of Americans, create 8 million new jobs. Well, he missed the mark considerably; we are now at 20 million new jobs, the lowest peacetime unemployment since 1957 and the largest budget surplus in our nation's history. Household incomes are rising and (inaudible) across the board; African Americans, Hispanic Americans, everyone is (inaudible) economic progress, more families are moving from the dependency of welfare to the dignity of self-sufficiency, more families are moving into homes of their own, and we've also seen progress on so many other social indicators that were

very troubling to us back in 1992. The crime rate is down across the country, our neighborhoods and homes are the safest they have been in decades, teen pregnancy is down, more young people are going into college, over and over again we have seen that when we have positive, strong, (inaudible) leadership the American people respond, and I am so pleased that we can be here together today, and I can thank you for helping to make this progress possible. I am very very proud of what the president and the vice president have achieved, but it would not have been achieved had it not been for leaders like all of you, so thank you and know that you are a part of ending this century in the strongest possible America that we can imagine, but there is work to be done.

As good as times are, as many problems as have been addressed, there is unfinished business. You know, when I think of the end of the Twentieth Century, I think about all that we have achieved, and the challenges that lie ahead. That we have to continue to bring those voices to the forefront, in the (inaudible), in the Democratic party and through our political commitment in the election in November 2000 that we continue to make clear that the issues we care about are at the top of the American agenda. Because women spoke out about crime and violence that kept their children from safely playing outside, we have put nearly 100,000 more police officers on the beat and taken deadly guns off the street. Because women spoke out about the need to take care of children who are growing up without health insurance in our country, we have expanded health care coverage to nearly 5 million needy children, most of whom live in families that work hard for a living and don't make enough money to afford insurance on their own. Because working women spoke out about the impossible decisions they were forced to make between caring for a sick parent or a newborn child and keeping their job or the benefits at their job, we extended family and medical leave to millions of workers, and we now at last count estimate that more than 20 million Americans have taken advantage of the Family and Medical Leave Act. Now there are some critics of these policies who have called this trend toward focusing on issues that are really close to our hearts as the feminization of politics as if fighting to make sure that children have health care or after school care are not concerns for fathers as well as mothers. But I think the more accurate term is that we are working for a *humanization* of politics, that in this vastly technologically quickly moving world we find ourselves in, we don't want to lose those human connections. We want to make sure that while we are sending messages back and forth in cyberspace, no American child is left behind, and if we do everything within our power to ensure that every American feels that he or she has a chance to live up to their own aspirations and fulfill their own opportunities in the future. So I think the humanization of politics (inaudible) women's voices to the Democratic Party and this administration, and our leaders in Congress have made loud and clear is an important change in the political landscape of America, and I hope that that change continues to encompass the views and the values that we have. Because as far as we have come, we know that a family is still at risk in our country of not always being able to take care of its own needs. Let me just give you a few examples:

You know that if we truly valued families, we would have in the Congress a strong, enforceable Patient's Bill of Rights that would send a clear message that medical decisions across the board need to be made by physicians, not by bureaucrats or accountants and we have to keep (inaudible).

We know that in America that truly valued families, we would help parents more meet their responsibilities at work and at home with tax cuts for child care and home child care and a

standard family leave law that would cover more workers and commit more parents to fulfill their responsibilities. No Americans, father or mother, should have to choose between the job they need and the child they love.

An America that truly valued families would take serious, credible steps to strengthen Social Security and modernize Medicare with a (inaudible) concern our generation and doesn't burn our children while we ensure that it is there for our parents and our grandparents. For many many older man and women in America, particularly older women, Social Security and Medicare has spelled the difference between poverty and a dignified older age. It is a solid compact between generations that we must continue to honor. I just came from a pep rally (inaudible). I am glad that Steve Martin? is here, a great leader, making clear the Democrats will continue to push for prescription drugs for the elderly because in an America that truly values families would help our seniors afford the prescription drugs they need to stay healthy.

These are the hard, cold facts: nearly two-thirds of all Medicare beneficiaries have no prescription drug coverage or inadequate prescription drug coverage, and it is not just a problem for low income Americans, more than half of all Medicare beneficiaries without drug coverage have incomes greater than 150% of the poverty level. And I wish that all of you could see some of the heart wrenching letters that the president and I receive. A woman from Indiana (inaudible) who has resorted to cutting her prescription pills in half because she simply cannot afford the pills. A couple from Georgia, who say that their drug costs are now their biggest expense, greater than food and even housing. These people deserve and need our help, and the drug industry can buy all the ads they want, but the one thing their ads cannot deny is that the problem is real and that the time for action is now. Our older Americans cannot afford to wait any longer. No senior should have to choose between the food in their refrigerator and the medicine in their cabinet, and I hope that the Democrats are successful with their discharge? and petitions and resolutions in getting a debate about this issue on the floor. I don't know what the Republican leadership is so afraid of. Let's have a debate about whether we want to provide Medicare prescription drug coverage for our seniors, and let's remind everyone that this issue is principally about women and women's health because we live longer and have more healthcare needs because of our longer lives, often live our last years alone, and we want the kind of enhanced quality of life that a prescription drug benefit would give us, and that's a message we need to take to (inaudible).

You know an America that truly valued families would ensure that every child in this country gets a world class education in our public schools, and that means we should reduce class size, modernize our buildings and increase accountability. Now I can remember in the '98 election, I was at a WLF event, I think this was in Philadelphia, and shortly after the Congress had agreed with the President in order to finish that Congressional session and get on with the elections, that the Congress would vote for 100,000 teachers to lower class size. And I remember speaking at this event and saying, "no, that is what they voted for, but you have to watch them because they will renege," and someone came up to me afterwards and said, "oh, you really think that's true now that they voted for it," and I said, "they voted for it to try to save some of their seats," because I believe in '98 that the democrats were going to do a lot better than any of the pundits predicted, and you bet when they get back they will not fund it. Well, sure enough, that's exactly what is happening in the Congress today. They don't want to fund that classroom initiative that enables us to lower class sizes for children in the early grades which we know makes a difference in their learning outcome. So we need again all of our voices loudly and clearly saying, "yes we do want to lower class size," and put qualified teachers into our

public school classrooms, and that is an issue that if not resolved this year, it will be back next year, and we will continue to fight for it, and we will need your help to do that.

An America that values families will also move forward to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and enact common sense gun reform, but for too long, as you know so well, the gun lobby has been calling the shots in Congress, and they're doing it again. It is time to say enough is enough. Pass the gun control laws that the president sends to Congress (inaudible).

An America that truly values families would raise the minimum wage; no one who works full time, and I believe this so strongly, should have to live in poverty, and that is a very simple contract, part of our basic bargain with people in our country, if you work full time and you are responsible, then you should have a chance to work your way out of poverty. Right now, we see debates going on about the minimum wage that are designed not to provide budget compromises, opportunities to expand it, and I hope, again, we will speak out and say, "it is time in this great economic prosperity we enjoy, to raise the minimum wage for working Americans most of whom are women who will benefit from raising the minimum wage.

An America that truly values families would enforce and ensure that men and women get equal pay for equal work. You know, on the eve of the 21st century, the women still makes just 75 cents for every dollar earned by a man, and some Republicans, who (inaudible) the Republican National Committee on its website, say that this is an imaginary problem of an issue. That any wage gap can be explained by, and I quote, "the non-monetary benefits of female dominated jobs including better supervisors, fewer risks, easier commutes, and more flexible hours." Well, need I say more. You know, the Republicans still just don't get it. We have proof positive coming from MIT this past year. I don't know if any of you followed this, but tenured women professors at MIT, among the finest scientists and (inaudible) academics anywhere in the world, discovered that they were not receiving the compensation and full benefits equivalent to their peers. We're talking about tenured professors compared to tenured professors, people who get the kinds of research grants that we (inaudible) moves basic science research forward, and they discovered that they were discriminated against on the basis of pay, on benefits, on other related issues. Now I think that should put that issue to rest once and for all. If this happens, and you can imagine if this happens to tenured women professors at MIT, think of all the other workplaces in America where so many more women are not given the opportunity to be able to earn a living that their work deserves to be paid. And so let's be sure that we make clear the wage gap is not a hobgoblin, it is a reality from our college campuses to our factory floors, and we cannot any longer tolerate it.

An America that truly values families is the kind of America that we in the Democratic Party want to build. That's why it is so important to win, that we not only keep Democrats in the White House, but we elect a new Democratic majority for the new millennium in the Congress. Now I will believe that if women understand what is at stake in this election, women will vote. But it is up to us to make sure that women do, and it is almost overwhelming to think of the lack of progress and the reversal of progress that could happen in the new century if we have, heaven forbid, a Republican in the White House and a Republican majority in the House and Senate. I'll just give you one small (inaudible) which is a very very big issue, and that has to do with choice. I don't know if you followed what happened in the Senate just a few weeks ago when on the resolution to determine whether or not the Senate supported Roe v Wade; it passed 51 to 47. Now that is too close a margin for comfort.

So that, along with all the other issues that I have mentioned, need to be (inaudible) as strongly as possible to women and men about what is at stake in the election of the 20th Century

and the first election of the 21st century. Now we have a lot of work though before we can feel comfortable that that message will be heard and that women will act on it. Though much of the progress we have made in issues affecting families and women is because of the millions of women who made their views known at the ballot box, there are still too many women in America who choose to stay home every November. I cannot tell you how many women tell me that they did not vote because they did not believe that their one vote would make a difference in a national election, and I think all of us have to do everything we can to make that connection. I've asked women whether they support the kind of economic policies that have given us the prosperity we enjoy, they support Family and Medical Leave, they support the Brady Bill and getting assault weapons off the street, that they support choice, they support lowering class size, they support the work that we have been trying to do now for seven years. And tell everyone you speak with that in 1998, women voters were the key to three Senate races and one governor's race. If only men had voted in North Carolina, South Carolina, Wisconsin and Maryland, the outcome of those elections would have been very very different, and I'm really glad that Kathleen Kennedy Townshend is here thanks to the women's vote that came out to support her and the governor in that election. If 9,759 Americans had changed their votes in 1996, less than one voter per precinct, we would have taken back the House for the Democrats. Imagine how much more progress we could have made if just that number of women, less than 10,000 around the country, had come to the polls and voted for the issues that women tell us they care about.

You know, it took 70 years for women to win the right to vote, and many of you I am sure have seen Ken Burns' new documentary about Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Not for Ourselves Alone." I was privileged to speak with, a year ago at Seneca Falls to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the "Declaration of Sentiments" that Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted, and I just shuddered to think what two great women like that would believe about us if they learned that millions of women are now taking that hard-won right for granted and not even exercising the most fundamental right of citizenship. So let's use the WLS to empower women to speak out on behalf of the issues that we care about, to advance the causes that we know will make a difference in the lives of women, men, and children here at home and around the world.