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The President. Because we're going to have to work like crazy to pass the thing.

Q. You don't have the votes right now?

The President. No, but we'll get there. I don't know yet, but we'll get there. I feel very much better because of this broad bipartisan support, but I've been working with Senator Lott since the first of the year on this. He knows how important it is to me, and he's dealt with us in good faith. And we've worked with Senator Helms. We've worked with everybody, and we agreed that we would start the highly public, visible part of this campaign at about this time. So we're getting after it. We've got a month to deliver. We're going to try to do it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:01 a.m. in the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks to the Women's Economic Leadership Forum

April 4, 1997

Welcome to Humility 101. Thank you, Betsy, Maria, Linda. Thank you, Senator Landrieu, all of you. I'm delighted that you're here for this first ever Women's Economic Leadership Summit. Linda, I want to especially thank you and the Center for Policy Alternatives for your role in this meeting.

I couldn't help thinking, when Betsy was introducing me, that I—of all the things that I have done to try to elevate the status, the visibility, and the success of women, the most difficult one for me to do was just this week when I permitted Secretary Albright to represent me in throwing out the first ball—[*laughter*]—of the baseball season. It was very difficult. But you see, she got a lot more publicity for it than I would have. [*Laughter*]

She throws hard, straight, and low when necessary—[*laughter*]—that's good.

I'm delighted to see all of you here. When I came into office, one of the things that I wanted most to do was not only to fashion a new economic policy for our country that would move the economy forward but to do it in a way that would address two problems that I saw really eating away at the heart of America: one, the fact that all Americans didn't have a chance to participate in our economy, even when it was doing well, and I wanted to change that; and second, the fact that more and more Americans were having genuine difficulty fulfilling their responsibilities to their children and their responsibilities at work, principally lower income working people but not exclusively lower income working people, a lot of others as well.

So we attempted not only to have a big economic strategy on the big issues, focusing on cutting the deficit, eventually balancing the budget, continuing to invest in education and technology and research, expanding trade—all of those things that I think are so important—but also to specifically target people and places that had been left out of the economic mainstream with initiatives like the empowerment zones, the community development financial institutions initiative, the microenterprise initiative, which I imagine Hillary will talk a little bit about when she comes over in a few minutes. But also with a lot of initiatives specifically directed toward women, the things that we've done in the Small Business Administration, increasing by 300 percent the number of loans to women from the SBA, and a number of other things. And of course we have done a lot in the area of work and family.

And I think the results have been, conservatively speaking, pretty impressive. Just this morning the new unemployment figures were announced. Unemployment dropped to 5.2 percent. I now think we have persuaded most economists that we could actually have 5 percent or lower unemployment in this country without having inflation if we do it with discipline. I'm going to do everything I can to get a balanced budget agreement this year so that it will send a signal to the markets that they can keep interest rates modest, we can keep the markets strong, and we can keep creating jobs and bring more and more people into the work force.

Because, keep in mind, this 5.2 percent unemployment rate is misleading. There are lots and lots of States that have unemployment rates at 4 percent or less now. There are huge numbers of areas in States that have unemployment rates of 4.5, 4 percent, or less, and then there are places that have unemployment rates of 10 percent or more. So it's very important that we keep this effort going. It's also very important on the ques-

tion of whether we can move the number of people from welfare to work that are prescribed in the welfare reform bill, and I'll say a little more about that in a minute.

But the point I want to make to you is, number one, it's very important to do the big things right. And we have to continue to do that. If the overall economy is doing well because more and more women are well educated and well versed in business and because there are more and more groups out there trying to support each other and bring people into the economic mainstream, a lot of good things will happen if nothing else is done. So it's important to do the big things right.

But secondly, it's also important to have specific, targeted initiatives that open up economy opportunity for everybody. The average pay of women is still only 71 cents on the dollar of what men make; for minority women it's about 60 cents. It's still more difficult on the whole for women to start a business. It's still more difficult on the whole for women to rise above certain levels in corporations. And we can't stop until we have this whole thing done. That's really the thing I want you to focus on today.

And what I'd like to do is just to summarize very quickly some of the things that we've tried to do that directly or indirectly bear on this, the major initiatives outstanding that we're trying to implement in this Congress, and then again say that I hope that one of the things that will come out of the summit is that you will give us some more ideas about the road from here and where we go.

If you look at the world we are living in and the one we are certain to live in for the next few decades, it will be a world in which the flexibility of all human potential in a country will determine its capacity for success—the ability to learn, the ability to work, the ability to change, and the ability to reconcile competing obligations. The biggest competing obligation for any great society as a whole is, how do you balance the need to be highly competitive with the need to adequately reward work and provide a decent amount of security, without which people feel so disoriented it's hard for them to be productive? How do you strike the right balance, that requires us to forge a whole new synthesis in economic policy and to break out of old ways of thinking?

At a very personal level, we have to do the same thing with work and family. How do you enable people to succeed in the work place, to find personal fulfillment, whether it's in a for-profit or a not-for-profit or a public environment? How do you get the maximum number of able-bodied people in the work force and never forget that any society's most important task is raising good children who are successful and wholesome and happy and able to grow into successful people?

And so when we look at the future, we have to analyze every issue in terms of those two things. So that, if you take, for example, the struggle that I've waged here for the last 4 years to get people to accept, respect, and indeed rejoice in the fact that we are becoming an evermore multiracial, multiethnic society—that also, parenthetically, is necessary if we're going to reconcile these economic issues properly and if we're going to reconcile work and family properly, because we're not going to be able to raise successful children unless they fell comfortable not only with their own heritage but in respecting and dealing with people of different heritages. So this is very, very important.

I'd just like to start with that, because it's very important that, you know, when anybody brings something to me, and they say, ''Mr. President, we ought to do this,'' or ''We shouldn't do that,'' or ''We should try to stop the other thing,'' I try to see it through that framework. And I try to ask myself more and more, how will this affect America when our daughter is my age? What will this country look like in 30 years? How will we maintain the American dream? How will we maintain a sense of one America with genuine respect for our differences? How will we maintain the leadership of this country?

Just this morning I had a wonderful event with a number of leading Republicans and Democrats who have worked in arms control for years, endorsing the ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which, by the way, is a very big thing not only in terms of national security but in terms of our economic well being that we do this. But the most important thing to me is it will help

to provide the right balance between change and security for the American people 30 years from now if we do it. And if we don't, we'll pay a terrible price for it. And I think every one of you—we all need a kind of a framework for the future that we think about.

I'll just say this one other example. I had a very successful summit meeting in Helsinki with President Yeltsin. But the only way it succeeded was that he was able—not just me, but he was able to think about a future that is very different from the immediate past and not to be imprisoned by the categories of the past but to think about, you know, what do I want Russia to look like in 30 years? What do I want the men and women coming of age in Russia to be like? What kind of life do I want them to live? How should they relate to the United States and to the rest of Europe? And this sort of courageous thinking is really required of all of us. And we may have to give up some things we'd just as soon not give up in the short run, but we're going to be able to embrace a much richer future if we do it.

Now, to come back to the subject of the meeting, it seems to me that we have to stay with the proposition that in the near term, that small business will be the most powerful engine of opportunity for the largest number of women who are trying to move into the economic mainstream, either as employees or owners. When I became President—I think this is right—I believe that woman-owned businesses contributed about $1.6 trillion to our gross national product. It's up to $2.3 trillion now. One in five employees in the country are working for a business owned by a woman. That's a stunning statistic.

It also means that we have to do more to try to help women have access to the credit markets, to move in, to succeed. And we have tried to do that with the SBA and with other things. But secondly, it means that we have to be sensitive to the fact that if more women work in small businesses, they will be more vulnerable unless we have other mechanisms to enable them to succeed. That's one of the big reasons I thought it was important to raise the minimum wage. It's one of the big reasons that one of the most important provisions of the 1993 deficit reduction act in our economic plan was a huge expansion in the earned-income tax credit for working families. So it's a very good thing to do.

By the way, what that means is now that all families with two children with incomes of under $30,000 a year are now paying markedly lower taxes than they would have been paying if that bill hadn't passed. So it has made a difference. It's one of the reasons that I was proud that the Family and Medical Leave Act was the first bill I signed. We have millions of people who have now taken advantage of that, and we know that it has not hurt our economy. And again I will say, I know that it is somewhat inconvenient for some businesses on occasion, even though the surveys show that way over 80 percent of the businesses say there's been literally no cost. But in the end it has to increase the productivity of a society when people feel that they can do a good job at work and they're not worried sick at work about either their children, their parents, their spouses, or someone else because they can't even have a basic amount of time with them when they need it. So these are things it seems to me we need to focus on in the future.

We changed the pension laws in the last couple of years in ways that I think are very important, especially to a lot of women workers who have been employed by companies that were vulnerable. When I became President, they told me that the pension system of the country was going to be the next S&L crisis. And the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation was in terrible trouble and had been in debt for 16 years. Well, now it's running a surplus for the first time in over 20 years, and over 40 million workers have had their pensions secured. We made it easier for millions and millions of people to take out 401(k) plans and to keep them when they move from job to job and made nonprofits eligible for 401(k) plans, hospitals, educational institutions, other health care institutions. This affects 4 million women.

And we now know that while we have to be determined to preserve the stability and the integrity of the Social Security system, it is really not adequate to maintain the lifestyle of people when they get in their retirement years. We have to have higher savings rates for people in the work force. And since

more and more retirement plans that are funded by employers are going to define contribution plans instead of define benefit plans, it is absolutely essential that we continue to move forward with both the integrity and the accessibility of savings plans for retirements for women in the work force. And we have some more things that we will propose to the Congress this year to try to strengthen the integrity as well as the accessibility of retirement. I think it is very, very significant.

In addition to that, we have tried to improve, as Betsy said, the operation of the Federal child care programs and how they interface with those at the local level. And in the welfare reform bill, one of the best things about it was we put up $4 billion more for child care. But let me say, I still believe in some ways that's the most underfunded employee support program in the United States. And I urge you to take a look at that—about the delivery system and how it works.

One of the things that I think should be done intensely in every State—and I'm going around to State legislators, along with the Vice President and the First Lady, to talk to them about education reform and welfare reform, and one of the things that I think every State should do is to target the establishment of child care centers and the training of child care workers for moving people from welfare to work and then giving people on welfare who do become certified child care workers either free or discounted service for their own children in the child care centers where their parents work.

If you look at it, we have a window here of significant opportunity, because the States got a block grant under the welfare reform bill, targeted to how much they were getting when the welfare rolls were at their highest. The welfare rolls have now dropped by about 2.5 million, the biggest drop in history. So they have some extra money here until the next economic recession comes along.

And I believe that one of the most significant things that can be done—and I urge all of you to ask your States to consider doing this and to lobby at the State level to do this—is to focus very sharply on the opportunity this welfare reform bill plus this extra cash the States gives up to set up for the first time a genuinely comprehensive, well trained, well staffed, properly funded child care network in the country in a way that will move people from welfare to work and make child care available to lower wage working people who have never been on welfare in their lives but can't afford decent child care for their kids. It's a terrific opportunity, and we should be doing it.

Let me also say that we've done a lot of other things here that only—at least indirectly impact the economy, but have a huge impact on women: the Violence Against Women's Office, which I think has done a great job in the Justice Department, the Women's Health Office, the White House Women's Office that Betsy heads, the White House Interagency Committee on Women's Business Enterprise. We have dramatically increased medical research in areas that disproportionately affect women and involve women in testing protocols in a way they were not involved before I became President, which dramatically compromised the medical research effort of the country in terms of how it affected women. And I think that has been changed substantially, and I'm very proud of that.

Now, there is still a lot to do, and let me just mention some of the things that are my priorities. First of all, in the health care area. While the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill did a good thing saying that you couldn't be denied health insurance if someone in your family got sick or when you change jobs, it's only good if you can still afford to buy your health insurance. And we know there are 10 million children who still aren't insured and that a huge percentage of them aren't insured because their parents lose their insurance when they lose their jobs or when they're between jobs.

We have a proposal on the table which we think, with the money we now have available, will cut that number to 5 million. There are other proposals which have been offered in this Congress by both Republicans and Democrats alike. I would just urge you to do whatever you can and say whatever you can to whomever you can to tell us to do the best we can. I mean, we do have a sense that—I think a sense—there's a majority I think in the Congress now committed to

doing as much as we can on this. And if we could get the kids of this country insured, it wouldn't be long before we'd figure out how to fill the rest of the gaps. That's what I believe. And so I hope that we can make progress there.

With regard to welfare reform, the problems that I see in the bill are as follows. Number one, the biggest problem has nothing to do with welfare reform, and that is that they cut aid to legal immigrants too much. And I'm not talking about people who come here and don't tell the truth when they come to America and immediately try to get on welfare. I'm talking about people who work, pay taxes, have children. Many of them are women and, through no fault of their own, get sick, are victims of crime, have accidents, and now won't be able to claim any access to Medicaid or any other public benefits. Our budget corrects that, and I hope you will support that.

Furthermore, and right on point here, I believe that women businessowners are more likely than men businessowners to be sensitive to the extra effort that will have to be made to move people from welfare to work. But we know that most of these jobs are going to have to come from the private sector.

Now, let me just describe to you what the dimension of the problem is in welfare reform. In the last 4 years, our economy produced 11.5 million jobs. We had never done that before. That's the most we ever produced. In that 11.5 million jobs, there were one million people who moved from welfare to work. Of that one million people who moved from welfare to work, my Council of Economic Advisers estimates that about half of them moved from welfare to work because the economy got better and if nobody had lifted a finger, they would have moved from welfare to work because people don't like to be on welfare. They want to go to work if they can.

The other half of the other half, most them moved from welfare to work because of special efforts that had already been made in the States and localities under welfare reform initiatives that were already underway. Some of them moved off the welfare rolls because we had a 50 percent increase in child support collections in 4 years, something that I'm very proud of. And we have provisions to do better even, and we're going to do better.

But here's the rub: under this new law, 40 percent of those who are able-bodied and able-minded enough to be in the work force have to move from welfare to work some time in the next 4 years. And to cut to the chase, that's about 900,000 more. But that's 900,000 more that have to move from welfare to work whether we can produce 11.5 million jobs for another 4 years or not. If we did it back to back, it would be wonderful, and we might. But if we do, we will sure enough set some records. It has not ever been done before.

That means two things: One, we should give some extra help to communities with high unemployment to hire people to do community service related jobs, and there's something in our budget for that; but second, most of these jobs are going to have to come from the private sector and from welfare reform efforts. And there are—in my budget, there is a special credit which you can get only if you can demonstrate, A, that you've hired someone from welfare to work and, B, that they got a new job; they didn't replace someone else. But the credit is substantial. It's 50 percent of the salary up to $10,000 a year. So that is, in effect, an education and training supplement because we know that some of these folks who have never had work experience are going to be hard to place.

In addition to that, every State can—and I've been going around challenging them to do, and several are starting—can give the welfare check to an employer as an education and training supplement. In Kansas City, if you pay $1.75 over the minimum wage, they'll give you the welfare check. Kansas City will give it to you for up to 4 years. But most States would be more like a year.

But the point is, even if as a private employer, you couldn't hire someone for more than the length of the subsidy, if you hired somebody for a year, they'd have something on a resume. It would be that much easier to get another job. That would be 1 year on their 5 year lifetime limit on welfare that wouldn't be used up. So it would be worth doing even if it could just be done for a year.

And the women businessowners of America can have a huge impact in doing something that, by the way, will also help the economy if you create that many more consumers, bring that many more people into the work force, have that many more people being productive, that many more people being a positive role model for their own children. This is a huge thing. So I hope that you will, all of you, do what you can to try to mobilize the women business people of America to try to take an active and aggressive role in this effort.

I have asked the Congress to pass what I think is a good flextime bill to give people more options to take their overtime in time or money. But I think the important thing is that the employee ought to have the choice. It shouldn't be a way around the 40 hour work week. [*Applause*] Thank you.

I have asked the Congress—I think—I've asked the Congress to expand family and medical leave in a very narrow way just to give some time off to go to children's conferences at school and to take their children or their parents to regular doctor's appointments in a very limited fashion. I hope that will pass and find favor. And as I said, we've also proposed some other things in the retirement security area.

The last thing I would say is, I think that there are a lot of women who are outside their regular school years who deserve a second chance, who could make a major contribution to the economic life of this country. And the education proposals that are on the table in this Congress would be really helpful. If we pass the $1,500 a year tax credit for the first 2 years of college, it would in effect make community college education as universal as high school is today.

I also proposed a tax deduction of up to $10,000 a year for the cost of any high school—any tuition after high school, easier access to an IRA that you could withdraw from tax-free to pay for education, and the biggest increase in Pell grants in 20 years.

But I think these things are important. We need to remind ourselves that the average age of people in our educational institutions is going higher and higher and higher. Even in the 4 year colleges now, it's up to 25—26 in some of our 4 year colleges in America. Most of our community colleges, it's higher than that. And so having universal access so people can get a second chance, I think, is profoundly important. And I hope that you will support that. It's a big deal for our economy and a big deal for women's economic opportunity.

So these are the things that we're going to be pushing. If you have other ideas I hope you will do that and give them to us.

And the last thing I want to say is I hope you will continue to participate as partners with us. I went to a memorial service yesterday over at the Commerce Department for Ron Brown and the other people who were killed a year ago in Croatia. And I think one of the more important things that Secretary Brown did was to make sure that he emphasized women business leaders in these trade missions and reaching out to the rest of the world and trying to build ties. So I hope you will look for other opportunities to participate in that way and to continue to be a part of the partnership that we're trying to establish with America to create the kind of country we want for the 21st century.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:41 p.m. in the Indian Treaty Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Betsy Myers, Deputy Assistant to the President for Women's Initiatives and Outreach, and Maria Echaveste, Assistant to the President and Director of Public Liaison, White House; and Linda Tarr-Whelan, president and chief executive officer, Center for Policy Alternatives.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

April 2

The President declared a major disaster in the State of Washington and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery