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MRS. REAGAN'S REMARKS
MCI EXECUTIVE FORUM
WASHINGTON, D.C.
MONDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1988

-- THANK YOU. I'M DELIGHTED TO BE HERE.

-- WHEN I ASKED MY STAFF WHAT YOU WANTED ME TO TALK ABOUT TODAY, I WAS TOLD YOU'D LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT MY YEARS IN THE WHITE HOUSE. SO, HERE WE GO --

-- IN LESS THAN FOUR MONTHS, MY HUSBAND AND I WILL NO LONGER CALL THE WHITE HOUSE HOME. I CAN TELL YOU WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO OUR NEW LIFE AND OUR NEW FREEDOM BACK IN CALIFORNIA. AND YET, IT'S ALSO STARTING TO SINK IN HOW MUCH WE'RE GOING TO MISS BEING SO MUCH A PART OF THIS COUNTRY'S DAILY LIFE.

-- THE REMARKABLE THING IS THAT YOU CAN GENUINELY FEEL A NATION. YOU CAN FEEL THE PEOPLE AND THEIR PRAYERS AND THEIR CONCERNS. AND IT IS A VERY REWARDING, ENLIGHTENING SENSATION. AND THE WORLD THAT IS OPEN TO YOU . . . IN ONE WEEK THIS SPRING I WAS AT THE KREMLIN WITH THE GORBACHEVS, AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE WITH QUEEN ELIZABETH, AND AT DISNEY WORLD WITH A GROUP OF MY FAVORITE PEOPLE -- THE FOSTER GRANDPARENTS.

-- LIFE AT THE WHITE HOUSE IS A MAGNIFIED LIFE, WHICH MEANS THE HIGHS ARE HIGHER, THE LOWS ARE LOWER, WITH EVERY MOVE YOU MAKE EXAGGERATED BY THE TREMENDOUS SCRUTINY OF THE MEDIA. IT REALLY IS LIKE NOTHING YOU CAN IMAGINE. AT LEAST, I NEVER COULD HAVE IMAGINED IT. IT IS A HIGH-WIRE EXISTENCE, AND I WOULDN'T TRADE THE EXPERIENCE FOR EVEN EXTRA YEARS ADDED TO MY LIFE.

-- IT'S BOTH A PAMPERED, YET GRUELING EXISTENCE; YOU REALLY DO HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE IN THE WHITE HOUSE. IN LOOKING BACK, I WAS TERRIBLY NAIVE WHEN I ARRIVED. I REMEMBER DURING THE

CAMPAIGN TELLING A REPORTER THAT THERE'D ALWAYS BE PART OF MY LIFE THAT WOULD BE PRIVATE. SHE SAID, "YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT'S LIKE UNTIL YOU GET THERE." AND SHE WAS RIGHT. I WAS COMPLETELY UNPREPARED FOR THE INTENSE SCRUTINY. I JUST DIDN'T EXPECT IT TO BE THAT CONCENTRATED. AND I WAS EVEN MORE UNPREPARED FOR SOME OF THE SILLY THINGS I'D READ ABOUT MYSELF IN THE PAPERS. AND ONCE THEY APPEAR, THEY SEEM TO BE WRITTEN IN CONCRETE -- THEY JUST STAY THERE FOREVER AND KEEP ON BEING REPEATED.

-- SOME ARE PLAIN WRONG. SOME ARE DOWNRIGHT MEAN. SOME ARE HALF-TRUTHS OR COMPLETE EXAGGERATIONS. SOME ARE CORRECT. SOME ARE AMUSING. OTHERS ARE MADDENING AND STILL OTHERS HURT. WHAT I'VE LEARNED IS THAT YOU NEVER STOP BEING HURT BY STORIES, BUT YOU DO STOP BEING SURPRISED.

-- BUT NO MATTER WHAT IS WRITTEN ABOUT HER, THERE'S ONE THING ON WHICH ANY FIRST LADY MUST BE A STONE WALL. THE FIRST LADY IS FIRST OF ALL A WIFE.

-- A PRESIDENT HAS ADVISERS TO COUNSEL HIM ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ON DEFENSE, ON THE ECONOMY, ON POLITICS, ON ANY NUMBER OF MATTERS. BUT NO ONE AMONG ALL THOSE EXPERTS IS THERE TO LOOK AFTER HIM AS AN INDIVIDUAL WITH HUMAN NEEDS, AS A FLESH AND BLOOD PERSON WHO MUST DEAL WITH THE PRESSURES OF HOLDING THE MOST POWERFUL POSITION ON EARTH.

-- TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN A PRESIDENT IS HOSPITALIZED. YES, THERE ARE THE DEMANDS OF GOVERNMENT, BUT THERE ARE ALSO BASIC PERSONAL RIGHTS EVERY PRESIDENT SHOULD NOT BE DENIED. AS A WIFE, I BELIEVE MY HUSBAND HAS AS MUCH RIGHT TO A NORMAL

RECUPERATION AS ANY OTHER HUSBAND. AND I THINK IT'S AN IMPORTANT, LEGITIMATE ROLE FOR A FIRST LADY TO LOOK AFTER A PRESIDENT'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING. NO FIRST LADY NEED MAKE APOLOGIES FOR LOOKING OUT FOR HER HUSBAND'S PERSONAL WELFARE.

-- THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF DISCUSSION IN THIS COUNTRY REGARDING WHAT INFLUENCE A FIRST LADY SHOULD HAVE IN A PRESIDENT'S LIFE.

-- I AGREE WITH A.M. ROSENTHAL OF THE NEW YORK TIMES, WHO WROTE, "OF COURSE, THE WIFE OF THE PRESIDENT . . . WILL GIVE HIM OPINIONS, TELL HIM WHAT SHE THINKS OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND FARM SUBSIDIES. WHEN THEY GO UP TO THEIR LIVING QUARTERS AT NIGHT, IS SHE SUPPOSED TO TALK ABOUT DRESSES AND HAIRDRESSERS? ANY MAN WHO MARRIED A WOMAN THAT VAPID SHOULDN'T BE PRESIDENT ANYWAY."

-- BUT WHAT I FINALLY BEGAN TO REALIZE WAS THIS: AS FIRST LADY YOU'LL BE THE OBJECT OF ATTENTION NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO. SO YOU TRY TO USE THAT ATTENTION FOR A POSITIVE PURPOSE. I'VE TRIED AS MUCH AS I CAN TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE PROBLEM OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG OUR YOUNG PEOPLE.

-- AND I HOPE I'VE USED MY TIME TO GOOD ADVANTAGE, TRAVELLING TO 65 CITIES IN 33 STATES AND 8 FOREIGN COUNTRIES, AS WELL AS THE VATICAN, TO MAKE PEOPLE AWARE OF THE DRUG PROBLEM. I'VE TRIED TO GET THE MESSAGE ACROSS THROUGH HUNDREDS OF INTERVIEWS, TAPINGS, SPEECHES, EVENTS AND VISITS. EVERY MILE, EVERY MEETING HAS BEEN WORTH IT.

-- I'VE OFTEN THOUGHT THAT IF ANYTHING IS SACRED, OUR CHILDREN ARE SACRED. AND WE'RE THE ONES WHO MUST TEND THEIR FLAMES UNTIL THEY CAN BURN BRIGHTLY ON THEIR OWN. THEY ARE SO

VULNERABLE TO DRUGS. IN THIS COUNTRY, VIRTUALLY EVERY CHILD WILL BE FORCED TO MAKE A DECISION ON WHETHER TO USE DRUGS BY THE AGE OF 12 OR 14. MANY CHILDREN MAY FACE THE DECISION IN GRADE SCHOOL. MANY ARE SO YOUNG THEY HAVEN'T YET DEVELOPED THE STRENGTH AND VALUES AND UNDERSTANDING THAT WOULD HELP THEM SAY NO TO DRUGS.

-- FOR TOO LONG WE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND DRUG ABUSE AND THE DEVASTATING IMPACT IT COULD HAVE ON OUR FAMILIES AND OUR SOCIETIES. WE COULDN'T GET ANYONE TO FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM. FOR YEARS DRUGS WERE GLAMORIZED; THEY WERE TREATED SO CASUALLY THAT COMEDIANS ON TELEVISION EVEN MADE JOKES ABOUT BEING HIGH. TODAY, THANK GOODNESS, FEW PEOPLE THINK THAT DRUGS ARE EITHER GLAMOROUS OR FUNNY.

-- FOR YEARS YOUNG PEOPLE WERE THE BIGGEST ADVOCATES OF DRUG USE. TODAY, YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE AWARE OF THE DANGERS. TODAY, THE REAL ADVOCATES OF DRUG USE ARE THE AGING HOLDOVERS FROM THE 1960'S AND 1970'S.

-- FOR YEARS THERE WAS NO ORGANIZED OPPOSITION TO DRUGS. TODAY, THERE'S A STRONG ANTI-DRUG NETWORK IN THIS COUNTRY. PARENTS AND CHILDREN ALIKE HAVE FORMED GROUPS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY TO COMBAT DRUG USE.

-- CERTAINLY FOR THOSE WHO USE DRUGS, THE DRUG CRISIS IS WORSE THAN EVER. AND WE NEED NEW WAYS TO REACH THE YOUNG IN THE INNER CITY WHERE DRUG PRESSURES ARE TREMENDOUS. BUT NEVERTHELESS WE'RE MAKING PROGRESS, REAL PROGRESS, AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WHO'VE NEVER BEEN INVOLVED WITH DRUGS. ALL THIS IS PROGRESS THAT WILL BE HAVING ITS EFFECT IN YEARS TO COME.

-- MY WORK AGAINST DRUGS HAS PROVIDED ME WITH THE MOST FULFILLING YEARS OF MY LIFE. I WILL ALWAYS BE INVOLVED WITH THE

ANTI-DRUG MOVEMENT. I'M NOT ABOUT TO GIVE UP THIS CAUSE SIMPLY BECAUSE MY HUSBAND IS NO LONGER PRESIDENT. WHEN WE LEAVE WASHINGTON, I'LL BE WORKING TO BUILD A DRUG CENTER IN LOS ANGELES. THE CENTER WILL INCLUDE A RESIDENTIAL HIGH SCHOOL, A TRAINING FACILITY, AND A RESEARCH UNIT. AND I HOPE THE CENTER WILL BECOME A PLACE WHERE WE CAN DEVELOP NEW METHODS, TEST NEW APPROACHES AND DISCOVER NEW ANSWERS.

-- A FIRST LADY GENUINELY HAS THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. AND TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IS WHAT ALL OF US WANT IN OUR LIVES. THE FIRST TIME I RECEIVED A LETTER SAYING THAT I HAD SAVED A PERSON'S LIFE, I WEPT. I NEVER DREAMED I HAD THE ABILITY TO DO THAT -- TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE WHO WERE UNKNOWN TO ME. AND YET IF THEY'RE LONELY OR CONFUSED OR HURTING, THEY'RE OUT THERE LISTENING; THEY'RE WAITING TO BE SPOKEN TO AND HELPED. AND THAT'S THE WONDERFUL THING -- A FIRST LADY CAN REALLY, TRULY REACH SOME OF THEM.

-- THERE'S SOMETHING ALBERT SCHWEITZER SAID. HE SAID, "ONE THING I KNOW: THE ONLY ONES AMONG YOU WHO WILL BE REALLY HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO WILL HAVE FOUND HOW TO SERVE."

-- WELL, I AM VERY HAPPY, BECAUSE OVER THESE PAST EIGHT YEARS IN THE WHITE HOUSE, I HAVE FOUND HOW TO SERVE. AND FOR THAT I WILL BE FOREVER GRATEFUL TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

-- THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY.

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