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This has been the lodestar of our policy for the last 6 years—a goal that is consistent with our interests and that keeps faith with our values, an objective that we will continue to pursue, with your help and understanding, in the months and years ahead.

This visit by Premier Zhu is very important. The issues that are raised from time to time, which cause tensions in our relationship, they are also very important. But I ask you, at this institute, not to let the American people or American policymakers or American politicians in a political season lose sight of the larger interests we have in seeing that this very great country has the maximum possible chance to emerge a more stable, freer, more prosperous, more constructive partner with the United States in the new century.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:33 a.m. in the East Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Richard H. Solomon, president and Max M. Kampelman, vice chair, U.S. Institute of Peace; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Premier Zhu Rongji, former President Deng Xiaoping, and President Jiang Zemin of China.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Equal Pay

April 7, 1999

[*The First Lady opened the program with brief remarks concerning wage discrepancies between men and women and then introduced the President.*]

The President. Thank you. That is the truth. [*Laughter*] But Hillary didn't tell you the rest of the story. Senator Harkin, whose wonderful wife, Ruth, was also a part of our administration for several years, she has often made more money than her husband. And so we decided that maybe we should become part of a small but vocal radical caucus saying we shouldn't stop at equal pay; we like it when our wives make more money than we do. [*Laughter*] We have enjoyed the benefits of that.

I would like to thank Senator Harkin and Eleanor Holmes Norton for being here and for being longtime champions of this cause. I thank Ida Castro, our EEOC Chair, the local officials who are here, and Secretary Herman, who bears a lot of the responsibilities for what we are trying to achieve, for her work.

I'd like to make just a few brief points. Hillary has made most of the points that need to be made, and we all know here we're preaching to the saved in trying to get a message out to the country. But I'd like to point out as I tried to do in the State of the Union that the time in which we are living now in terms of our economic prosperity is virtually unprecedented. We had 4.2 percent unemployment last month.

I remember a meeting I had—and huge argument I had in December of 1992 when I had been elected but not inaugurated President, about how low we could get unemployment before inflation would go up. And all the traditional economists said, ''Man, when you get below 6 percent, you know, you will just see what will happen.'' And the American people turned out to be a lot more productive, a lot more efficient; technology turned out to be a lot more helpful; we were in a much more competitive environment. So now, we have 4.2 percent unemployment, lowest rate since 1970, lowest peacetime unemployment since 1957, 18 million new jobs.

But we still have some significant long-term challenges in this country. We have pockets of America—in rural America, in urban America, in our medium-size industrial cities, our Native American reservations—which have not felt any of the impact of the economic recovery. We still have substantial long-term challenges to Social Security, to Medicare. And we still have a significant fact of inequality in the pay of women and men.

And the central point I would like to make is that we should not allow the political climate or anything else to deter us from concentrating our minds on the fact that this is a precious gift that the American people have received, even though they have earned it. Countries rarely have conditions like this. If we can't use this moment to deal with these long-term challenges, including the equal-pay challenge, when will we ever get around to it?

That is the message I want America to send back to Washington. Yes, have your disagreements. Yes, have your fights. Yes, conduct your campaigns. Yes, do all this. But for goodness sakes, realize that this is, at a minimum, the opportunity of a generation, maybe more. And every single problem that we can take off the table for our successors and for our children is an obligation we ought to shoulder and get the job done. That's what this is about.

And those of us who are old enough to remember what the economy was like in the 1970's with the long gas lines, what it was like in the 1980's when we had the so-called bicoastal economy and my State and Senator Harkin's State had double-digit unemployment in county after county—I'm telling you, when times get tough and then you go around and try to talk to people about problems like this, their eyes glaze over because even the people who would benefit, they're just trying to keep body and soul together. They're worried about holding on to what they have. We have an opportunity now to make a better America for our children, for all of our children.

The second point I want to make is the one I made jokingly in the story about Tom and me having the privilege of living with women who make more money than we do. And that is that this is not just a women's issue. The women who are discriminated against often are in families, raising children with husbands who are also hurt if their wives work hard and don't have the benefits of equal pay. A lot of the women who are single mothers are out there working and they have boy children as well as girl children. This is not just a gender issue, and men should be very interested in this.

I can say furthermore that I believe that it would be good for our overall economy. You know, you hear all these problems that they say it will cause the economy if you do this. All this stuff is largely not true. I mean, every time we try to make a change to have a stronger society, whether it's a raise in the minimum wage or cleaning up the environment or passing the family leave law, the people that are against it say the same thing. And we now have decades of experience in trying to improve our social fabric. And America has had a particular genius in figuring out how to do these things in a way that would permit us to generate more economic opportunity and more jobs and more advances.

I'd like to make a third point not in my notes, but Hillary made me think of it. There are these people now who are out there saying, ''Well, there really isn't much of an equal pay problem because it's almost exclusively confined to women who have children. And women who have children have to have more intermittent periods in the workplace''—you've heard all the arguments—''and once you factor that out, well, there's no problem.''

Well, I have two reactions to that. First of all, if you take that argument to its logical conclusion, we would be depopulating America before you know it. No one else has really figured out any way to bring children around, as far as I know. [*Laughter*]

Secondly, if that is true, it still doesn't make it right. If you give the people the entire argument—which I don't think the analysis supports—but if you did, what does that mean? It means that an important part of the equal pay battle should be strengthening the family and medical leave law, for example, something I've been trying to do without success ever since we signed the first bill. It ought to apply to more companies. It ought to be more extensive. It ought to cover more situations. We've proved that we can do this without hurting the economy.

And if you believe that having children is a significant factor here and if you believe as I do that's the most important work of any society, then why shouldn't we continue with something that's done so much good, this family leave law, to find other ways to do it, to find other incentives for flex-time, all kinds of things we could be doing if this is a problem.

Now, finally, let's talk a little bit about what I think we can do about this right now. Earlier this year, I asked Congress to pass two measures to strengthen our wage discrimination laws and to boost enforcement of existing ones. I ask Congress again to pass the $14 million equal pay initiative that's in our balanced budget to help the EEOC identify and respond to wage discrimination, to educate employers and workers about their

rights and responsibilities. You'll hear some pretty impressive people talk about that on our panel in a moment. And to help bring more women into better-paying jobs.

Again, I ask the Congress to pass the "Paycheck Fairness Act" sponsored by Senator Daschle and Congresswoman DeLauro, which would put employers on notice that wage discrimination against women is just as unacceptable as discrimination based on race or ethnicity. Under current law, those who are denied equal pay because of race can receive compensatory and punitive damages. This new legislation would give women the same right. It will make a difference. It would protect employees who share salary information from retaliation. It would expand training for EEOC workers, strengthen research, establish an award for exemplary workers.

We can do more. Today I'm pleased to announce that we want to strengthen our legislation by requiring the EEOC to determine what new information on workers' salaries they need to improve enforcement of wage discrimination laws and to find a way to collect that information. The new provision would call on the EEOC to issue a new rule within 18 months to gather, in the most effective and efficient way possible, pay data from companies based on race, sex, and national origin of employees.

Addressing wage discrimination takes courage, as our panelists can tell you. It takes courage as an employee to speak out, to gather evidence, to make the case. It takes courage as an employer to recognize problems in pay equity and take steps to remedy them.

Just recently—let me just mention the experience of one of our panelists—we saw this courage among the administrators and women scientists at MIT, one of our country's most outstanding institutions of higher education. Together, they looked at the cold, hard facts about disparities in everything from lab space to annual salary. They sought to make things right, and they told the whole public the truth about it, which is a rare thing. And I appreciate what they did. I commend them. I hope their success and their example can be replicated throughout our country.

Now again I say, this should not be a partisan issue. It should be an American issue. And as you argue through these matters this year, I ask you, every time you are in contact with any person in a position to vote on this in Congress or influence a vote in Congress, ask them this simple question: If we don't deal with this now, when will we ever get around to it?

Thank you very much.

[*Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman thanked the President and First Lady and made brief remarks. She then introduced the roundtable participants and each made brief remarks on equal pay issues.*]

The President. I would like to just start. We're going to do a little roundtable and just give the participants a chance to answer a few questions and amplify on their remarks. And taking account of Sanya Tyler's voice problems, I still want to ask her one question, because obviously the situation at Howard and the situation at MIT were resolved in different ways.

After you won the lawsuit, did you feel that the administration treated you and other people who were in the same situation fairly? Did you feel like that the work environment was worse, and did you believe that the program also began to get more support, as well as on the wages? Was title IX and the other efforts you made, did you get more support for the program, as well as for your income?

[*Ms. Tyler, head coach of women's basketball at Howard University, had sued because the university hired a head coach for men's basketball and paid him 4 times her salary. She won and was awarded $2.39 million and remained in her coaching position. She expressed pride in Howard University's reaction to the suit, indicating that the administration had expressed greater openness to women's participation not only in the sports but in many leadership areas at the university. The First Lady then introduced Professor Nancy Hopkins, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), who stated that 5 years ago there were only 15 tenured women in MIT's School of Science. The discrimination against women at MIT was subtle and difficult to identify. She stated that an incident upset her, and she wrote a strong*

letter to MIT's president. She consulted a fellow female faculty member on the tone of the letter, and her colleague asked if she, too, could sign it. After polling others, the female faculty all signed the letter, and the administration was very supportive. The women gathered data on the problem, and the dean took immediate action to institute changes. The First Lady stated that often these problems are subtle and not readily apparent, and she commended MIT for its prompt action.]

The President. You know, the question that I wanted to ask, because this MIT thing is so unusual, is, do you believe that they knew it was going on before? And if they didn't know it was going on before—but all the women you went to had immediately related in the same way you did and signed up—how did it happen? Because I think this is something that data may not tell you. But I think this is what is really important, because there may be a lot of organizations out there where this sort of just creeps in, but the people now running these organizations don't know it.

And what I'm hoping is that—it's not like—it may not be as overt as it was when Carolyn was in the work force, so how do you think this happened? It's very impressive that the president said, ''Okay, let's go do the right thing.'' But that raises the question of how did it happen in the first place?

[*Professor Hopkins stated that this was the last frontier of the civil rights/affirmative action process. She stated her belief that it wasn't conscious, and the women themselves weren't aware of it. It was a subtle and almost unconscious gender bias that was small in each instance, but it accumulated to real pay.*]

The President. Let me ask a specific question. Do you think—if there was no deliberate policy to hire all these people at a lower salary, and then not to raise them at some point to a comparable salary, and there was never a systematic policy, do you believe that—here's what I'm trying to get at—is there a still, sort of in the minds of at least the men who are making these hiring or pay decisions, this notion that there's a marketplace out there, and it's a big deal for a woman to be a tenured professor at MIT? And therefore, this was a market-based decision; this is what I can get this talent for; and this is what I'm going to pay? Is that what you think happened? And if not, what is it that you think happened?

[*Professor Hopkins said men approached these decisions differently than women, and women had to share the decisionmaking power. The First Lady then introduced Carolyn Gantt, an employee at a Washington, DC, senior center, who during her career had witnessed men with the same or lesser qualifications in jobs receiving more benefits and higher pay. Mrs. Clinton asked how she became aware of the situation. Ms. Gantt answered that she had contacts in the community who shared information with her and that she had access to lists of how much individuals in her organization were paid and that, combined with her knowledge of individuals' duties and qualifications, led her to recognize the disparity in compensation. After going to the organization's board, she got the promotion but became a pariah. When she moved into a new position in the District of Columbia Government, she encountered the same situation.*]

The President. Let me just use this remarkable woman's case as an illustration of a point I made in my remarks, that this is something that imposes great economic costs on the society as a whole.

You have seven children, right?

Ms. Gantt. I still have seven, but they're grown. [*Laughter*]

The President. And you're still working part-time? And how old are you?

Ms. Gantt. Do you really want me—— [*Laughter*]

The President. Let me ask you this. Let me ask you another question. You are——

Ms. Gantt. ——[*inaudible*] category. [*Laughter*]

The President. I know I shouldn't have asked. [*Laughter*] The reason I ask you is because you look so much younger than you are. [*Laughter*] But let me ask—the point I wanted to make is, she has been for some time eligible for Social Security. Here's the point I want to make about the issue. You know we're having this big Social Security debate here now, and we're in an argument

in the Congress about how to save Social Security. Why? Because the number of people over 65 are going to double between now and the year 2030. And the Trust Fund runs out of money in 35 years.

And for it to be stable, it needs to last for 75 years, but in addition to that, we need to lift the earnings limit for people who work when they're over 65, I think, so they can still draw their Social Security, number one. And number two, we need to have a remedial program to deal with the fact that the poverty rate among single elderly women is twice, almost twice the general poverty rate among seniors in this country.

Why? A lot of it is because of stories like this. So you've either got people like this remarkable lady who is healthy enough and, as you can see, more than quite alert and on top of things and energetic, who continue to work on and on, or you have people who can't do that, and they are twice as likely to be living in poverty even when they draw Social Security.

This is another of the consequences of this. And so the rest of you are going to have to pay to fix this unless you just want to let it go on, and I don't think since we have some money to fix it now, I presume none of us want to let it go on, and we'd like to fix it.

But we should understand that none of this—this kind of discrimination is not free to the rest of us, as well. Just because you haven't felt it directly doesn't mean that you're not weakened and lessened because of the quality of life, the strength of your society, the fabric of it is not eroded by this. And that's the point I wanted—I didn't want to embarrass her about her age, but I think it's important that you understand that this is a cost imposed on the whole society. And one of the big efforts we're going to make this year in this saving Social Security is to do something about this dramatic difference in the poverty rate. And it would be much, much lower if no one had ever had the experiences you just heard described.

[*Secretary Herman continued the discussion saying the pension gap was even greater than the 75-cents-to-every-dollar gap for regular wages. She pointed out that only 40 percent of women have pension coverage. The First Lady then introduced Patricia Higgins, a nurse who also encountered wage discrimination in her field, who discussed the problem and explained how medical advances presented increasingly complex issues for nurses. As her career advanced, she realized that retirement savings were not sufficient. She noted her daughter was planning to be a nurse, and she wanted things to be better for her. Secretary Herman stated that there are policies in place in many institutions but practices inside these institutions often failed to support the policies and procedures. She said the administration was supporting legislation to share salary information without fear of reprisal and asked Ms. Tyler if she thought that would be helpful. Ms. Tyler stated that, in her case, pursuing the issue in court had been very successful and, in the end, yielded solid results.*]

The President. Thank you very much. Let me say on behalf of all of us, we're delighted that you're here. We especially thank Senator Harkin and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton for their leadership, and we thank our panelists. They were all terrific.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The roundtable began at 1:53 p.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to Title IX—Prohibition of Sex Discrimination, part of Public Law 92–318, the Education Amendments of 1972. The transcript made available by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the full text of remarks of the First Lady and the roundtable participants.

Proclamation 7179—National Equal Pay Day, 1999

April 7, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

We live in a time of remarkable promise. Our Nation's economy is the strongest we have experienced in a generation, creating more than 18 million new jobs since 1993 and the fastest growth in real wages in more than two decades. American women have contributed greatly to this record of success; unfortunately, they have not enjoyed an