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Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

March 11, 1998

Dear _____:

I write to seek your support in obtaining Senate consent to the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW is the most comprehensive and detailed international treaty developed to date relating to the rights of women. The United States actively participated in the drafting of CEDAW and signed the treaty in 1980. Although the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted in favor of ratification in 1994, the Senate has not formally considered the treaty since that time.

The rights of women are an issue of global importance—and one that is integral to our foreign policy. The success of any government depends ultimately on ensuring that all its citizens can participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives. Too many societies continue to shunt women to the sidelines, limiting their access to education, health care, and economic opportunity. Moreover, violence against women remains a widespread problem. I think you would agree that, as we enter the next century, we must address these issues. CEDAW provides us with an effective tool for doing so.

I believe that the ratification of CEDAW is critical to our efforts to advance the status of women throughout the world. To date, 161 countries have ratified CEDAW, including all our European allies and most of our important trading partners. The United States is one of the few countries that has not. This impedes our efforts to ensure that women everywhere are treated fairly and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

As you know, U.S. state and federal law already provides strong protections for women and is largely consistent with the provisions of CEDAW. In 1994, the Administration submitted a detailed analysis of the consequences of CEDAW ratification for U.S. law. All concerns at that time were addressed by the small number of reservations, understandings, and declarations upon which the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the State Department agreed. These include an explicit understanding that the treaty does not create a right to an abortion.

Today, in celebration of International Women's Day, I am announcing that obtaining Senate advice and consent to the ratification of CEDAW is a top Administration priority during this session of Congress. I am also announcing my goal of having the full Senate act on CEDAW this year, which marks the 150th anniversary of the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York.

I would very much like to have your support in ratifying CEDAW and look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader; Jesse Helms, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Telephone Remarks With Representative-Elect Lois Capps

March 11, 1998

President Clinton. Hello, Lois?

Representative-Elect Capps. Hello, Mr. President.

President Clinton. Oh, I didn't know you were on the phone. Congratulations.

Representative-Elect Capps. Well, thank you so much.

President Clinton. I'm so thrilled for you.

Representative-Elect Capps. It was a tremendous experience, and I owe a lot to all of the people who are listening.

President Clinton. Well, you made a great grassroots campaign, and I think you really persuaded people that you would be a strong, independent voice for them. And of course, we were all thrilled that you ran on the issues that I think are critical to the future of the country, on education and the Patient's Bill of Rights and the tobacco issue.