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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Addresses the New Jersey Girls State Program

Gov. Christie Whitman today spoke to the New Jersey Girls State Program about the role women have played in politics through the years. She encouraged the young women to make education a priority in their lives, praised them for their leadership and commitment and stressed the importance of those qualities in today's society.

The Girls State Program, sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary, is attended by more than 400 of New Jersey's outstanding high school students who spend the week learning about the state's government and political processes.

Attached is a copy of her remarks.

GOVERNOR WHITMAN'S SPEECH AMERICAN LEGION GIRLS STATE RIDER UNIVERSITY THURSDAY, JULY 2, 1998

Thank you, Patricia (McMahon), and good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to participate in another great Girls State program, especially since I was made an honorary member last year. I'm very proud of that, and I applaud all the candidates and participants for your enthusiasm, hard work, and leadership.

You are taking part in a process that to you probably seems entirely natural. Why shouldn't women participate in government, address important issues and create policy? They should, but it hasn't always been that way.

For many generations, the only role women had in the political arena was sweeping it. Let me give you a representative sampling from the centuries.

In the 18th century, English author Mary Manley wrote, "Politics is not the Business of a Woman."

The 19th century artist Pierre Auguste Renoir said - and I quote -- "I consider that women who are authors, lawyers, and politicians are monsters."

And well into this supposedly more enlightened century, the phrase "a woman's place is in the home" still held currency.

Even while you've been in high school, headlines about a state-funded military school in Virginia show that there are still individuals in this country today who believe that separate and unequal treatment for women is good enough, and who think that the mere presence of women at a public institution will destroy it.

Fortunately, wiser heads prevailed down south -- but not without a fight. It is sometimes easy to be complacent about the opportunities that women now have in our society. But remember that those advancements were hard-won.

As you've undoubtedly realized this week, it is important for women to have the same opportunities to participate in all levels of society as the other half of the human race. I think that's particularly true in politics. I believe we bring a different perspective to the table on many issues. We may choose different issues to focus on than our male colleagues, and we tend to be consensus builders. Our life experiences are different and so are our priorities.

That's why we need expansive representation in office. It's more than a matter of equity. I don't think the world would be perfect if all leaders were women. But we need to be fully represented. The more diversity in the process, the more likely the process will benefit all citizens -- male and female.

As New Jersey's first woman governor, I understand that. I know I have a responsibility to recognize talented women who can break through the government's glass ceiling and through entrenched stereotypes as well. I'm proud to say that my administration has appointed more women to high-ranking positions than any other in New Jersey history.

That list includes the first woman chief justice in New Jersey's history and the first woman Chief of Staff. And I just appointed a woman to run state government's largest department, Human Services.

This week, you not only have studied democracy and republican government, you have lived it. You all deserve congratulations. You have elected one governor, a first among equals. But you are all leaders. By virtue of your selection to Girls State, you have been recognized by your communities as leaders of the future.

Everyone who has talent for leadership is obliged to develop that talent. I don't mean each of you has to consider the White House, the State House, or the House

of Representatives as your life's ambition. But I do hope every Girls State citizen will consider herself a leader and always strive to lead -- starting now.

Critical problems in the world and in our state cry out for your input, your energy, and your idealism today. Ask yourself if you are doing all you can right now.

Most speakers you'll hear in the next few years will point out -- and rightly so -- that you have your whole lives in front of you. But consider this: With an average life expectancy of about 75, at age 18 almost one-fourth has already gone by. My message to you is that the time to act is now.

As you return home after this wonderful week, I invite you to join me in trying to make each day count. Continue to make your education a priority in your life, so you'll have the tools to lead in the future. Join me in the duties of citizenship by learning about the issues, getting involved, and, of course, voting. Join me in meeting the challenges of leadership and in serving our fellow citizens. And finally, join me in proving that politics is the business of women.

Thank you.