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Remarks at a reception for Representative Debbie Stabenow
William J Clinton

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Thank you. Now, only a politician who is not running for office would take a stand on the Final Four before the results are in. (Laughter]

Thank you very much. Debbie, I am a huge basketball fan. And I already lost my State school and my daughter's alma mater in the NCAA, so I'm just watching it with great fascination. It's been a good tournament.

I want to thank Senator Torricelli for all that he has done for the Democrats, and the Senate candidates in particular. And I thank Carl Levin for more than I can say. You have no idea all the good things that he does in the Senate, many of which are not vote-getting issues; they'll never make the headlines. But someone needs to be going to work every day who cares about public policy and good Government and the way this country works. And Carl Levin does. You should be really proud of him. He's a really good man.

I want to thank Gary and Bill and Michelle for helping Debbie to raise the money necessary to wage a campaign against an incumbent Senator of the other party. It's a difficult thing to do. And she is in good shape, but she needs your support to do it. And I want to thank John Conyers and Sandy Levin for being here, and so many other of my friends from Michigan who helped me these last 7 years and a couple of months. I thank you very much.

I was thinking to myself, "What am I doing here? I'm not running for anything." [Laughter] I'm trying to get this fine Member of Congress a 6-year term, and I'll never even have the privilege of working with her. Well, one reason is-and on principle this year, I'm very big on women going to the U.S. Senate. I have a passing interest in a lot of these elections. [Laughter] But I would like toI'll be very brief, because she's already told you why she's running.

I think it's important that we remember that things were different in 1992 when I ran for President. We had economic distress. We had social decline. We had political division. And we basically had

drift and gridlock in Washington.

And I believed that this country could build a bridge to the new century with an America that offered opportunity for everyone who is responsible enough to work for it, with an increasingly diverse America that cherished that diversity but thought our common humanity was more important, with an America that continued to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity. And we're in better shape than we were in 1992, and for that I am very grateful. And for the opportunity I've had to serve, I am profoundly grateful.

But the real thing I would like you to think about is: What is it that we propose to do with this prosperity? You know, I've reached an age now when my memory stretches back long enough that I know that nothing lasts forever. And in tough times, that's reassuring. In good times, it should be sobering.

This is a moment of phenomenal opportunity for our country. And a lot of theI'm glad to see so many young people here, because you've got most of your lives in front of you. And it's very important that we take this moment to deal with the big challenges, the big problems, the big opportunities in the new century, in a world that is coming closer and closer together, in a world where increasingly what matters is whether you believe every person counts and every person is given the ability to develop his or her Godgiven potential.

You know, I just got back from India and Bangladesh and Pakistan. And I made a stop over in Switzerland to keep working on the Middle East peace process. And I'll tell you an interesting story. I was in this little village in India, one of the hundreds of thousands of little villages in a country with over 900 million people, with a per capita income of $450 a year, one of the poorest places on Earth.

So I go to this little village, and I meet the local government. And it's required now that all the different tribes and castes have an opportunity to be represented, and 30 percent of all the local governments are women-elected officials. And I meet the women's dairy cooperative, and these women took over the milk business because they got a little machine that tested the fat content of milk. So they weren't cheating anybody out of their money anymore.

And--now keep in mind, I'm in one of hundreds of thousands of villages, right, in a country with a rich and diverse texture but a low per capita income. Every single transaction that the dairy cooperative made was recorded on a computer. Everyone that bought milk in there got a computer printout of what the fat content was, what the price was that day, then got an accounting out of the same computer on who bought the milk and when she got her money.

Then I go into the local government in this tiny village. And I see there the computer in the community center. And every person can come in and get on that computer in English or Hindi. And many of the things you can find you can get even if you can't read, because of the software, the sophistication of the software. So poor village women can come in and see how they're supposed to care for their newborn babies in their first year of life. They pull it up on the screen, and then they had a printer, and they got it out. And it's just as good information as you can get here or in any other place in America, in the finest doctor's office in the land. This is going to be a very different world in the next 5 or 10 years.

I went to Hyderabad in India, which is sort of their high-tech capital, and the head of the State Government there now offers 18 different government services on the Internet, including getting your driver's license. [Laughter] Nobody ever has to wait in a line in the revenue office. [Laughter] Do not move to India just yet. [Laughter) We will get that done, but you get the picture, right?

Today I met--when President Mubarak from Egypt was here today, and we met with a bunch of Egyptian-Americans. One of them was a Nobel Prize-winner from Caltech. Another was a high official at the World Bank. Another was a big high-tech company executive. Another one ran a big biotech company. We talked a lot about the human genome and the sequencing of it, and how we were going to allow people to patent legitimate discoveries, but how we had to keep the basic information affordable so that the developing countries and poor people around the world and in this country could also benefit from the discoveries.

I mean, we're talking about no more Alzheimer's and cures for Parkinson's and detecting cancers when they're just a few cells. These are amazing things.

And the reason that I'm here tonight, even though I'm not running, is that I don't want our country to blow this opportunity. What's the big problem in all these peace negotiations around the world? People want peace. Young people like you, they're thinking about their future; they want a whole different world. They're not all caught up--it's a question of people's impulses--the basic, good human impulses at war with old ideas cherished by people who can't let go.

We have an American version of that, I think, in this contest here. One of the reasons that I want Al Gore to be elected President is that I know from personal experience he understands the future, and he knows how to take us there.

And you can't--most of what is written is written about politics and politicians acts as if policies are inconsequential and acts as if things that really affect the lives of millions of people don't

matter. But I would argue to you that the details of our welfare program mattered; the details of our education program mattered; the details of our environmental program mattered; the details of our anticrime program mattered. It matters what you do. The details of our approach to science and technology mattered. These things matter.

This is not about a bunch of hot air and slogans and positioning. This is about whether this country, at its moment of maximum prosperity and opportunity and minimum threats from abroad and from within, will take the chance that we have had never before in my lifetime, except maybe in the 1960's, before all the wheels ran off, to write the future of our dreams for our children. That's what this whole thing is about. Don't make any mistake about it. That's what the whole thing's about.

I worked hard to try to help turn this country around and get us moving in the right direction. But the big benefits are still out there to be reaped. Wouldn't you like your country to be the safest big country in the world? Wouldn't you like your country to be a place where every working parent could also succeed at rearing their children because there was adequate child care? Wouldn't you like your country to be a place where every child, no matter how poor, was held to high standards but had high opportunities in education, where there was no digital divide, where there were economic opportunities in the poorest urban and rural neighborhoods and on every Indian reservation in the country? And I could go on and on and on. That's what this whole deal is about.

And I'm telling you, if I can do anything this year, I am going to try to convince the American people only to vote for those people that understand the future and are prepared to do what it takes to get us there. And all of us, together. That's why I'm here.

And I hope tomorrow, if people ask you why you were here, you will tell them that because Debbie Stabenow is a great human being, a great public servant, and she will take us there.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:45 p.m. in the Columbia B Room at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts William and Michelle O'Reilly; Gary Torgow, finance chair, Stabenow for Senate; and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. Representative Stabenow is a candidate for U.S. Senate for Michigan. Prior to the President's remarks, Representative Stabenow presented the President with a Michigan State University T-shirt to honor the school's men's basketball team's appearance in the Final Four of the National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament. This transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 29.