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Women's Sports Foundation Speech

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WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION

SEPTEMBER 24, 1984

I WANT TO THANK AL FERRO FOR THAT WONDERFUL INTRODUCTION. AND I WANT TO THANK YOUR PRESIDENT, DONNA DIVERONA, FOR INVITING ME BACK AGAIN TO HELP YOU CELEBRATE THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION. YOUR FOUNDER, BILLIE JEAN KING, HAS SHOWN US ALL WHAT IT MEANS TO OPEN DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY. THIS EVENT GIVES US A CHANCE TO HONOR A SPECIAL FEW WHO HAVE FOLLOWED HER FINE EXAMPLE.

THIS HAS BEEN QUITE A SUMMER FOR WOMEN, HASN'T IT? ACTUALLY, IT'S BEEN QUITE A DECADE FOR WOMEN. AND THIS YEAR'S SUMMER OLYMPICS SHOWED THE WORLD JUST HOW FAR WE'VE COME.

AS OLD RECORDS FELL AND NEW STARS ROSE THIS JULY, MILLIONS OF WOMEN SHARED THE PRIDE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AND GLIMPSED THE GOAL OF EQUALITY. I KNOW I WAS INSPIRED BY THE PERFORMANCE OF MANY OF YOU IN THIS ROOM, AND I'M GRATEFUL TO BE HERE WITH YOU TODAY.

OUR PROGRESS TOWARD EQUALITY IS NOT ONLY GOOD FOR WOMEN. IT'S GOOD FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY. EVERY TIME THIS NATION REMOVES ANOTHER BARRIER, OUR SOCIETY IS MORE FREE. EACH TIME WE ADD THE TALENTS OF ANOTHER EXCLUDED GROUP, OUR COUNTRY IS ENRICHED.

WHEN I FIRST RAN FOR CONGRESS, I RAN AS AN ASSSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY, AND MY SLOGAN WAS "FINALLY...A TOUGH DEMOCRAT."

I ALREADY ^eKNOW IT TOOK TOUGHNESS TO GO THROUGH LAW SCHOOL AT NIGHT ~~TO BECOME A PROSECUTOR.~~ *While working full time during the day* SINCE THEN, PEOPLE LIKE YOU HAVE TAUGHT ME MORE ABOUT WHAT "TOUGH" REALLY MEANS.

AS ALL OF YOU KNOW SO WELL, IT'S TOUGH FOR LITTLE GIRLS WHO WANT TO PLAY BASEBALL, WHEN SCHOOLS DON'T LET THEM PLAY. AND IT'S TOUGH FOR WOMEN WHO DESERVE ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS, BUT COLLEGES WON'T GRANT THEM.

YOU AND I CAN CHANGE ALL THAT. WE CAN -- WE MUST -- MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE WOMEN, AND THE MEN, WHO WILL FOLLOW US.

BUT THE KEY TO PROGRESS IN SPORTS AND OTHER FIELDS IS EDUCATION. WE'VE FOUGHT HARD FOR EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND WE'VE WON IMPORTANT VICTORIES.

ONE OF OUR MOST IMPORTANT WAS TITLE NINE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT, WHICH DENIES FEDERAL FUNDS TO ANY SCHOOL THAT DISCRIMINATES AGAINST WOMEN.

EVEN THAT VICTORY IS NOT SECURE. THIS ADMINISTRATION HAS DONE ITS BEST TO BREAK THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND WOMEN THAT TITLE NINE FORGED. IT HAS SIDED WITH THOSE WHO WOULD DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN, AND DONE ITS BEST TO MAKE TITLE NINE LESS EFFECTIVE.

MR. REAGAN WENT TO THE OLYMPICS TO CONGRATULATE OUR FINE WOMEN ATHLETES, AND I THINK THAT'S GREAT. BUT I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD JUST PAT WOMEN ON THE BACK AFTER THEY'VE CROSSED THE FINISH LINE. WE MUST HELP THEM GET TO THE STARTING BLOCKS BY OUTLAWING DISCRIMINATION IN ALL FEDERALLY-FUNDED INSTITUTIONS.

OF COURSE, THAT WOULD BE A LOT EASIER TO DO IF WE HAD OUR RIGHTS PROTECTED IN THE CONSTITUTION. AND WHEN I TAKE THE OATH OF OFFICE FOR MY SECOND TERM AS VICE PRESIDENT, I WANT TO SWEAR TO UPHOLD A CONSTITUTION THAT INCLUDES THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT.

THE WOMEN WE ARE HONORING TODAY HAVE SHOWN US THAT WOMEN CERTAINLY HAVE THE ABILITY TO SUCCEED. AND WHEN WE'RE ALLOWED THE OPPORTUNITIES, OUR ABILITY KNOWS NO BOUNDS. IF ANYONE PROVES THAT FACT, IT IS THE PROFESSIONAL SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR.

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA IS AN OUTSTANDING ATHLETE. BUT ONE OF HER BEST QUALITIES IS THAT SHE'S OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS.

(UNFORTUNATELY, MARTINA CANNOT BE HERE TODAY.) BUT I DON'T MIND CONFESSING TO YOU THAT SHE GAVE ME MY SECOND BIGGEST THRILL OF THE SUMMER WHEN I RAN INTO HER ON THE COURTS AT THE WEST SIDE TENNIS CLUB. SOME OF YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD THAT I GAVE MARTINA A FEW POINTERS THAT DAY ABOUT RETURNING CHRISSIE LLOYD'S SERVES. AND ALL OF YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. SHE LISTENED WELL, AND WENT ON TO WIN THE U.S. OPEN FOR THE SECOND TIME IN A ROW.

WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW IS THE MARTINA GAVE ME A FEW HINTS ABOUT HANDLING GEORGE BUSH'S VOLLEYS DURING OUR DEBATE NEXT MONTH. I'M A VERY GOOD LISTENER AND SHE'S A VERY GOOD COACH. AND I SAY, GEORGE BUSH WILL GO DOWN IN STRAIGHT SETS ON OCTOBER 11.)

SO FOR ALL THE HELP SHE'S GIVEN ALL OF US, WILL YOU JOIN WITH ME IN CONGRATULATING THE FOUNDATION'S PROFESSIONAL SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR, MARTINA NAVRATILOVA. YOUR PRESIDENT, DONNA DIVERONA, WILL ACCEPT THE AWARD ON MARTINA'S BEHALF.

THIS YEAR THE AWARD FOR THE BEST AMATEUR SPORTSWOMAN IS SHARED BY TWO GREAT ATHLETES, JOAN BENOIT AND MARY LOU RETTON. (I UNDERSTAND THAT MARY LOU WAS IN LOS ANGELES LAST NIGHT PRESENTING AN EMMY AWARD, SO SHE WAS UNABLE TO BE WITH US THIS MORNING. BUT WE ALL CONGRATULATE HER ON HER MAGNIFICENT ACHIEVEMENTS AT THE OLYMPICS.)

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THIS SUMMER, JOAN BENOIT WON THE RESPECT AND ADMIRATION OF PEOPLE EVERYWHERE WITH HER INCREDIBLE VICTORY IN THE WOMEN'S MARATHON RACE. FOR YEARS, THE OLYMPIC COMMITTEE WOULDN'T ALLOW A WOMEN'S MARATHON, BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT WOMEN DIDN'T HAVE THE STAMINA TO RUN THE RACE. WELL, THEY WERE WRONG, AND JOAN BENOIT PROVED THEM WRONG.

JOAN'S STRATEGY WAS TO GET OUT IN FRONT RIGHT FROM THE START AND STAY THERE. WELL, YOU MIGHT HAVE NOTICED THAT WALTER MONDALE AND I HAVE CHOSEN A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT STRATEGY FOR WINNING OUR MARATHON. BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT STRATEGY YOU CHOOSE, AS LONG AS YOU'RE IN FRONT AT THE FINISH.

LET'S CONGRATULATE THE WOMEN SPORTS FOUNDATION'S AMATEUR SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR, JOAN BENOIT. *and Maylou Belton*

THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH FOR COMING.

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