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October 24, 2007

## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS: Mary Louise Smith Lecture at the Catt Center for Women and Politics**

Thank you so much, Maggie, for that wonderful introduction and for your student leadership and concern about all of these issues and I'm delighted that your family could be here with you to see the excellent presentation you just made.

And I want to thank Dr. Dianne Bystrom for her outstanding leadership as well. And to the Catt Center and Iowa State for hosting this event -- and for all their work to promote and celebrate women in politics.

I also want to recognize Bonnie Campbell, Iowa's former Attorney General, Elaine Baxter, Iowa's former Secretary of State, and all of the elected officials who are here. Also, Christie Vilsack, former First Lady, and my many friends who have gathered here for this occasion- including some of my friends from Arkansas who are travelling around Iowa this week. And especially to the students and faculty of Iowa State. Its wonderful being here and having this honor to actually talk for a few minutes about women and politics and women in politics.

I could say that it's a pleasure being up here with all of the women running for President in 2008. But I'd like to make a prediction: that while there may be plenty of room on this stage tonight -- some day, there will be enough of us to transform this event from a lecture into a debate.

[Applause]

Finally, I want to thank the members of Mary Louise Smith's family who have joined us tonight. Talk about a trailblazing woman in public life. Mary Louise Smith started at the grassroots right here in Iowa, working her way up to become the first woman Chair of the Republican National Committee. This was not an easy feat for a woman in 1974. But with her signature poise, and her intelligence and integrity, Mary Louise Smith proved to be more than up to the challenge.

In addition to being an accomplished organizer and leader, she was also a passionate advocate for women's rights, reproductive choice, and many other important causes. She was a role model and an inspiration for many, and I am honored by this chair that bears her name.

And of course, there is this Center's namesake, the great Carrie Chapman Catt. I and every other woman who holds this chair does so in part because of her life's work. Raised right here in Iowa, a graduate of this university, she served as a teacher, a

school principal, a superintendent, and a reporter before joining the women's suffrage movement and realizing her talents as a gifted organizer and dynamic orator.

She did two stints as President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and she helped to found the International Woman Suffrage Alliance to reach out to women across the world. In the end, it was Catt who devised the "Winning Plan" for the suffrage movement -- a plan to campaign simultaneously for suffrage at both the state and national levels. The rest, as they say, is history.

And it really is quite a history, isn't it? There has never been a better time to be a woman in America. It's almost hard to explain to young women today how much things have changed -- even just during the course of my lifetime.

Growing up, there were sports we couldn't play, schools we couldn't attend, and jobs that essentially had a "men only" sign on them.

As an eighth grader I was captivated by space-travel. I wrote to NASA asking how to apply to be an astronaut -- they wrote back explaining that these positions weren't open to women.

Well today, Iowa's own Peggy Whitson has been appointed the first female Commander of the International Space Station.

[Applause]

Years later, when I was deciding where I wanted to attend law school, I was coolly informed by a Harvard Law professor, and I quote, "We don't need any more women at Harvard." So I went to Yale. [laughter] And my entering class at Yale Law School -- where I decided to go instead -- had 235 students, of whom just 27 were women.

Today, women are the majority of students in law schools.

As a young lawyer, when I told a colleague that I might want to practice courtroom law, he replied that, that was impossible, because I didn't have a wife. He asked me, "When you're in trial, and you're busy, who will make sure you have clean socks for court?" [laughter] Well, I had honestly had never thought about that. I had always washed my own socks. [laughter]

Today, women are serving across America as judges, partners, as law professors -- and yes, even successful courtroom lawyers with clean socks.

The norms are changing on Capitol Hill. Back in the mid-1980s, women were not allowed to wear pantsuits on the Senate floor. Clearly, I would not have survived. [laughter]

And today, we've sworn in the first Madame Speaker of the House of Representatives.

[Applause]

We've even seen, much I'm sure to that old Harvard law professor's chagrin, the first woman President of Harvard University.

Women are now a majority of students in colleges -- and the majority of those who voted in 2004. It is nothing short of breathtaking when you stop to think about it.

But all of this progress is not a quirk of fate. It didn't happen by accident. It is the result of the contributions of women and men from every background, serving at every level, using their diverse array of skills and talents to move our nation forward.

Contributions from national leaders like Carrie Chapman Catt and her colleagues in the suffrage movement. Trailblazers right here in Iowa like Arabella Mansfield who, in 1869, became the first woman in America formally admitted to the Bar. Women like Sojourner Truth who campaigned both against slavery and for women's suffrage. Or Harriet Tubman who risked her life time and again so others could taste the fruits of freedom. Courageous women around the world like Aung San Suu Kyi who has been a virtual prisoner for decades in the cause of freedom for the Burmese people. Women who run for office in their own countries against some tough odds like Angela Merkel in Germany and Michelle Bachelet in Chile, and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia.

But it is not just the women leaders in the history books who've made history. It is also those unsung heroes who transform lives and communities every single day.

The teachers who tell our daughters, "You are just as smart and capable as the boys, don't you fail to live up to your potential." I think about my 6th grade teacher Mrs. King quoting from the Bible said not to hide your light under the bushel basket.

The women on the PTA who wonder why aren't more girls in those honors math and science classes. I remember when my daughter was in first grade joining up with a couple of other mothers to do extra science programs for our first graders. And all those mothers who work all day -- sleep a few hours -- do the night shift, because they want something better for their children.

Some women have fought lonely battles, forging ahead on their own when no one else would stand by their side. I think of Edna Griffin, called the "Rosa Parks of Iowa." On July 7, 1948, she was refused service at a Des Moines lunch counter. But Edna Griffin responded by organizing pickets in front of the store -- and when no one else joined her, she would picket alone. She took her case all the way to the Iowa Supreme Court -- and she won.

Other women have had the benefit of networks of women drawn together by shared experiences and aspirations. I've had the privilege of traveling to more than 80 countries. And everywhere I've been as First Lady and now as Senator, I have tried to find time to meet with women in the countries where I find myself- to ask them what their lives are like, what kind of opportunities and challenges they face. I remember a woman in Northern Ireland by the name of Joyce McCartan. Joyce, a Catholic, had lost more than a dozen family members during the so called "troubles" -- including her own seventeen-year old son who was shot dead by Protestant gunmen. But instead of retreating into anger and grief and wanting revenge, she brought together a group of both Protestant and Catholic women to set up a safe house for women of both traditions to talk about their needs and their fears over cups of tea.

I sat down with those women one day and I listened as they talked about how they had discovered that they all worried when their husbands and sons left their homes, and they were all relieved when they returned safely. And despite their differences, they wanted a better future for their country and their children. It was these women -- and others like them -- sitting around at kitchen tables, sharing pots of tea, who helped chart the path to peace.

Here at home, during my time in the Senate, I have cherished the opportunity to work with my women colleagues in both Houses and on both sides of the aisle. Now we may not see eye to eye on everything, but we get together and we trade those very important bits of advice like what kind of shoes to wear on marble floors when you're on your feet all day. And when it comes to the issues that we can agree on --

whether it's afterschool funding or healthcare and education for women here in America or for women in Afghanistan-- we are a force to be reckoned with.

I've been honored to work throughout my career on issues like foster care and adoption, family leave, equal pay and preschool for our children. And I have always been struck when people label these as women's issues. I disagree with that characterization. While these so-called "kitchen table" issues are certainly women's issues -- they're also men's issues and children's issues. They're issues that we all have a stake in.

Today, too many men have to choose between health insurance for themselves or for their children, because they can't afford both.

When women make just 77 cents for every dollar a man earns -- it's not just women who are affected, but families with less income to pay the bills.

We're all worried about whether the next generation of children will have the tools they need to compete in the global economy.

Today, many fathers are struggling to spend more time with their families just like mothers always have. In fact, the issue of family leave provides a particularly good example. I'll never forget a newspaper advice column that I read in the early 1980s. I was working at a law firm at the time and my daughter was about three years old. Someone had written into this column asking: "I'm about to get a big promotion and I'm going to have my own office for the first time. What kind of decorations are appropriate for my office?"

Well, the advice columnist responded that he needed to know if the writer was a man or a woman because it would affect the answer. If you're a man, he said, and you have a family, put up lots of pictures of your family because people will think when they come into your office "this is a stable person with a good set of family values." But if you're a woman, don't put any pictures of your family in your office because people will think you can't keep your mind on your job.

So, of course, I immediately filled my office with pictures of my family.

Well, a lot has changed since then. But unfortunately this attitude is still around. It kind of sums up too many people's feelings towards women and parents in the workplace: Keep your family life to yourself, struggle on your own to meet the demands of work and family and don't let it affect your work.

But think about this for a minute. A lot of working fathers wish they had more time with their children. All employers want employees to be focused and productive -- which is hard to achieve when work and family are out of balance. And every American has a stake in how the next generation is raised -- after all, we're raising our future innovators, our college professors, our nurses, our business leaders, our farmers, teachers and so much more.

So when we fight to strengthen family leave -- that helps not just women, but all Americans who want to spend more time with the people they love and care for. That's why I'm fighting for paid family leave -- because no one should have to worry if they need a couple of hours to take their child to the doctor. And no one should be denied the chance to bond with their newborn or adopted baby or to care for an aging parent. I think we should encourage the development of families working to take care of one another. There's so much care giving that goes on in our country, we sometimes overlook it. But if all the caregivers, people who devote most or all of

their time caring for a child, caring for a parent, caring for a loved one with a disability, if all of those Americans were to decide tomorrow to stop giving that out of love, to replace that care would cost 300 billion dollars a year. People give it because they love, they have a sense of family obligation, they want to do the right thing and we make it very, very hard for families to care for one another.

Instead of focusing on what is really going on in people's lives, too often our politics is about distractions. Who's up, who's down. What people are wearing more than what they are saying.

Well, there will always be that kind of analysis. But in the end, none of that really matters very much.

What matters are the lives of people I meet every day who feel like they're invisible. Like no one's paying attention to them and their struggles.

Like the woman I met from LeClair who had to sell half her family farm to pay for her family's medical bills. She sure feels invisible.

Or the woman I met at the Maid-Rite in Toledo who was working two jobs and still struggling to get by and she wonders whether anybody really sees how hard she's been working.

The woman in Greenville whose daughter got sick, but didn't have health insurance. She died a year later. She was just eighteen years old. Her death certificate listed the cause of death as unknown, because she was never able to afford to get a proper diagnosis.

Well, I don't think that any of these people should be invisible in our country. They're certainly not invisible to me. I see them, I hear them, and I carry their stories with me where ever I go. And they shouldn't be invisible in our political process.

One of the aspects of politics that has changed dramatically with the entry of some many women is that a lot of these stories are now just out there, people are talking about them, trying to determine what to do to give someone who is struggling a better chance. When I think about the struggle that women had to even get the vote I don't get discouraged, I get inspired.

The first women's convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. It was a hot July and a group of women decided that they wanted to meet together at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls to see if they could draft a statement claiming their rights as women. At that time of course our laws didn't really give women rights in any aspect of life, not just at the voting booth but in inheritance and marriage and child custody and so much else. So these women and a few brave men joined together on that hot July day to begin a process that led to the Declaration of Sentiments. It was the first document that we know of anywhere in the world where a group of people had come and said women deserve their rights. Only one woman who was there at that convention lived long enough to see women get the vote in America. It took more than 70 years from the start of the movement until nineteenth amendment was passed. More than 70 years of faith and devotion, protesting and lobbying. And when I think about the challenges we face today in politics, I always am in awe of how hard these other women had to struggle to get what we take for granted.

Ultimately, they did succeed, because even in the face of the most heartbreaking set-backs, they never lost sight of what mattered and they refused to give up.

I've always loved the story of how, back in 1915, Catt and her colleagues believed that winning in New York was critical to winning at the federal level, so they fought their hearts out. They held 10,300 meetings. They handed out seven and a half million leaflets. And they raised nearly \$100,000 -- a staggering sum in those days.

But in the end, they lost by nearly 200,000 votes.

That night, Catt was asked how long this defeat would delay their fight nationally. She replied, "Only until we can get a little sleep." And two days after that loss, they started a new campaign with a new slogan: "Victory in 1917."

I'm grateful to her and countless others because I know that every day I walk in the paths they cleared and benefit from the victories they won.

Now, some might say that their work is finished in America since women no longer face legal obstacles to education or employment or the right to vote. But we know that even though legal barriers have fallen away -- economic and attitudinal ones still remain. And that so long as there are gaps between our aspirations and our reality, their work and ours is not finished. That more perfect union still awaits.

If we truly want to finish what Catt and her colleagues had started, then it is time we stopped paying women 77 cents on the dollar when they work 60 minutes of the hour, just like men.

[Applause]

We can see that we are still not where we need to be because just this year the United States Supreme Court heard a case of a woman named Lilly Ledbetter. Lilly Ledbetter worked in a factory in Alabama. She worked there for over 20 years. She was a good worker. She became a supervisor- the only woman to become a supervisor and year after year she did the same work that all of the male supervisors did. And about 20 years into her work she learned she had never been paid the same as all of the men. Men with lesser seniority, younger men, and she wondered why. And she tried to find out and basically her employer wouldn't answer her questions. And Lilly Ledbetter didn't want to take that for an answer. So she started talking to people in town and somebody sent her to a lawyer and the lawyer said that's against the Equal Pay Act, we've had an Equal Pay Act on the books since 1963- they can't do that. The lawyer called the factory and the factory wouldn't talk to the lawyer so the lawyer brought a law suit. And Lilly Ledbetter won in court and the factory appealed it. And she won in the appellate court and the factory appealed it to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has changed in composition as you know and all of a sudden after everyone thought that the cases had been settled, that if you were discriminated for doing the same job as a woman that a man is doing you are entitled to back pay for as long as you have been doing that job as a way to deter other employers from practicing discrimination and to make good on the many hours of work that were not fairly compensated. Well, the new Supreme Court found a reason to deny Lilly Ledbetter back pay for all of those years. They came up with a theory that nobody had ever heard of before. So don't believe that the hard work is over- we still have a long way to go.

If we truly want to finish what Catt and her colleagues started, then it's time we did more than just talking about family values -- we need to adopt policies that truly value families.

[Applause]

We stand for universal pre-kindergarten all the way through to affordable college.

[Applause]

From quality, affordable healthcare for every American to retirement security for every American. Paid leave. Flexible workplaces.

We need to recognize the challenges that so many people face today. You know, the economy is much more difficult. The average American family has lost a thousand dollars in income in the last six years but the costs of everything else have gone up—health care, education, energy and gas. It's much tougher for young families to really pull together the time they need for each other.

The biggest concern that a lot of young families tell me is that they don't have enough time. They're working as hard as they can, they're worried about their future, they're anxious about everything from whether they have enough to put away to tide them over on a rainy day to what happens in the mortgage market and what's going on if somebody in their family gets sick.

If we truly want to finish what Catt and her colleagues started, then we need to do something about our national debt -- \$9 trillion and counting.

[Applause]

Every baby born today starts life with \$30,000 of debt on his or her tiny shoulders, the largest birth tax in history.

And if we truly want to finish the work that Carrie Chapman Catt and her colleagues started, then we must truly use the power of the vote to make our voices heard. To take our leaders to task. To build the kind of future we want for our children and grandchildren.

In 2004, more than 35 million women did not vote. You know, for so long, Carrie Chapman Catt and all the women who worked with her were silenced by others. Today, too many women silence themselves.

As Catt once said, "The vote is a power, a weapon of offense and defense, a prayer. Understand what it means and what it can do for your country."

Today, more than ever, we know what the vote can do for our country. I meet people who are ready to use it who have never used it before. I'm always struck when someone tells me they're voting for the first time. Often it's a young person turning 18. Sometimes it's a much older person who has just never registered and never voted. And then I meet people who never miss an election. They believe it's their duty and responsibility to show up whenever the polls are open. I've met a lot of women in their nineties who've told me they were born before women could vote, and they want to live long enough to see a woman in the White House.

[Applause]

And I love it when I hear mothers and fathers whispering to their little girls, "See honey, in this country you can be anything you want to be." Well, that's what I believe about our sons and our daughters. There should be no limits on any of our children in America. But we have to do the hard work to make sure that is true. And all too often, people give up their beliefs and convictions because they don't vote leaving the field free to those who may not share their views, don't care about the same issues that they care about, but are willing to be there when it counts. We need

to do everything we can to heed Carrie Chapman Catt's admonition to "Roll up your sleeves and set your mind to making history"

That's what Americans have been doing for over 200 years. It wasn't by accident that the first meeting ever held in the world to talk about and write down what rights women were entitled to happened in America. We have to keep faith with the work, the struggle and the sacrifice of those who have come before. We have to be reminded from time to time that freedom isn't free and equality cannot be taken for granted. Every generation faces new challenges and every generation has to step up and be heard and exercise their constitutional rights to make a difference.

That's what we do when we're at our best in America. I want Americans to start acting like Americans again. We face a lot of challenges here at home and around the world. We need to set big goals, goals that will bring out the best in our country, goals that will unite us, goals that will respect each and every one of us and cherish the contribution that we can make to this great nation. I know that there's a lot of work to be done but I relish the opportunity to be part of making history with all of you because this country deserves the very best that each and every one of us can offer.

Thank you all very, very much.

[Applause]

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