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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE
OBSERVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S YEAR, 1975

THE EAST ROOM

6:39 P.M. EDT

Members of the Congress, the House and Senate,
Members of the Commission, distinguished guests, ladies
and gentlemen:

I apologize for being a little late, but I
have spent a good share of the afternoon with a substantial
number of Members of two important committees of the
Senate, so I am just late and I hope you will understand
and accept my apology.

I obviously am delighted to welcome such a
talented group of women and men to the White House. The group
that I have met in there that I had the privilege of inviting
specially here today, as well as all of you, represent a rich
diversity of political, cultural and experienced background, but
it is most important that your common concern for
upgrading the status of women transcends any differences
that you might have.

Your work to promote the observance of the International
Women's Year begins tomorrow. And with a very broad challenge
to promote equality between men and women, I think you
have got your work cut out for you -- to insure the full
participation of women in the social-economic developments
of this society as well as to recognize their contributions
to the development of world peace.

Although the growing concern about the special
legal and social problems of women has paved the way for
many, many new laws and important court decisions, real change,
as I see it, will depend upon the caliber and degree
of enforcement. Laws alone, as we know in many, many
instances, are not enough.

Statistics on the employment of women in Federal
Government demonstrates, I think, the problems that remain
in assuring true equal opportunity. While nearly one-third
of all Federal employees are women, only 4.5 percent of
the top level employees are women.

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This Administration, as the records will show, recently reminded the heads of all Federal departments and agencies that a strong affirmative action is needed to see that everyone has the opportunity to compete with -- or on a fair and equal basis.

The Federal Government, in my judgment, has a very special responsibility and a special opportunity to set an example and this we intend to do. I hear about that from Betty virtually every night. (Laughter) And I can assure you with that kind of prodding that this Administration will continue to vigorously pursue talented applicants on the basis of qualifications alone.

One of the most refreshing by-products of the search to secure rights for women is the emphasis on freeing both sexes from restrictive stereotypes. Liberation of the spirit opens new possibilities for the future of individual Americans and the Nation.

I think there are several very critical areas that can benefit from your personal attention. When I look around this room, I know that the attention of this group can have a tremendous impact. One of these is the Equal Rights Amendment, which I wholeheartedly endorse, having already voted for it.

I have had a special opportunity to follow the debate of ERA because Betty keeps talking about it at night. (Laughter) But it would be my observation that it has too often degenerated into some frivolous non-issues. An amendment to the Constitution calls for a very serious evaluation of the impact and the meaning of a proposed change.

As state legislatures convene this year, the ensuing debate over ERA should be a vehicle to inform legislators, and the public as well, on the many complex legal problems women still encounter.

Myths about the protected economic status of women can be dispelled through serious discussion. The way can be, as I see it, open for the review of areas that will not be affected by ERA. You have a challenging and very critical task ahead. You can do much, in my judgment, to move the Nation along toward making justice and equality a reality for the American women.

The restrictions on the rights, the restrictions on the responsibilities to one American affects all of us. A Nation is only as strong, a Nation is only as creative as its citizens. The better we use the talents of all our people, women as well as men, the brighter and more secure the future of this great Republic will be.

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I thank you for joining Betty and me, and we would like to jointly issue you an invitation to have refreshments in the State Dining Room.

Thank you very, very much.

I can tell who that applause is for but she said I did very well. (Laughter)

I want that on the record because I don't get that very often. (Laughter)

END

(AT 6:47 P.M. EDT)