

Bill Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention

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Wells Fargo Center
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In the spring of 1971, I met a girl. The first time I saw her, we were, appropriately enough, in a class on political and civil rights. She had thick blond hair, big glasses. Wore no makeup. And she exuded this strength of self-possession I found magnetic.

After the class, I followed her out, intending to introduce myself. I got close enough to touch her back, but I couldn't do it. Somehow, I knew this would not be just another tap on the shoulder, that I might be starting something I couldn't stop. I saw her several more times the next few days but still didn't speak to her. Then one night in the law library talking to a classmate who wanted me to join the Yale Law Journal, he said it would guarantee me a job at a big firm or a clerkship with a federal judge. I really wasn't interested — I just wanted to go home to Arkansas.

Then I saw the girl again, standing at the opposite end of that long room. Finally, she was staring back at me. So I watched her. She closed her book, put it down, and started walking toward me. She walked the whole length of the library, came up to me, and said, "Look, if you are going to keep staring at me, we at least ought to know each other's name. I'm Hillary Rodham, who are you?" I was so impressed and surprised that, whether you believe it or not, momentarily, I was speechless.

Finally, I sort of blurted out my name and we exchanged a few words, and she went away. Well, I didn't join the Law Review, but I did leave that library with a whole new goal in mind. A couple days later, I saw her again, wearing a long, white, flowery skirt, and I went up to her and she said she was going to register for classes for the next term. I said I would go too.

We stood in line and talked — you had to do that to register back then. I thought I was doing pretty well until we got to the front of the line and the registrar looked up and said, "Bill, what are you doing here? You registered this morning."

I turned red and she laughed that big laugh of hers and I thought, well, heck, since my cover has been blown, I asked her to take a walk down to the art museum. We have been walking, and talking, and laughing together ever since.

And we have done it in good times, through joy and heartbreak. We cried together this morning on the news that our good friend and a lot of your good friend, Mark Weiner, passed away early this morning. We built up a lifetime of memories. After the first month and that first walk, I drove her home to Park Ridge, Illinois, to meet her family and see the town where she grew up, a perfect example of post-World War II middle-class America. Street after street of nice houses, great schools, good parks, a big public swimming pool. And almost all white.

I really liked her family, her crusty, conservative father, her rambunctious brothers, all extolling the virtue of rooting for the bears and the cubs. And for the people of Illinois here, they even told me what waiting for next year meant — could be next year, guys.

Now, her mother was different. She was more liberal than the boys. She had a childhood that made mine look like a piece of cake. She was easy to underestimate with her soft manner and she

reminded me all over again of the truth of that old saying that you should never judge a book by its cover. Knowing her was one of the greatest gifts Hillary ever gave me.

I learned that Hillary got her introduction to social justice through her Methodist youth minister, Don Jones. He took her downtown to Chicago to hear Martin Luther King Jr. speak and he remained her friend for the rest of his life. This will be the only campaign of hers he ever missed.

When she got to college, her opposition to the Vietnam War compelled her to change parties and become a Democrat. And then between college and law school, on a total lark, she went alone to Alaska and spent time sliming fish.

More to the point, by the time I met her she had already been involved in the law school's legal services project and she had been influenced by Marian Wright Edelman. She took a summer internship interviewing workers in migrant camps for Sen. Walter Mondale's subcommittee. She had also begun working in the Yale New Haven hospital to develop procedures to handle suspected child abuse cases.

She got so involved in children's issues that she actually took an extra year in law school working at the child studies center to learn what more could be done to improve the lives and futures of poor children. She was already determined to figure out how to make things better.

Hillary opened my eyes to a whole new world of public service by private citizens. In the summer of 1972, she went to Dothan, Alabama, to visit one of those segregated academies that enrolled over a half a million white kids in the South. The only way the economics worked was if they claimed federal tax exemptions to which they were not legally entitled. She got sent to prove they weren't.

So she sauntered into one of these academies all by herself, pretending to be a housewife that just moved to town and needed to find a school for her son. And they exchange pleasantries and finally, she said, "Look, let's get to the bottom line. If I enroll my son in this school, will he be in a segregated school? Yes or no?" And the guy said "Absolutely." She had him. I've seen it a thousand times since.

And she went back and her encounter was part of a report that gave Marian Wright Edelman the force they needed to keep working to get the Nixon administration to take those tax exemptions away and give our kids access to an equal education.

Then she went down to South Texas, where she met one of the nicest fellows I ever met, the wonderful union leader Franklin Garcia, and he helped her register Mexican-American voters. I think some of them are still around to vote for her in 2016. And then, in our last year in law school, Hillary kept up this work. She went to South Carolina to see why so many young African-American boys — I mean, young teenagers — were being jailed for years with adults in men's prisons. She filed a report on that, which led to some changes too. Always making things better.

Meanwhile, let's get back to business. I was trying to convince her to marry me. I first proposed to her on a trip to Great Britain, the first time she'd ever been overseas. We were on the shoreline of this wonderful lake, Lake Ennerdale. I asked her to marry me and she said, "I can't do it."

So in 1974, I went home to teach in law school and Hillary moved to Massachusetts to keep working on children's issues. This time, trying to figure out why so many kids counted in the census weren't enrolled in school.

She found one of them sitting alone on her porch in a wheelchair. Once more, she filed a report about these kids and that helped influence ultimately the Congress to adopt the proposition that children with disabilities, physical or otherwise, should have equal access to public education. You saw the result of that last night when Anastasia Somoza talked. She never made fun of people with disabilities. She tried to empower them based on their abilities.

Meanwhile, I was still trying to get her to marry me. The second time I asked, I tried a different tactic. I said, "I really want you to marry me, but you shouldn't do it." She smiled and looked at me like what is this boy up to. She said, "That is not a very good sales pitch." I said, "I know but it's true." And I meant it. It was true. I said, "I know most of the young Democrats our age who want to go into politics, they mean well and they speak well, but none of them is as good as you are at actually doing things to make positive changes in people's lives."

So I suggested she go home to Illinois or move to New York and look for a chance to run for office. She laughed and said, "Are you out of your mind? Nobody would ever vote for me." So I finally got her to come visit me in Arkansas. And when she did, the people at the law school were so impressed, they offered her a teaching position. And she decided to take a huge chance.

She moved to a strange place, more rural and conservative than anywhere she had been. Where she knew good and well that people were wondering what in the world she was like and whether they could or should accept her. Didn't take them long to find out what she was like.

She loved her teaching. She got frustrated when one of her students said, "What do you expect, I'm just from Arkansas." She said, "Don't tell me that. You're as smart as anybody. You just have to believe in yourself and work for it and set high goals." She believed anyone could make it. She also started the first legal aid clinic in northwest Arkansas, providing legal aid services to poor people who couldn't pay for them.

One day, I was driving her to the airport to fly back to Chicago when we passed this little brick house that had a for-sale sign on it and she said, "Boy, that's a pretty house." It had 1,100 square feet, an attic fan and no air conditioner in hot Arkansas, and a screened-in porch. Hillary commented on what a uniquely designed and beautiful house it was.

So I took a big chance. I bought the house. My mortgage was \$175 a month. When she came back, I picked her up and said, "You remember that house you like?" I said, "While you were gone, I bought it, and you have to marry me now." The third time was the charm. We were married in that little house on October 11, 1975. I married my best friend.

I was still in awe after more than four years of being around her at how smart, and strong, and loving, and caring she was, and I really hoped that her choosing me and rejecting my advice to pursue her own career was a decision she would never regret. A little over a year later, we moved to Little Rock when I became attorney general and she joined the oldest law firm west of the Mississippi. She started Arkansas Advocates for Family and Children. It's a group that is still active today.

In 1979, just after I became governor, I asked Hillary to chair a local health committee to help expand health care to isolated mountain areas. They recommended to do that partly by deploying trained nurse practitioners in places with no doctors to provide primary care that they were trying to provide. It was a big deal then — highly controversial and very important. And I got the feeling that what she did for the rest of her life, she was doing there. She just went out and figured out what would help people and if it was controversial, she just tried to persuade people it was the right thing

to do. It wasn't the only big thing that happened that spring, my first year as governor. We found out we were going to be parents.

And time passed. On February 27, 1980, 15 minutes after I got home from the National Governors' Conference in Washington, Hillary's water broke and off we went to the hospital. Chelsea was born just before midnight. And it was the greatest moment of my life. The miracle of a new beginning. The hole filled for me because my own father died before I was born and I had the absolute conviction that my daughter had the best mother in the whole world.

Through nursing school, kindergarten, T-ball, soccer, volleyball, and her passion for ballet. Through sleepovers, summer camps, family vacations, and Chelsea's own very ambitious excursions, from Halloween parties in the neighborhood to a Viennese waltz gala in the White House, Hillary first and foremost was a mother. She became, as she often said, our family's designated worrier. Born with an extra responsibility gene. We rarely disagreed on parenting although she did believe that I had gone a little over the top when I took a couple days off with Chelsea to watch all six Police Academy movies back to back. When Chelsea was 9 months old, I was defeated for reelection in the Reagan landslide and I became overnight, I think, the youngest former governor in the history of the country. We only had two-year terms back then.

Hillary was great. Immediately she said, "What are we gonna do? Here is what we are going to do: We're gonna get a house, you're gonna get a job, we're gonna enjoy being Chelsea's parents, and if you want to run again you have to go talk to people and figure out why you lost, tell them you got the message, and show them you still have good ideas." I followed her advice.

Within two days we had a house. I soon had a job. We had two fabulous years with Chelsea and in 1982, I became the first governor in the history of our state to become elected, defeated, and elected again. My experience is, it's a pretty good thing to follow her advice.

The rest of the decade flew by it as our lives settled into a rhythm of family and work and friends. In 1983, Hillary chaired a committee to recommend new education standards for us in response to a court order to equalize school funding.

And a report by national experts said our woefully underfunded schools were the worst in America. Typical Hillary, she held listening tours in all 75 counties with our committee. She came up with really ambitious recommendations. For example, that we be the first state in America to require elementary counselors in every school because so many kids were having trouble at home and they needed it. So, I called the legislature into session, hoping to pass the standards, pass the pay rate for teachers, and raise the sales tax to pay for it all. I knew it would be hard to pass, but it got easier after Hillary headed the education committee and the chairman, a plainspoken farmer, said, "It looks to me like we elected the wrong Clinton."

Well by the time I ran for president 9 years later, the same expert who said we had the worst schools in America said that our state was one of the two most improved states in America — and that is because of those standards that Hillary recommended.

Now, two years later, Hillary told me about a preschool program developed in Israel, called HIPPY: Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters. The idea was to teach low-income parents, even those who couldn't read, to be their children's first teachers. She said she thought it would work in Arkansas. I said, "That's great, what are we going to do about it?" She said, "I already did it. I called the woman in Israel and she'll be here in about 10 days to help us get started." Next thing you know, I'm being dragged around to all these little preschool graduations. Keep in mind this is

before many states even had universal kindergarten and I'm being dragged to preschool graduations, watching these poor parents with tears in their eyes because they never thought they would be able to help their kids learn.

Twenty years of research has shown how well this program works to improve readiness for schools and academic achievement. There are a lot of young adults in America who have no idea Hillary had anything to do with it, but are enjoying better lives because they were in that program. She did all of this while being a full-time worker, a mother, and enjoying our life. Why? Well, she is insatiably curious, she's a natural leader, she's a good organizer, and she's the best darn change-maker I have ever met in my entire life.

So, look, this is a really important point for you to take out of this convention. If you believe in making change from the bottom-up, if you believe the measure of change is how many lives are bettered, you know it is hard and some people think it is boring. Speeches like this are fun. Actually doing the work is hard. So people say, well we need to change.

She has been around a long time. She sure has. And she has sure been worth every single year she has put into making people's lives better. I can tell you this — if you were sitting where I am sitting and you heard what I have heard and at every dinner conversation, every lunch conversation, on every long walk, you would say, "This woman has never been satisfied with the status quo in anything." She always wants to move the ball forward. That is just who she is.

When I became president with a commitment to reform health care, Hillary was a natural head to the health care task force. You all know we failed because we couldn't break a senate filibuster. Hillary immediately went to work on solving the problems the bill sought to address one-by-one. The most important goal was to get more children with health insurance. In 1997, congress passed the children's health insurance program, still an important part of President Obama's Affordable Care Act. It insures more than 8 million kids. There are a lot of other things in that bill she got done piece by piece, pushing the rock up the hill.

In 1997, she also teamed with the House minority leader, Tom Delay, who maybe disliked me more than any of Newt Gingrich's crowd. They worked on a build together to increase adoptions of children out of foster care. She wanted to do it because she knew that Tom, for all of our differences, was an adopted parent and she honored him for doing that. The bill that they worked on was passed with an overwhelming bipartisan majority and led to a big increase of children out of foster care, including not infant kids and special needs kids. It made life better, because she is a changemaker. That is what she does.

Now, when you are doing all of this, real life does not stop. 1997 was the year Chelsea finished high school and went to college. We were happy for her but sad for us to see her go. I will never forget moving her into her dorm room at Stanford. It would have been a great little reality flick. There I was, in a trance, just staring out the window trying not to cry and there was Hillary on her hands and knees, desperately looking for one more drawer to put that liner paper in. Finally, Chelsea took charge and told us ever-so-gently that it was time for us to go. So, we closed a big chapter in the most important work of our lives. As you will see Thursday night, when Chelsea speaks, Hillary has done a pretty fine job of being a mother. And as you saw last night beyond a shadow of a doubt, so has Michelle Obama.

Now fast forward, in 1999, congressman Charlie Rangel and other Democrats urged Hillary to run for the seat of retiring senator Pat Moynihan. We had always intended to go to New York after I left office and commute to Arkansas, but this had never occurred to either one of us. Hillary had never

run for office before but she decided to give it a try. She began her campaign the way she always does things, by listening and learning. And after a tough battle, New York elected her to the seat once held by another outsider, Robert Kennedy.

And she did not let him down. Her early years were dominated by 9/11. By working to find the recovery. Then monitoring the health of and providing compensation to victims and first- and second-responders. She and Senator Shuman were tireless and so were the house members.

In 2003, partly spurred on by what they were going through, she became the first senator in the history of New York ever to serve on the Armed Services Committee. So, she tried to make sure people on the battlefield had proper equipment. She tried to expand, and did expand, health care coverage to members of the National Guard. She got longer family leave working with Senator Dodd for people caring for wounded servicemembers and she worked for more extensive care for people with traumatic brain injury.

She also served on a special Pentagon commission to propose changes necessary to meet our new security challenges. Newt Gingrich was on that commission. He told me what a good job she had done. I say that because nobody who has seriously dealt with the men and women in today's military believes they are a "disaster." They are a national treasure of all races, all religions, all walks of life.

Now, meanwhile, she compiled a really solid record, totally progressive, on economic and social issues. She voted for him against a proposed trade deal. She became the de facto economic development officer for the area outside of New York City. She worked for farmers, for wine-makers, for small businesses and manufacturers. For upstate cities and rural areas that needed more ideas and more new investment to create new jobs. Something we have to do again in small town and rural America, in neighborhoods that of been left behind to our cities, in Indian country, and yes, in coal country.

When she lost the hard-fought contest to President Obama in 2008, she worked for his election hard. But she hesitated to say yes when he asked her to join his cabinet, because she so loved being a senator from New York. So like me, in a different context, he had to keep asking. But as we all saw and heard from Madeleine Albright, it was worth the effort and worth the wait.

As Secretary of State, she worked hard to get strong sanctions against Iran's nuclear program. And in what the Wall Street Journal called a "half-court shot at the buzzer," she got Russia and China to support them. Her team negotiated the new START treaty with Russia to reduce nuclear weapons and establish inspections. And she got enough Republican support to get two thirds of the senate, the vote necessary to ratify the treaty.

She flew all night long from Cambodia to the Middle East to get a ceasefire that would avoid a full-out shooting war between Hamas and Gaza, to protect the peace of the region. She backed President Obama's decision to go after Osama Bin Laden. She launched a team — and this is really important today — she launched a team to fight back against terrorists online and built a new global counterterrorism effort. We have got to win this battle. In the mind field.

She put climate change at the center of our foreign policy. She negotiated the first agreement ever with China and India, officially committed to reduce their emissions.

And as she had been doing since she went to Beijing in 1995 and said, "Women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights," she worked to empower women and girls around the

world and to make the same exact declaration on behalf of the LGBT community in America and around the world.

And, nobody ever talks about this much — nobody ever talks about this much, but it is important to me. She tripled the number of people with AIDS in four countries whose lives are being saved with your tax dollars. Most of them in Africa, going from 1.7 million lives to 5.1 million lives and it did not cost you any more money. She just bought available FDA-approved generic drugs, something we need to do for the American people more. Now, you do not know any of these people. You don't know any of these 3.4 million people, but I guarantee, they know you. They know you because they see you as thinking their lives matter. They know you, and that's one reason the approval of the United States was 20 points higher when she left the Secretary of State's office than when she took it.

Now, how does this square? How does this square with the things that you heard at the Republican convention? What is the difference in what I told you and what they said? How do you square it? You can't. One is real, the other is made up.

And you just have to decide which is which, my fellow Americans. The real one had done more positive change-making before she was 30-years-old than most politicians do with a lifetime in office. The real one, if you saw her friend Betsy Ebeling from Illinois today, has friends from childhood through Arkansas, where she has not lived for more than 20 years, who have gone all across America at their own expense to fight for the person they know.

The real one has earned the loyalty and respect and the fervent support of people who have worked with her in every stage of her life, including leaders around the world who know her to be able, straightforward, and completely trustworthy. The real one calls you when you're sick, when your kid's in trouble, or when there is a death in the family. The real one repeatedly drew praise from prominent Republicans when she was a senator and Secretary of State.

So, what is up with this? Well, if you win elections, on the theory the government is always bad and will mess up a two-car parade — a real changemaker represents a real threat. So your only option is to create a cartoon. A cartoon alternative. Then run against the cartoon. Cartoons are two-dimensional. They're easy to absorb. Life in the world is complicated and real change is hard. And a lot of people even think it is boring. Good for you, because earlier today you nominated the real one.

We have to get back on schedule — Look, I have lived a long, full, blessed life. It really took off when I met and fell in love with that girl in the spring of 1971. When I was president I worked hard to give you peace and shared prosperity, to give you an America where nobody is invisible or counted out. But, for this time, Hillary is uniquely qualified to seize the opportunities and reduce the risks we face and she is still the best darn changemaker I have ever known.

You could drop her in any trouble spot. Pick one. Come back in a month and somehow, some way, she will have made it better. That is just who she is. There are clear, achievable, affordable responses to our challenges. But we will not get to them if America makes the wrong choice in this election. That is why you should elect her .

And you should elect her because she will never quit when the going gets tough. She will never quit on you. She sent me in this primary to West Virginia, where she knew we were going to lose, to look those coal miners in the eye and say, "I am down here because Hillary sent me to tell you that if you really think you can get the economy back that you had 50 years ago, have at it, vote for

whoever you want to. But if she wins, she is coming back for you to take you along on the ride to America's future."

And so I say to you, if you love this country and are working hard, are paying taxes, and obeying the law, and you'd like to become a citizen, you should choose immigration reform over somebody who wants to send you back. If you are a Muslim and you love America and freedom and you hate terror, stay here and help us win and make the future together. We want you. If you are a young African-American disillusioned and afraid, we saw in Dallas how great our police officers can be. Help us build a future where nobody is afraid to walk outside, including the people who wear blue to protect our future.

Hillary will make us stronger together. You know it because she spent a lifetime doing it. I hope you will do it. I hope you will elect her. Those of us who have more yesterdays than tomorrows tend to care more about our children and grandchildren. The reason you should elect her is that in the greatest country on Earth, we have always been about tomorrow. Your children and grandchildren will bless you forever if you do. God bless you. Thank you.