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November 1, 2007

YOUTH: Remarks on Student Activism at Wellesley College

Well, I'll tell you, I know how we're going to solve the energy crisis.

(LAUGHTER)

We're all going to do it together. This wonderful hall that has meant so much to me over so many years, the site of a lot of great memories for me is a place that I return to with so much love and affection.

And standing up here with my -- looking out at all of you is just an overwhelming experience. I am so grateful to be here.

And I thank Maya (ph) and everyone who is working with her here at Wellesley, the entire Wellesley College students who are putting this team together to support my candidacy and who put this event together today.

I also want to thank the students from all of the colleges and universities. I know we have students from B.U. and Harvard and Yale and Brown and others...

(APPLAUSE)

... who have traveled to be here. And welcome to Wellesley and welcome to this event. It's not exactly a mixer, but I hope you get to meet each other.

(APPLAUSE)

There are a lot of friends in this audience, people whom I have known for a long time, but there are two that I want to recognize, because they've meant so much (inaudible).

That meant two out of four feet had to be on the floor at all times. Try it sometime.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, that is a rule that I and many of my classmates became actually nostalgic for when we had college aged children of our own. But while times have clearly changed, what makes this college special has endured.

The world class faculty and staff who push you and challenge you, those late nights and long lunches where you challenge each other and learn from each other, the camaraderie that develops when smart, ambitious young women come together in a community of learning.

In so many ways, this all women's college prepared me to compete on the all boys' club of presidential politics.

(APPLAUSE)

This was a place where you could try out all different kinds of leadership styles, where you could ask for critique and support from your friends and the faculty with whom you had an ongoing relationship. It was a place that truly did prepare women to make the best choices that we thought were right for our own lives.

I have to tell you, though, when I came to Wellesley, I never in a million years could

have imagined I would one day return as a candidate for the presidency of the United States. Back then, I didn't even know for sure I would return for my sophomore year.

(LAUGHTER)

I had grown up in the Midwest, outside of Chicago.

(APPLAUSE)

I had serious doubts about this whole going east for college idea and just one month after I moved into my room in Stone Davis, I felt...

(APPLAUSE)

... I felt like all my worst fears had been confirmed. So many of my classmates had traveled the world. They learned and spoke multiple languages. I was struggling in my classes, in fact, to the point where my French professor said to me, "Mademoiselle, your talents lie elsewhere."

(LAUGHTER)

And I called home. In those days, you called collect. And my parents took the call, which was a good thing, and I said I just didn't think that I could do this. It wasn't for me.

Now, my father said that was just fine. I think he missed me. But my mother, who never got to go to college, would not hear a word of it. She said, "Hillary, I don't want you to be a quitter," to which I'm embarrassed to admit I responded, "All right. But if I don't like it at the end of the year, can I quit then?"

(LAUGHTER)

Well, I stuck it out and I am so glad I did, because my four years here were among the most exhilarating and informative of my life. And the friends that I made here have been the friends of a lifetime. They have sustained and supported me every step of the way on my journey, as I have tried to do for them.

And we started that journey at a tumultuous time in our nation's history. We were embroiled in a war that many of us opposed. Here at home, so many of our fellow citizens were marginalized and denied their most basic rights.

We were uneasy about our future, uncertain about America's role in the world, and unwilling to trust a government that didn't share our values.

Sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it?

(APPLAUSE)

But we were inspired by our Wellesley motto not to be ministered onto, but to minister, and we took it to heart, probably more than some of our professors and administrators at the time would have liked.

We protested the Vietnam War. We marched for civil rights. We fought to bring more minority students and faculty to Wellesley. And at the end of our four years, my classmates convinced our skeptical college president, Ruth Adams, to have the first ever student speaker at graduation and then they convinced me to do the honors.

(APPLAUSE)

Well, when the time came, President Adams introduced me as, and I quote, "cheerful, good humored, good company, and a good friend to all of us." I'm afraid she probably wanted to take it all back once I opened my mouth.

(LAUGHTER)

My thoughts on the indispensable task for criticizing and constructive protest wasn't exactly her idea of a commencement speech. Now, when I go back and read it today, I have to admit, it wasn't the world's most coherent address and I sort of cringe when I read that I actually said things like "coming to terms with our humanness and authentic reality and inauthentic reality."

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(LAUGHTER)

I tell you, Wellesley gets into you and...

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(APPLAUSE)

But I still believe as strongly today as I did then in my statement that politics is the art of making what appears to be impossible possible. That is what I have believed ever since I was a student here. That's what I have tried to do throughout my life, starting after law school, as when Maya said, I didn't want to go to work for a law firm, I didn't want to clerk for a judge.

I went to work instead for the Children's Defense Fund and my first assignment there was trying to figure out what we could do to get more kids into school.

I went to New Bedford, Massachusetts to try to figure out why there were so many children in the census who didn't appear on any school enrollment forms. And I went door to door and in home after home, I found children who were blind or deaf or in wheelchairs. They were kept home because the schools wouldn't or couldn't accommodate them.

They wanted to learn. They wanted to succeed. But they never had the chance. I knew then that I wanted to spend my career being a voice for children, children particularly who had been left behind, children who drew the short straw in life.

I wanted to fight to give them the same opportunities that I had growing up. And like many of my classmates and many of you, I did want to make a difference. Now, that wasn't always easy. Back then, women weren't always taken seriously back then.

When I was first deciding where to attend law school, I was invited to go, after I had been admitted to Harvard and Yale, to a cocktail reception for prospective students at the Harvard Law School and I knew a couple of the male students who were there and they were showing me around.

And we ran right into Professor Paper Chase, large, imposing, three-piece suit, watch chain, looking down at everyone, and one of my friends said, "Professor so-and-so, this is Hillary Rodham. She's trying to decide between us and our nearest competitor."

And he looked down at me and he said, "Well, first of all, we don't have a nearest competitor."

(LAUGHTER)

"And, secondly, we don't need any more women." So I decided to go to Yale.

(APPLAUSE)

There were 235 students, of whom just 27 were women, and today women are the majority of students in law schools.

(APPLAUSE)

As a young lawyer, when I once told a colleague that I wanted to practice litigation courtroom law, he replied that this was clearly impossible, because I didn't have a wife.

He asked me...

(LAUGHTER)

He asked me, totally seriously, "When you're in a long trial and you're so busy, who will make sure you have clean socks for court?"

I had honestly never thought about that.

(LAUGHTER)

I had always washed my own socks. And I have been thrilled to see women serving across America not only in the legal profession, but the medical profession, in academia and so much else.

But back then, the idea of a woman running for president would have been greeted with derisive laughter.

Well, times have changed. Despite the challenges we faced, we have found ways to serve our country in every way imaginable, in our professions, our communities and our families.

And looking at your generation, I see that same desire to give back. We saw it especially after September 11. While the president didn't ask us to do anything, except go shopping, which hardly ranks up there as a call to action and sacrifice from an American president, the young people of our country had other ideas.

Between 2000 and 2006, applications to teach for America nearly tripled. Between 2004 and 2006 alone, applications to the Americorps Vista program jumped 50 percent. And in recent years, the Peace Corps has seen the highest number of volunteers in three decades.

We've seen a resurgence of activism on college campuses. Students at Brown have created a sustainable foods initiative, organizing farmers' markets and convincing dining halls to switch to local foods.

Students at Keane State College in New Hampshire hosted a concert to raise money for victims of the genocide in Darfur.

Students at the University of New Hampshire are working to protect our environment by reducing energy and water use on campus.

And here at Wellesley, just recently, students organized a day of awareness and a rally to protest the unfair treatment of the Jena 6. They've also traveled to New Orleans to help rebuild after Hurricane Katrina and...

(APPLAUSE)

... I especially want to thank you for working together through a group called Sisters Keepers to help student mothers finish their education.

(APPLAUSE)

And to those who might sometimes here on television say that your generation is disengaged, that you're not as passionate and committed as we were, I say come to Providence, come to Keane, come to Durham, come to Wellesley, travel across our country, take the same opportunity that I've had to actually meet and talk with the young people of America, see how every day you're standing up, taking charge and making the impossible possible.

Unfortunately, for nearly seven years, we've had a president who hasn't been much of a partner in your work. If anything, he's actually created more work. He's undermined women's right and gay rights and appointed Supreme Court justices who chipped away at reproductive rights, undermined equal pay, and turned back the clock on school integration, decisions that will affect you and your children for decades to come.

He's continued to wage a war in Iraq that has taken more than 3,800 of our best and most dedicated young men and women and costs us more than \$300 million a day, a bill that, again, you and your children will be paying, unless we reverse course.

He's run up our national debt to \$9 trillion. So every baby born today starts life with \$30,000 of debt on his or her tiny shoulders, a birth tax that will only increase for your children and grandchildren if we don't end this reckless spending.

He's waged a war on science, cutting off promising stem cell research, banning his own surgeon general from talking about contraception, failing to address the threat of global warming, that we know not only could, but is leading to increased storms and floods and heat waves and droughts, affecting millions of people across America and the world.

To paraphrase one of my most recent opponents, the philosopher, Stephen Colbert...

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... this administration doesn't make decisions based on facts, it makes facts based on decisions.

(LAUGHTER)

As a result, my generation is in danger of being the first ever to leave America worse off than when we found it. And whether you're a Democrat or Republican, Independent, or you don't even care about politics, I think we can all agree that your generation, my daughter's generation deserves better than that.

The challenges you face today are no less profound than ones faced by previous generations of Americans and you deserve a president who will meet those challenges head on, a president who is committed to your future, a president who will never again play politics with women's health and women's rights, who will never again...

(APPLAUSE)

... who will never again put ideology over science and the cures and breakthroughs of the future, who will never again engage in reckless spending and stick you with the bill, who will confront the challenges that we face without fear or fear-mongering and leave America better off.

If you give me the chance and the honor, I will be that president for you.

(APPLAUSE)

I will start by making college affordable again so that middle class and hardworking families can go.

(APPLAUSE)

Back when I went to college, my father told me, "Here's the deal. Got enough money for your tuition and board, but anything beyond that, like buying books, you pay for yourself." And I had worked summers and holidays since I was 13, so I was fine with that.

But when I decided to go to law school and I told my father, he said, "Well, you're on your own for that one. That wasn't part of the deal."

So I kept working and I got a scholarship from Wellesley, the Vida Dutton Scudder scholarship, and I borrowed money from the federal government at a low interest rate. I didn't have to worry about some for-profit student loan company ripping me and my family off, raising the interest rates or changing the terms of the loan.

I didn't get stuck with a massive debt that would have derailed my dreams of a career in public service. When I'm president, I will restore that basic bargain. I proposed a new college tax credit that will cover more than 50 percent of the typical cost of public colleges and universities or the full cost of tuition for community colleges.

And for those who don't go to college, I think we should invest more in apprenticeships and job training and lifelong learning opportunities. There are so many...

(APPLAUSE)

There's so many hardworking young Americans, I think you probably know as many as I do, who don't go to college, but who deserve to have a shot at a high wage, high skill job, and we're going to have a lot of shortages in high skill jobs.

So we need to start doing more for them, as well. Let's start creating those jobs by investing in a new, clean energy industry and addressing the threat of global warming right now.

(APPLAUSE)

We all know the science. There's no longer a debate. Global warming is real. It's one of the greatest environmental, economic and international security threats we face, and I was, as I'm sure all of you were, so proud of Vice President Gore when he got the Nobel Prize for raising the alarm about global warming.

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(APPLAUSE)

But we need a policy and that is what I will do as president. I'll create a \$1 billion green building fund to build and renovate public buildings. We'll make buildings green and energy efficient. I want to establish a strategic energy fund paid for by a \$50 billion investment in clean, renewable technologies by taking away the tax subsidies from the oil companies. They don't need them to make a profit.

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(APPLAUSE)

Next week I'll be unveiling a broad agenda to address our energy and global warming challenges and I'll be talking a lot more about those issues all next week.

But today's challenges aren't just at home. We have to face those in order to make sure we have a strong and prosperous middle class. That has been the engine of economic growth in our country.

That's why we have to tackle energy. That's why we have to make college affordable. That's why we have to have an education system that starts with universal pre-kindergarten, that fixes the unfunded mandate of No Child Left Behind.

(APPLAUSE)

And that's why, finally, we need a health care system that provides quality, affordable health care for every single American.

(APPLAUSE)

But we know that our challenges are not just here at home. After nearly seven years of a stubborn, preemptive, go-it-alone foreign policy, we have our work cut out for us to restore our leadership around the world.

That starts with bringing our troops home from Iraq as responsibly and quickly as we can.

(APPLAUSE)

There is no military solution and we should not be asking our brave young men and women to serve as referees in their sectarian conflicts. It has to be done as carefully as possible, because it is dangerous withdrawing troops.

I've laid out my plans to bring our troops home from Iraq and demand that the Iraqis take responsibility for their own country, replace our military involvement with an intensive diplomatic initiative in the area.

And let me be clear, if George Bush doesn't end this war while he is president, when I am president, I will as quickly as I can.

(APPLAUSE)

But, unfortunately, our problems go far beyond Iraq. Take out the globe and look at it. We have alienated our friends and emboldened our enemies across the world. I have said I won't even wait until I'm inaugurated. The day after I'm elected, I will ask distinguished Americans of both parties to travel around the world with a new message, the era of cowboy diplomacy is over. We're going to start working with people again.

(APPLAUSE)

And, you know, I have come to a rather obvious conclusion based on my Wellesley education. You can't be a leader in the world if no one is following. And we have got to get back to leading, leading with our values, leading with moral authority, leading on behalf of bringing the world together, because when it comes to the challenges we face from global terrorism to global warming to global epidemics and global competition, we cannot do this all on our own.

And I want to lead the world to end the genocide in Darfur and we need to act immediately. Every day we fail to act is a betrayal of our common values.

As president, I will speed the deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping force. I will provide

them with more support to do the job we're asking them to do and create real consequences for anyone who continues the bloodshed or obstructs the peace process.

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We need to lead the world...

(APPLAUSE)

... to stop the brutal violence in Burma and insist that the regime release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

(APPLAUSE)

We need to lead the world in fighting the AIDS epidemic that is creating a global generation of orphans and destabilizing countries. That's why I was proud to sign the pledge to invest \$50 billion by 2013 to combat AIDS across the world. We need to lead the world...

(APPLAUSE)

We need to lead the world in standing up for women's rights. Twelve years ago, when the U.N. convened a historic conference on women in Beijing, I was proud to represent our country and proclaim to the world that women's rights are human rights, because when women...

(APPLAUSE)

... when women continue to be raped as a casualty of conflict, trafficked for commercial advantage, denied education and health care and family planning, not given access to credit, denied their rights as citizens, that not only affects them and their countries, that compromises the dignity and the human rights of the entire human family.

If we don't stand for women's rights, we will never stand for our best values. That has to be a part of American foreign policy.

(APPLAUSE)

We need to lead the world in providing opportunity to the world's children, because when 100 million children in the developing world don't attend school and 150 million more drop out before finishing first grade, that is a recipe for poverty, extremism and instability.

That's why I've introduced the bipartisan Education for All Act, \$10 billion over five years toward the goal of basic education for every boy and girl around the world.

And, finally, we need to lead the world by living up to our values here at home. As we seek to promote the rule of law in other nations, we must accept it for ourselves. As we counsel liberty and justice for all, we cannot support torture and the indefinite detention of people we declare to be beyond the law.

(APPLAUSE)

I realize this is an ambitious agenda. Would you expect anything less from a Wellesley woman?

(APPLAUSE)

And I know I can't do it alone. I need your help. I am thrilled that we are launching 120 student chapters on college campuses across America today. We have a new Web site called Hillblazers at www.Hillblazers.Com to help young people get organized.

And in the coming weeks, I need your help to make the calls, to knock on the doors and organize the events and talk to your friends and family. That's what I did back in 1968, when a group of my dear friends and I jumped in a car that one of us finagled to have on campus, and we would drive from Wellesley to Manchester, New Hampshire, stuffing envelopes and walking the precincts for Eugene McCarthy.

He was running for president on a platform of ending the Vietnam War. I am running for president, in part, on a platform to end the war in Iraq and most important of all, I

need your help on election day. I need you to get the vote out and get your friends registered so they can vote.

In 2004, while the voter turnout rate for 18- to 34-year-olds was higher than in 2000, more than 25 million still never cast their votes, enough to possibly change the course of history.

For so long, young people have been ignored and silenced by others. Today, too many young people silence themselves. It's up to all of you to change that.

I know that politics can be frustrating, but it seems like we get bogged down in distractions and trivialization, who's up and who's down, people's hairstyle or their laugh or what they're wearing rather than what they're saying.

But in those moments when you think you're never going to break through the noise and you just want to give up, I urge you to think about all of the people who came before you. Many of them, we'll never know their names. They're lost to history. But so many others, we can read their stories, be amazed at their strength and their courage.

Think about those audacious women and a few brave men who gathered in Seneca Falls, New York for the declaration to issue the very first statement ever in the history of the world calling for women's full equality.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the key organizers, was just 32 years old. One attendee was just 15. It took more than 70 years for them to win the vote, more than 70 years of protesting, organizing, lobbying, going to jail, doing hunger strikes, chaining themselves to the gate in front of the White House, but they never gave up.

And just one woman from the Seneca Falls Convention lived long enough to actually cast a ballot.

Think about the civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was just 26 years old when he led the Montgomery bus boycott. My dear friend, Congressman John Lewis, was just 25 when he led that historic march across the bridge in Selma, a march that ended with teargas, hoses and the crack of night sticks against and his and others' skulls, as the marchers knelt down to pray.

Think about that. They were attacked as they knelt down to pray. They were, as Congressman Lewis put it later, using our bodies as a witness to the truth and they forced America to bear witness, as well.

They were willing to put their lives on the line and together they made the impossible possible.

I stand here today because of those brave men and women and I am inspired every day by the people I meet on the campaign trail. You know, the mothers and fathers who lift their little girls on their shoulders or lean over and whisper in their ears, "See, honey, in America, you can be anything you want to be."

The women in their 90s who come to my events, they stand there, they hold themselves up in a walker, they may be in a wheelchair, and as I meet them, they tell me, "I was born before women could vote and I want to live long enough to see a woman in the White House."

I know the challenges...

(APPLAUSE)

I know the challenges we face are daunting, but I still believe what I said in my commencement speech nearly 40 years ago. Fear is always with us, but we just don't have time for it, not now. So let's roll up our sleeves and get to work together.

We're ready to shatter that highest glass ceiling. It's what Americans have been doing for more than 200 years. It's what I believe has created the space for the transformative changes that we have been the beneficiaries of.

I think we're ready for that kind of change again. Change is just a word if you don't have the strength and experience to make it happen. I believe I do and I believe

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together we can make it.

We can make history. I like to think that it will be young people driven by Dr. King's fierce urgency of now who will make the difference in this election, because when I am president, my presidency is about your future. It is about what you will have to make your lives, to make your choices however you choose, to be responsible for yourselves, those whom you love, your communities, our country and the world.

There's a lot of work to do and I hope you will join me in doing that work.

Thank you all very, very much.

(APPLAUSE)

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