

YVETTE FREEMAN: Whoo! I am so excited to be talking to y'all. You people are beautiful, and lunch was great. They also gave us choices. We had our meat, we had our cheese potatoes, we had our spaghetti, and you can decide on what you want to eat. I ate the meat. It was baked really good. And string beans, I don't know who put -- who put their foot in those string beans? Ooh, that was so good.

You know what? I had this picture that I passed out to you guys. All right, that's me at 300 pounds doing ER, okay? The hair's dyed. I always had white hair, so, and I always wore, you know, natural or wigs. Right now, Hollywood can't take this hair at all. Anyway, and then that's me at 130 pounds. Skinny, I thought I was hot stuff, mm-hmm. And that's why I'm going to tell you my story, how I got from here to here to here, okay?

Now the purpose of this event is to educate the members about cutting-edge policy issues of national, state, and local importance. What's more important than health? If you don't have your health, you don't have nothing. Do you realize that obesity is -- combines, it's part of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, strokes. I mean, they are all the same thing based on obesity. If you didn't have that -- sometimes it's heredity, but mostly it's obesity. And I know a way that we can stop this. We need to educate ourselves early and take action.

I used to believe that it was a puzzle that you had to put together yourself how to get your health together, how to lose the weight, how to eat the food. You personally had to put it together. I don't think so now. I'll tell you why later why I don't think it's just a one-person thing. It is a whole thing. I want to give you some statistics really quick.

Okay, out of 1,000, African Americans and cardiovascular disease, among non-Hispanic blacks aged 20 and older, 44.8% of men and 47.3% of our women have cardiovascular disease. Whoo. In 2008, cardiovascular disease caused the death of 46,819 black males and 49,819 black females. Angina pectoris, now that's where your heart beats real fast and you don't have enough oxygen. It's more common in women than it is in men.

Among Hispanic -- non-Hispanic blacks aged 20 and older, 3.3% of the men and 5.6% of the women have angina--us. The annual rate of 1,000 populations of new episodes of angina for black men are -- well, let's skip down to 20: 22.4% for ages 65-74. For black women, the rates are 15.3% for ages 65-74. We are in trouble. And it all still stems from obesity.

Stroke. Among non-Hispanic blacks aged 20 and older, 4.5% of men and 4.4% of women have had a stroke. Blacks have a risk of first-ever stroke that is almost twice that of whites. Between the

1990s and 2005, the incident rates of stroke decreased for whites. It increased for us. In 2008, stroke caused the deaths of 7,222 black males and 9,488 black females. This is amazing. These numbers are amazing.

High blood pressure, who has it? You know somebody who's got high blood pressure. Among non-Hispanic blacks aged 20 and older, 43% of men and 45.7% of women have high blood pressure. I have high blood pressure, and it was one of the reasons why I also started to try to get myself together.

Now, who am I to be telling you all these statistics? You've probably heard all this before, but I thought I'd just throw them in, let it just remind you. I'm going to share with you how I put my puzzle together. And I'm so very happy to be talking to y'all because you are our country. You're the ones that put out the laws. You are the ones that can change, help change. Because it's going to take all of us to do it.

So you look healthy, you ate a good lunch today. Isn't that nice? Webster Dictionary's definition of being healthy is soundness of body or mind, okay? And I was invited here because I staved off high -- no, not high blood pressure. Almost, it went down, diabetes, because I lost weight. Okay, I lost weight. 20 pounds could get you out of diabetes, just 20 pounds, okay?

Now I was on this big series on NBC called *ER* for 15 years. And they loved me being fat. You know why? Most nurses are overweight and smoke cigarettes, okay? At least back when it started 15 years ago. They're doing it a little bit better right now. This show had George Clooney. You all know who George Clooney is? Uh huh. And Julianne Margulies, she has her own new series now. Noah Wyle has his own series now. I'm doing the *Bold and the Beautiful*. And that's a soap and I know I don't even have time to be looking at that at all, okay? But anyway, they're killing off all the older people and I'm the doctor. Oh well.

ER, we got the SAG award, we got this award, we got that award. We had all these stars. I learned so much about medicine and how to work the machines and things like that. In fact, my husband, my sweet husband, and I'm going to tell you men something, you listen to your wives, okay? My husband had his appendix burst on him just a couple weeks ago. And I tried to get that boy to the hospital, finally he said, "Okay, I'll go." But while he was in there those 12 days, I was there every day, making sure that beeping machine was working, making sure the bed was made right because I knew how to do it from doing *ER*. The nurses didn't appreciate that I knew so much, but I helped my husband, and most men don't go to the doctor like us women. But anyway.

How I lost this weight. I went to UCLA. They have a program there. And it's an obesity program and it's been there for like 20 years. And what I did was I did shakes and pills and vitamins for one whole year. Okay, now we were monitored by doctors and everything, but what they did was they taught us what food was about, how to manage the food, how many calories this weighs, how much this and how much exercise you need. So they taught us this. They said that obesity is an addiction, just like alcohol or anything like that. But the only problem is you can put alcohol away. You can get away from cigarettes. But you can't get away from food.

I'm not sure if I still believe that because I think that what Mrs. Obama is doing now starting with the kids is how we're going to save our lives and save our people. Because she started that program, it started in February 2010, and it's called *Let's Move*. Because back 30 years ago, all of you -- we're all about the same age. We were walking to school. We were, you know, doing -- mama would tell you to get outside and play, do this and do that. They don't do that now. They sit there and they play on their computers. They sit and they do -- they don't get the exercise.

Did you see the video of these kids hollering about getting 800 calories for lunch? Did you see that? Shame on them. Come on. They had 800 calories for breakfast, they have 800 calories for lunch, and then they get snacks. 800 calories is enough for a child to make it through school. That's all you need. But here's what the thing is. I'll get to how I want to change it. I'm going to tell you how I started changing my life.

When I started out, I did a show called *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Do you know that show? Nell Carter starred in it. I did the first national of it. *Singing: No one to talk with, all by myself. No one to walk with, but I'm happy on the elevation of shelf. Ain't misbehaving, I'm saving my love for you, and you, and you.* Let me tell you all something. I weighed at that time about 225. I got the job because I weighed 225 and of course could sing.

Okay, they had two heavy women, one skinny woman, and one fat man and one skinny man, okay? On the national company, we made more money than we ever made in our lives. What did we do? We started eating out late at night, having parties and things, gaining more weight. They would just open up our costumes for us. It was fine. You know that little skinny girl? She started gaining weight. She almost lost her job. I got paid to stay fat.

All right, I did another show, it was called *Dinah Was*. Do any of you people know who Dinah Washington is? *Singing: What a difference a day made, 24 little hours. Brought the sun and the flowers.*

Ooh, it used to be rain. My yesterdays were blue, dear. Tonight I'm a part of you, dear. My lonely nights are through dear since you said you were mine. Lord, what a difference a day makes. Whoo.

I created that show, okay? When I was doing *Ain't Misbehavin'*, people kept telling me, you look and sound like Dinah Washington. When I was in Chicago, I opened it in Chicago, *Ain't Misbehavin'*. And I helped write the show, helped produce it. We moved off Broadway, we did all this. Let me tell you something about Dinah. She worked for -- one of her big jobs was for -- Lionel Hampton. Do you know who he is? Whoo, he was fabulous. He picked her as her singer on the road.

Dinah was like 18, 19 years old at the time, overweight. When she got -- was coming onto the bus to join the band, the band looked at her like she was a fool. They wanted Lena Horne. They treated her bad. That's when she started dieting. Back in the 40s and 50s, they had these things called amphetamines. Mm-hmm, a lot of housewives were hooked on amphetamines. In fact, they're still giving them out in disguised form to lose weight. UCLA was doing it too. We used some of those pills, phentermine and all that kind of stuff.

Well, Dinah did the amphetamines, she also drank, and then she also took some pills to calm -- you know, to make so that she could sleep. How did she die? Christmas Eve, packing, fixing up her bows and things and packages. And she died of a heart attack because of all those pills at age 39.

Now I know all this about this woman, okay? I wrote the story. I got an OBI award. That's a Broadway -- it's an off-Broadway award. Did I pay any attention to that? I didn't. I got fatter, okay? I did that show eight shows a week. I got fatter. What was wrong with me, okay?

Well, no, there's something that doesn't -- it didn't click, you know, that I had to get my health together. It took a little bit more than that. All right, I went with my brother -- no, let's start with my father, diabetes. My father -- my mother would cook for my father, you know, trying her best to save her husband. This is back in the 60s, okay? And we used to have this thing on Sunday where we would look at the *World of Disney* and we'd have ice cream and we'd have that big, old soul food dinner that we all know how that is. And then we look at the show and have our ice cream.

When my father got diabetes, we had Jell-o. I was so mad at my mother, I could not tell you. The only thing I took from that was an aversion of anybody telling me how to eat. I used to catch my father sneaking down the street, getting his ice cream. He was not compliant, okay? And I would -- I would -- and I would blackmail him, seriously blackmail him. Give me some money or give me some ice cream or I'm telling mom. It worked. But that still -- that was the beginning of it. I didn't learn about what my

mother was doing to help my father. And I -- and that's what Mrs. Obama is talking about. So we'll get to that about children.

Diabetes and cardiovascular death rates for African-American women are 67% higher than white women. All of this is hooked up. It's what we're eating and how we're dealing with it. Okay, what's the other reason why I started to lose the weight? My brother-in-law is a diabetic. I went to the -- his podiatrist with him when I was starring on *ER*. And I signed autographs and things like that. And I watched what the doctor was doing. The doctor to me was giving him a great pedicure. And I said it, the doctor looked at me like I was out of my whole mind. And he said he'd have to watch his feet to make sure he doesn't get any ulcers or anything like that.

Okay, I said, okay, I'm sorry, I apologize. But I didn't pay any attention to that. I went on back to signing autographs and gaining more weight. My sister, my older sister, became a diabetic. And that was like starting to hit home. And my younger sister became a diabetic, and that started to hit home. But what really hit home was I had a friend. And I'm not going to say who it is. He was a heavy-set actor. You would know him. You would really know this man. He got an operation and it was a cosmetic operation. He got a tummy tuck, okay? Think it's going to make you look good. He laid up in that hospital so long that he got -- he got an ulcer on his heel. They ended up taking off his leg. Then they took off his next leg. And he ended up dying of kidney failure. And he told me that he had eaten himself to death.

That did it. That's when I looked up and I said, okay, Yvette, you got to get yourself together. That's when I went on with UCLA and I lost the weight. Now you all want to know about how to keep the weight off, don't you? You already know. It's exercise and managing your food. We all know this. But it's hard. It's hard because you work so many long hours, you have kids you got to deal with, you got this and that, and we're older and we're used to certain things. But the kids, a child can learn a language like this, [snapped fingers] okay? And I got one of those things for the computer to learn how to speak, you know, Spanish. I'm still trying to learn how to speak Spanish. But a kid can learn it easily.

So if we start with the kids in the schools, then they will know how to manage their lives. I think us old heads, we're just going to have to just manage our lives as best we can. But the kids. Now how are we going to do this? I think that we should have a contest. Each state, state-by-state, then come national. We should have the kids -- weigh them in, weigh in each school, and then whoever wins that section gets so much money. You know people who got money. There are enough people in insurance companies and everybody. You got people who have money, could back this. And then have a contest for each state. And also teach the kids how to eat while they're doing this contest for their school.

And remember the initiative of don't smoke? And they would teach the kids, and the kids would go home to mommy and daddy and say, mommy, daddy, don't smoke. That worked. We start with the kids and we go from there and have a contest. Okay? Because we're a country that just doesn't -- I mean, we gamble all the time. But this is gambling on our youth. And you guys can do it. Do you have any questions? I think I did my little 20 minutes.

I'm really serious about it's hard right now for an older person to maintain their weight because of habits. But not our babies. So the baby initiative, add that to Obama, Mrs. Obama. That's my girl. So what questions do you have for me? Anything? Want to know anything about show business? You know that there are less black people working on TV right now than before Obama was here? Did you notice? What's that? Please tell me.

SENATOR CATHERINE PUGH (MD): Yes, Senator Catherine Pugh from Baltimore, Maryland. You talk about you lost the weight, but you weren't specific in terms of what you did. What exercises do you do? Okay.

YVETTE FREEMAN: All right, first off, I eat half of my food on my plate. I also have a plate about this big we all eat from. I eat more protein and vegetables than I do potatoes and things like that. I exercise. Here's the exercises. I got myself a dog because I hate exercising, okay? My dog, I have to walk him twice a day. If he -- if I don't walk my dog twice a day, he will nudge me to make me go outside.

I know how to count calories. I know how many calories I had today. And I also know that I give myself treats once in a while. I love to cook, and those darn cooking shows, they mess you up, okay? But then I manage it. I do it on, you know, maybe once a week I really go and do my thing. I like to have a drink, I do, but I also know that wine puts more weight on me than vodka. Hey, okay? Yes, could I have another question? Hey, vodka, better than gin.

REPRESENTATIVE VANESSA SUMMERS (IN): I would like --

YVETTE FREEMAN: Yes?

REPRESENTATIVE VANESSA SUMMERS: You just said everything that I've done in the last couple of months, the last six months. I was diagnosed diabetic. My mother got sick, had to walk the dog, so I walked the dog every day. And learned how to drink, excuse me, vodka. And I'm down 22 pounds and off of one of my diabetic legs.

YVETTE FREEMAN: Congratulations.

REPRESENTATIVE VANESSA SUMMERS: So everything you said, you know, yeah.

YVETTE FREEMAN: You know what? Here's another trick. If you want to be 150 pounds, do eat 1,500 calories a day. You can have 800 -- 1,800 calories if you walk your dog for a mile. Know how many calories you can eat to lose the weight. It's education. That's why the kids need to be educated. But you guys all look good, though. I mean, you really do. I mean, I don't see anyone really overweight. No, no, don't you laugh back there.

REPRESENTATIVE JOE ARMSTRONG (TN): Now you do a little urban gardening.

YVETTE FREEMAN: Oh my gosh, here's another trick. Yes, I do garden. I do tomatoes. I also do canning. I can like my grandmother. I'm pulling all those things back. I also grow the best greens you could possibly have. In fact, let me tell you what happened. We moved from a big house to a one-floor house because we're getting older and, you know, we don't need the steps and all. Well, I drive past my old house. I had terraced the front yard of my house and I had greens growing there. Those people don't even know what they have. And I've been tempted to just go up and cut them, but I know that I'd get arrested.

Yes, I have a garden. But my husband is also a gardener too. He loves to garden. So if you want to come in my house for tomatoes and greens, mm-hmm, maybe an eggplant. I also have apricot trees growing. That's California. And I have lemons, okay? And then I got these little thing called -- they're not apples, but they're like little brown -- no, but they're not, they're something else. They're like -- I'll get the name in a minute. They're so good and they're usually from down south. Oh, I got a persimmons tree too on the other side. This is how you live in California. You all going to come join me?

Got some more questions? Did I help? Because you -- I am so impressed with you, you know, with what you do. You know, God bless all of you. Thank you.