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REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
"SALUTE TO MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON" LUNCHEON
GIVEN BY FEDERATED DEMOCRATIC WOMEN OF OHIO
DESHLER HOTEL, COLUMBUS, OHIO

Mrs. Gunsett, Mrs. Welsh, friends:

It is a great pleasure to be here among you whom I've heard so much about.

This morning when we arrived I remembered that I had once been told proudly by one of your citizens: "Columbus is the largest city in the world named for the man who discovered America."

Columbus is a discovery for me and a delightful one -- even though I do feel at home with you because I know you as good, hard-working Democrats -- through the people you send to Washington.

And, they are your admirers! If you live up to all I've heard from Ann Celebrezze, Jane Lausche and Rachel Young -- and their husbands -- then Ohio -- "Mother of Presidents" -- is going to be mother of a Texas president this fall.

And as you might suspect, he is one of the reasons I'm here today.

As a matter of fact, when your nice invitations kept coming in, Lyndon said, "I think you ought to go." I agreed.

Then I found out I was supposed to make a speech! Since he was the one who had urged me to come, I stopped him the other morning as he strode through our little family sitting room on the second floor of the White House on his way to the office -- arms loaded with envelopes marked, "Night Reading". I said, "Listen. You had better fortify me with some facts for our Ohio friends. Tell me the things you are gladdest you've accomplished."

I wish you could have seen his expression when I asked him to build a mountain in three minutes.

But being Lyndon, he accepted the challenge! He said, "Well, there's so much to be thankful for -- the tax reduction, the education bill, the arbitration of the railroad strike, civil rights, the poverty bill..."

And, as often happens in our conversations, the telephone rang at that moment and he was saved by the bell.

Actually, that is quite a record for nine months -- nine months into which we were so tragically and with appalling suddenness thrust. These have been searing months, reaching constantly for hard answers to hard problems. But they have been satisfying months, too, because we can see achievements. Bills have become laws; dreams have become realities because we have a can-do Congress. And, we have a can-do country.

This is what I want to talk to you about today for that is what the great society is all about -- imaginative planning at the top; legislation to set up the machinery. But -- then -- most of all, people in action in their communities to bring it to the hometown of America.

One of the overwhelming feelings I have -- partially from 29 years as the wife of a public official -- but even more gleaned within these past few months, is my pride in how many Americans-- how many right here in Ohio -- are so hard at work building what Lyndon calls "The Great Society."

Last Monday in the East Room of the White House, I saw many Americans of high talent in many fields of our national life-- the men and women of that grace and quality that has so enriched our arts, our literature, our science, labor and business -- receive from the President the Medal of Freedom. It is the highest civil honor that can come to a citizen of our country; it is in civilian terms our Medal of Honor.

But I thought, too, that while these specially honored men and women at the White House are in a sense our elite of achievement, there are so many others -- so unnoted, so unsung -- whose own achievements for the people are honored only in their doing. There are those who make the small places greatly to blossom -- the backyard, the schoolyard, the town park. There are those who serve humankind in the hospitals, in the charity drives -- in all those thousands of good local things that finally add up to a stronger, a surer, a safer, a kinder and -- yes -- a more beautiful America. I know these, the unawarded Americans, for I have seen them.

Some people have interpreted my husband's "Great Society" as a campaign promise. Nothing can be so far from the truth. No one can give you a "great society" -- all in a neat little package and delivered at your doorstep. Presidents can inspire it, strive for it, and, with Congress, set the designs on the drawing boards. But people like you must give it life.

And you are. If you doubt that mankind is on the march, then I urge you just to take a look around. This year, I have traveled 40,000 miles from Eastport, Maine to Vernal, Utah. And I can report to you that the citizens of this country are busy. They are transforming small islands of poverty to communities of hope. This is what the great society is all about. There is work to be done. But we -- not we in Washington -- but we in America are doing it.

I know right here in Columbus you are concerned about the high number of school dropouts. I was delighted to read that already your city and county officials are meeting with civic organizations to apply the newly-enacted anti-poverty program to this problem.

It is wise application on the local level of national legislation that will bring the great society about.

We are whittling away at the unemployment figure, and we are making progress; 4 million more at work in 40 months. Enrollment in our colleges and universities is growing by the hundreds and thousands. You can see that at your own Ohio State here in Columbus and at the many other fine institutions of higher learning in this education-conscious state.

We are -- and women particularly are -- cleaning up the cities of our country. Yesterday in Akron, Frances McGovern took me to see Opportunity Park. It is on the easels now, but every business, labor and civic group in the town is hard at work to see that those flowers and trees on the drawing board are planted, watered, and grow to replace the bricks and ash cans.

When I think of the hard-working builders of the great society, I think, too, of a day last spring when a group of 100 women came to Washington. They were the directors and presidents of women's organizations -- the PTA, the AAUW, the League of Women Voters, heads of church groups of all faiths. They came over to the White House to talk about forming a Job Corps for Girls. We had quite a time finding a place to meet that day. Every room was filled with meetings or tourists. Lyndon had even booked the Rose Garden. There are days when the White House is just one big seminar -- groups working on everything from community relations to higher education. Finally, I found a quiet place under the trees on the South lawn where we talked over a cup of coffee.

It was talk then -- ideas springing forth rapidly -- but by next January this talk will be dormitories in the big cities where the girl dropouts can find homes and a training program that will lead to paychecks and a chance to belong.

It is a good beginning. We will be giving a great many young women in this country the greatest of all gifts -- hope.

And no one can tell you better than your own Anthony Celebrezze -- who heads the department which must handle so many of the hopeless -- what this means even in the very hard-headed practical figures of lightening the welfare budget.

A lot of people worry about the younger generation. But like you, some of my nearest relatives are the younger generation. I do not worry about a generation that has rallied with fervor and action to the Peace Corps.

They are helping people in countries around the world.

No one will ever be able, accurately, to measure their worth. There are babies alive today in Africa because a Peace Corpsman -- perhaps one of the 481 from Ohio -- put some screens up at a hospital. There are blind people in the Dominican Republic who have learned a trade because a blind girl from Texas joined the Peace Corps and taught them Braille.

But we women need not make our dream so far beyond our front door that we forget the simple every day contributions we can make around our own hearth. We can add wit and warmth, color and beauty.

Never underestimate the value of our small daily offerings. A comfortable atmosphere and a thoughtfully-planned meal are part of the good life. They can change a husband's perspective after a hard day and set his mind on constructive paths to meet tomorrow's problems.

When you have set your own small world a-right, you have done a great deal. For this, too, is an element of the practicing citizen in this great society.

I hope you will spell out to your neighbors and your friends the satisfactions of being such a practicing citizen.

Certainly one of the first rules of being a practicing citizen is to cast your ballot. "Vote, vote as you please, but vote." That was the battlecry when women first won the right to vote.

It chagrins me when I read that nearly one-third of the women who have the right to vote fail to make it to the polls. The women of Ohio -- as you well know -- have until September ~~24th~~ 23 to register.

You have only to travel in a country where this right is denied to properly appreciate what a precious possession you have. Not to use it is unforgivable!

I am a Democrat and proud of it. I do not think only Democrats dream of the great society. However, I do believe that since the days of the depression and war, it has been the leaders of the Democratic Party who have been most practical and persistent in taking the necessary steps to achieve it.

We do not walk alone.

One hundred years ago, Walt Whitman had a vision of what American could mean to the world. I think at this time we can say as he did, "I know the past was great, and the future will be great, and I know that both are curiously conjoined in the present time ..."

An America that achieves a great society can be a model to the world -- a translation of American ideals into opportunity. We have the faith to take the gamble on the character of the people of this country. I do not think we will be disappointed.

And, we shall reap what we have sown.

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