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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 18, 2013

Remarks By The President at Women's History Month Reception

5:04 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Well, hello, everybody! (Applause.) And can everybody please give Amanda another big round of applause? (Applause.) It seems to me she would be pretty good at sales. (Laughter.) I was sold just listening to her right there.

Thank you, Amanda, for sharing your story, the wonderful introduction. It is an honor to welcome all of you here to the White House.

Now, let's be clear, I am used to being surrounded every day by talented, accomplished women -- (applause) -- from all the meetings I have in the West Wing to the dinner table with Michelle, Malia and Sasha. (Laughter.) But I have to say, even for somebody who is accustomed to it, this is a pretty exceptional group that I'm looking around here.

We've got business leaders like Abbe Raven, CEO of the A&E Networks. (Applause.) There she is right there. We've got activists like Dolores Huerta and Lilly Ledbetter. (Applause.) All-star athletes like Tamika Catchings. (Applause.) And outstanding public servants from Congress and my administration, including Valerie Jarrett, who serves as our chair of the Council for Women and Girls here at the White House. (Applause.)

And when I look around this room, it is hard to believe that 100 years ago this month, thousands of women were marching right outside this house demanding one of our most fundamental right: the right to vote, to have a say in our democracy. And today, a century later, its rooms are full of accomplished women who have overcome discrimination, shattered glass ceilings, and become outstanding role models for all of our sons and daughters. And that means we've come a long way, and that's thanks to the efforts of so many people like you.

Because of the hard work and exemplary leadership of the women in this room, military families have protected family and medical leave. Women have legal recourse to fight against pay discrimination, as Amanda took advantage of. Women have the opportunity to serve on the front lines of our military conflicts, and that means that they're getting paid and promoted equally. Women have the opportunity to make their own choices about their health.

We're also seeing expanded opportunity for women to reach their full potential all around the world. That's in large part because four years ago, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton -- (applause) -- a tireless advocate for women herself, designated an Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues whose sole job it is to make sure that women and girls are a central part of every aspect of our foreign policy, that their concerns are considered at the highest level of our diplomatic decision-

making.

For four years, the incredible Melanne Vermeer held that role. (Applause.) Where is Melanne? Is she here? All right, well, she's incredible. Take my word for it. (Laughter.) We're so grateful for her service, along with the millions of women around the world that she helped to amplify and helped to fight alongside on the causes that are so important. But with Melanne leaving on, we've got some big shoes to fill. So today, I am very pleased to announce that I will be nominating Cathy Russell as our next Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues. (Applause.)

Cathy is a longtime advocate for women, for justice, for fairness. She's worked on preventing violence against women here and around the world. Throughout my first term, she's served as chief of staff to Dr. Jill Biden. (Applause.) She's worked tirelessly alongside Michelle and Jill to make sure that our military families get every single benefit and bit of assistance that they so richly deserve and have earned. I'm certain that Jill will miss Cathy, but I know she joins me in saying that we could not be prouder of Cathy's hard work and her advocacy. And we know that she's going to be a powerful voice on behalf of women and girls around the world. So thank you, Cathy, for your continued service. (Applause.)

It's women like Cathy, like Jill, like Amanda, like Michelle, like all of you, that inspire so much progress each and every day. And I've got to tell you, all of you inspire me to make sure that I'm doing everything that I can as President to carry on that progress, and to do everything we can to ensure equality and opportunity for all women.

Just last week, I was proud to sign the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act -- (applause) -- a law, by the way, that Cathy helped to make possible in the first place, securing for women the protections and the services to help them live their lives free from fear of violence and free to pursue their own measure of happiness.

And that's what everybody deserves in this country -- the opportunity to make of their lives what they will, no matter who they are, what they look like, whether they are boys or girls, women or men. That's why I ran for President in the first place -- to put the same rights and opportunities within the reach of all of our daughters and sons. And while there's still a lot of work to be done, I am confident that we can reach that goal, that we can make sure that every single door is open, every dream is within reach -- for Malia, for Sasha, for your daughters, for your granddaughters -- to make sure that they never feel like there are barriers in front of them, and that if they work hard, they can make it.

So I want to thank all of you for your incredible advocacy. I could not be prouder of you. I'm glad that you had a chance to join us. I understand that we had some great panels earlier today, and I expect this conversation and, more importantly, the work will continue for many years to come.

So thank you very much, everybody. Enjoy the reception. (Applause.)

END

5:15 P.M. EDT



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