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## An Open Letter to Michelle Obama On Water

Published on February 14, 2017



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Dear Michelle:

Now that you have returned to the role of private citizen—though, admittedly you are a private citizen with millions of eyes focused on you—I want to encourage you to continue your great work promoting the health of our nation’s children. Your emphasis on exercise and nutrition, jobs and support for veterans, and education have touched millions of Americans of all ages and all backgrounds. Now it’s time to bring in the most common denominator and the first step toward good health—access to clean water.

Of course, that's a global issue. According to the United Nations, women and girls in developing countries spend 200 million hours each day carrying water to supply their families. And even with our enviable public works systems here, some Americans have limited access to healthy water, and the infrastructure that delivers our drinking water and shunts away our wastewater is rotting away before our eyes.

You are the ideal citizen to lead the charge for a revamp of our national water infrastructure and global improvement of access to clean water. After all, you're a leader. You are a champion for children, women, veterans, teachers and communities throughout the U.S. and around the globe. And you have a deep connection to the water industry through your father, Fraser Robinson III, who worked for the Chicago Water Department helping operate a filtration plant to keep Chicago healthy and growing. What a profound public service on your father's part, and on yours! Speaking as one citizen to another, I hope you will carry that legacy forward.

Over the past eight years, you have certainly created a great base to build on.

Let's Move, your program to promote nutrition, exercise and a healthy lifestyle, is immediately and directly complemented by access to healthy water.

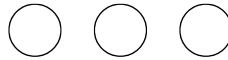
With Joining Forces, you showed veterans some of the commitment they have shown our nation. We can support our heroes not just through medical care and job opportunities, but by ensuring that we never again see a disaster like the fuel and chemical contamination of the Camp Lejeune water supply, which resulted in increased incidences of eight diseases and a \$2 billion payout by the U.S. government. We could even take it a step farther and point out that water is a strategic resource, a vital battlefield asset and a *casus belli* around the world. If we can help address water availability and access for our military and for people around the world, we could save lives on the battlefield...and by preventing battles in the first place.

Through Reach Higher and Let Girls Learn, you encouraged students to excel in school and reach beyond their high school diploma to achieve their academic potential. When it comes to achieving the mission of addressing the issues that prevent adolescent girls from receiving an education, hauling water and inadequate sanitation are high on the list for hundreds of millions of girls around the world. As you know, it's not just the developing world—we've seen children in Flint, Michigan, threatened by lead in their water. That affects IQ and overall health—and, of course, achieving learning potential.

Perhaps we can think of a Michelle Obama-led campaign to rejuvenate water infrastructure as Obama Care 2.0. After all, it's not just universal—water is an unassailable health care “moon shot” that doesn't reflect a particular philosophy on

government or ideology. If there's one thing we all have in common, it's our dependence on clean, healthy water.

It's been a practice of mine to focus Valentine's Day on women and girls at the forefront of the fight for clean water. Michelle Obama, this is my Valentine to you, delivered with thanks for your years of public service and hopes that you will include water as a centerpiece of your next efforts as you take on what your husband described in his farewell address as the most important role in a democracy: that of private citizen.



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