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BYLINE: Larry King

HIGHLIGHT:

First lady Hillary Clinton discusses adoption. Wendy's founder and senior chairman Dave Thomas, Jan Heffner, the executive director of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and a panel of adoptive mothers discuss their experiences with and their encouragement of adoption.

BODY:

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LARRY KING, HOST: Tonight, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton on adoption. She wants you to know there are thousands of kids who need it. Entertainer Marie Osmond joins us, one of four fabulous adoptive moms joining us in Los Angeles. With her is actress Donna Mills -- she has an adoptive daughter -- actress Valerie Harper -- got an adopted daughter, too -- actress-singer Nell Carter, two adopted sons, and in Columbus, Ohio, Dave Thomas, founder of Wendy's and founder of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. That and more next on LARRY KING LIVE.

Good evening. There are about 120,000 adoptions every year in the United States, but there are still tens of thousands of kids waiting to be part of a loving family. Hillary Rodham Clinton started working on children's issues long before she entered the White House, but she's made adoption a special priority as first lady, and it's in that role she joins us from New York. We'll save talk of her Senate run for an upcoming show.

Hillary, why adoption? You're not adopted. You didn't adopt Chelsea?

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON, FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED STATES: You know, Larry, I think it goes back to the work I did 30 years ago when I was in law school, and I decided that I really wanted to do everything possible to help children, and the most vulnerable of our children are children who are caught up in the foster care system, who are given up for adoption, who are abused and neglected. The very first case I did as a young law student was to work with a lawyer to try to help a foster mother adopt a young foster child, and in those days, back in 1970, oftentimes the decisions were made not on the best interests of the child, but who had the biggest house or the most material possessions. And we've come a long way in making adoption much more available and affordable for all people.

And I hope one of the messages of your show tonight is that we have 400,000 children in foster care. About a hundred thousand of those are available to be adopted. We have many children who are not in the foster care system, but who are given up for adoption, and we don't have enough permanent loving homes for those children, so anything we can do we ought to try.

KING: Why -- is it that most people who want to adopt want babies? They don't want to adopt the 4-year-old or 7-year-old in the foster home?

CLINTON: Well, I think that's part of it. But I also think that the system has not been as user-friendly as it needed to be. You know, starting back in '93 and '94, we began to try to change the laws at the national level, to try to begin to expedite decisions about whether a child would go back to that child's biological family or be freed for adoption, and we've done a lot of events at the White House. I know that Dave Thomas will be on with you, and he has been a terrific ally in our fight change and really open up the adoption system.

And you know, one of the great joys that I have had in the years in the White House is seeing that magic happen when a young child is adopted and finds a permanent home. We have opened the White House time and time again. I remember, particularly, a young woman who had been in foster care for most of her life who was turning 13. All she wanted is what any child wants, which is a room of her own and a family of her own.

And so there are so many success stories that I hope everybody will be sharing and knowing that there are a lot of children out there waiting. We now provide more financial support through the federal government for people who adopt and tax credits. We provide support for people, especially, who adopt children with special needs, physical or emotional nature, so there's a lot of help out there.

KING: The late Bob Constantine, the writer, once wrote, "I have four children. Two are adopted. I forget which two."

CLINTON: Yes.

KING: Has society accepted this more?

CLINTON: I think so. And I know that as I travel around New York, I meet so many people who are products of the foster care system themselves, who are adopted, who are adoptive parents.

You know, I was just yesterday at Central High School out on Long Island, and I was having a town hall meeting at the high school about education. We talked about everything -- you know, overcrowding, and qualified teachers and the kinds of courses kids have to take, and then a young man stood up, and he said he was in the foster care system, and he wanted to know what would happen to him when he graduated from high school, and I was so pleased I could tell him that we changed the law last session of Congress. It was a bipartisan effort, so that we could continue to provide support services.

You know, it used to be, Larry, that when a child aged out of foster care, either on his 18th birthday or when he graduated from high school, whichever came first, there would be literally a knock on the door of his foster home or his group home, and there would be somebody standing there with a big old black garbage bag, and the kid would be told to put his belongings in it because he was moving. Well, we've now changed that, and I want to thank people on both sides of the aisle. You know, we have brought together some unlikely allies. I worked with the late John Chafee, a wonderful man who was very devoted to kids, and in the House, I worked with Tom DeLay, who doesn't have the same views on a lot of things I do, but cares about foster kids and adoption. So I think there's a growing public awareness and acceptance, and there is now more support for people willing to adopt. And I really hope that we can increase the number of children adopted. We set a goal. We're trying to reach that goal, of doubling and then tripling the number of children adopted out of our American public system by the year 2002.

KING: One other thing, Hillary, do minorities have a tougher time being adopted?

HILLARY: Well, you know, it's interesting, because there are a lot of informal adoptions in the minority communities, particularly African-Americans, who have always taken in children of cousins, or grandchildren or people in some kinship relationship. I would like to see us do more to support that kind of guardianship and custody arrangement rather than having a child be put into the foster care system. If we can keep that child in some system of relatives or kinship, I think it would be better.

And the other point I wanted to make is that yesterday, after this young man stood up at the high school, another young man stood up and said that his mother had been a foster mother for years, and it got so difficult, and the kind of compensation available was so inadequate for what is truly a 24-hour-a-day job, being a mother. I'd like to see us give more respect to the people who do a good job of fostering children, as well as helping more people understand what adoption could mean in their lives as well.

KING: Thanks, Hillary. Thanks so much. I'll send your best to the rest of the panel as they join us.

HILLARY: Thank you. Thank you so much, Larry.

KING: I'll see a lot of you on the trail.

HILLARY: I'll look forward to it.

KING: Hillary Clinton, the first lady of the United States.

Our panel of Marie Osmond, Valerie Harper, Donna Mills, Nell Carter, Dave Thomas and the director of his foundation joins us right after this.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: Welcome back. We're going to bring our panel on in stages, and we begin with Marie Osmond, the cohost of "Donny and Marie," the very popular daytime talk show host across the United States. She's an adoptive mother. Four of her seven kids are adopted.

MARIE OSMOND, ADOPTIVE MOTHER: Really, I can't remember. Is that what it was?

KING: Since you can have children, why do you adopt children?

OSMOND: That's a very good question. I think, first of all, I can say honestly from my position that there is no difference, that literally, it's one of those things that...

KING: You don't look at one and say adopted.

OSMOND: No, you really, truly don't.

KING: Why do you adopt?

OSMOND: Honestly, Larry, my kids chose me. It was almost like God put them in front of me. And if you ask a lot of adoptive parents, it really was almost that. It was a gut feeling they had. It was almost like I knew where to go.

KING: But you had to make the initial thing, to say...

OSMOND: Yes, but it wasn't your typical adoption, all of them. And everybody that I talked to, there's a feeling -- and we'll ask the panel -- but it's like an intuitive mother's intuition, almost like from the birth mother to you saying, find me, and it's the most incredible experience I have ever had.

KING: Hillary talked about foster parents. Would you have adopted -- all of your children were adopted as infants, right?

OSMOND: Yes, they were.

KING: Would you have adopt a 3-year-old, 4-year-old?

OSMOND: Absolutely.

KING: Still might, never know with you, Marie?

OSMOND: Still might?

KING: You still might.

OSMOND: No I think I am done, Larry. Seven's good.

KING: But you would have adopted an older child?

OSMOND: Absolutely. I don't think there's any difference. I think that that feeling comes from the parent. And mine just happened to be an infant, different -- you know, a couple of weeks, a couple of days, whatever it was.

KING: What's the most difficult aspect of it? There has to be some difficult aspect to adoption.

OSMOND: No I think.

KING: I am going to guess the personalities of the children might be so different, other problems...

OSMOND: You know what, I think sometimes that adoptive parents will use that. They'll say my child is difficult because he's adopted. That's not true. Some of my -- every child is born with a personality. Every child comes down with an agenda, I swear, and whether it's biological or whatever, you take that child and say, OK, I will deal with this child how I need to deal with this child, but the difficulty, to me, is sometimes you look at these children, and you remember the birth mother, and that's why I have recorded songs about it. I've designed dolls about it. I have done adoption dolls and things like that, because I really think they're the ones that initially -- we get the blessing of it. You know, they go through that loss periodically.

KING: In all of your cases, did you know the birth mother?

OSMOND: I didn't -- I don't know my birth mothers.

KING: None of them?

OSMOND: No.

KING: Don't know their names.

OSMOND: I would have to look in the papers. But I have all the information if my children want to know.

KING: For health reasons?

OSMOND: Well, no, but if my children want know, I think that's their privilege and prerogative.

KING: And if they want to meet them someday that's okay, too?

OSMOND: I look forward to it.

KING: There are some who say, don't do that.

OSMOND: I think that's the child's choice. I think it's very important. My children have known from day one that they've been adopted. My one little girl says I am more special than you because I am adopted. And she's just fabulous.

KING: Do you always tell the adopted child they're adopted? Is that a good policy?

OSMOND: I think they just kind of know it. They know they came a different way. They know that there's no difference. They know that some came in mommy's tummy and some didn't, and they all have different circumstances, and I think that's where you spend a lot of time on your knees and a lot of time with God determining how you handle each child.

KING: There's a lot of aspects to this.

In a moment, we'll be joined by Dave Thomas. You know him as the founder of Wendy's, see him in all the Wendy's commercials. But he's the founder of the Dave Thomas Foundation for adoption. Also with him is Jann Heffner, the executive director of that foundation, and then Donna Mills will join us, and Valerie Harper and Nell Carter, all adopted mothers -- adoptive mothers.

OSMOND: That's right.

KING: When we come back, Dave Thomas and Jann Heffner will join us. Marie Osmond stays.

I'm Larry King. Don't go away.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, OCTOBER 15, 1999)

KING: What's adoption like?

ROSIE O'DONNELL, ADOPTIVE MOTHER: The best thing that ever happened to me in the world, and it's the greatest gift. And I think in the whole adoption story, the birth mothers are often the ones who are not celebrated. And people have said to me, it's such a great thing that you adopt. Well, it's not really a great thing that I adopt. I'm the lucky one who gets to adopt. It's a great thing that the parents of both of my children knew that they were not capable of giving them the kind of life they deserve.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: Marie Osmond remains, and we're now joined from Columbus, Ohio by Dave Thomas, the senior chairman and founder of Wendy's, the founder of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption -- he was adopted when he was 6 years old -- and Jann Heffner. Jann is the executive director of that foundation.

Dave, lot of people are adopted, but they don't start foundations. Why did you?

DAVE THOMAS, DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTION: Well, Larry, I was adopted

when I was six months old, and I've got to say hello to Marie.

OSMOND: Hi, Dave.

THOMAS: I know Marie.
Hello, Marie, how you doing?

OSMOND: I am doing great.

THOMAS: And Hillary has just been fantastic, and what she said, I can't say enough about her. And the reason why I started the foundation was that I wanted just to get -- I just thought if just one boy or one girl, we could get a loving home and a permanent home, you know, that would be our objective, and awareness has been one of our biggest things, and we really have been working at it, and there have been so many people have helped us and awareness is so powerful.

KING: Jann, as executive director, one would wonder, with so many people wanting to adopt and so many people available for adoption, what's the problem?

JANN HEFFNER, DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTION: Well, I think, historically, when people have thought about adoption, they have thought about adopting infants, and currently, there are probably only about 17,000 to 25,000 infants that are available for adoption at any one time in the U.S., but there are 110,000 kids who are in the foster care system.

KING: So 25,000 infants available at any one time, but 110,000 by what age group would be available?

HEFFNER: Oh, from newborns all the way up to 18, and these kids just need the chance to be able to be brought into a loving home, and they flourish.

KING: How does the foundation, Dave, work?

THOMAS: Well, the foundation...

KING: What do you do?

THOMAS: What we do, basically, is for example, anyone who has maternity benefits, we try to get them to put adoption benefits in. And I know you have it at CNN. And what I'd like to see happen is that everybody in America, including government, business, would put adoption benefits right into their maternity benefits.

KING: That means if you adopt a baby, you get the same benefits the maternity mother would get?

THOMAS: Right, right, give an incentive to adopt.

Larry, let me just tell you this, it's so important to be adopted. You know, I was born out of wedlock, and I never knew my mother and father, but I did find a home. And you lose your childhood so fast. And I wish -- I knew Marie when I was going to be adopted, she could have adopted me.

OSMOND: I'd take you.

(LAUGHTER)

KING: Was it any different, Dave, growing up adopted? Did you have siblings who were biologically from their parents? Only child.

THOMAS: No, I was the only child, and I really didn't know until I was 13 years old, that I was adopted, but I knew there was something different about me, and it was something I didn't really want to talk about, and I never really talked about being adopted until I was about 21, 22 years old.

KING: Why? Were you shameful? THOMAS: Yes, I didn't want anyone to know I was born out of wedlock, and I didn't want to let anyone know that I was adopted. I mean, I just didn't think they -- you know, it was really important to me. And I was at a manager's meeting one time, and I was just talking to our people, and I said, look, how many of you have seen your mother and father? I said, "I have never seen my mother and father. And if I can do this, you can do it." And a manager come up to me, one of the young men, and he says, why don't you talk more about adoption? I said, well, if it will help, I'll do it. And so that's the reason why I went public.

OSMOND: Dave, being adopted, what would you suggest to parents who do adopt their children? Would you tell them at an early age? Or would you wait for awhile?

THOMAS: No, I would tell them at an early age, absolutely.

KING: In other words, as soon as they have understanding?

THOMAS: Absolutely.

KING: Jann, isn't it a joy to bring people together, to see a baby or an infant, somebody adopted, and you're there for the presentation of the child to the parent?

HEFFNER: Oh, well, it certainly is exciting, but it's I would say equally as exciting if you bring together a sibling group of two or three kids, and they have a chance to stay together, and they had a chance to find a new home and to all grow up together. It's -- that kind of feeling is tremendous, and we're seeing more and more of those kinds of stories happen as people begin to understand about the 110 000 kids that need families.

KING: Boy, we're making good points here.

We're going to take a break and come back.

As we go to break, Jamie Lee Curtis, an adoptive mother, reads from a book she wrote about adoption -- watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, SEPTEMBER 13, 1996)

JAMIE LEE CURTIS, ACTRESS: "Tell me again about the night I was born. Tell me again how phone rang in the middle of the night and they told you I was born. Tell me again how I screamed. Tell me again that you called granny and grandpa right away, but they couldn't hear the phone because sleep like logs. Tell me

again who you couldn't grow a baby in your tummy, so another woman who was too young to take care of me was growing me, and she'd be my birth mother, and you would adopt me and be parent. Tell me again about the first time you held me in your arms and called me your baby sweet. Tell me again how you cried happy tears. Tell me again about the first night you were my daddy, and you told me about baseball being the perfect game, like your daddy told you. Tell me

again about the first you were my mommy and you sang the lullaby your mommy sang to you. Tell me again about our first night as a family. Mommy, daddy, tell me again about the night I was born."

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: There are about six million adoptees in the United States. Each year about 40,000 birth parents relinquish their children for adoption.

We're joined now by Donna Mills, who adopted a baby girl, how long ago?

DONNA MILLS, ADOPTIVE MOTHER: Five and a half years.

KING: She's 5 1/2 years old now. She was how old when you -- four days?

MILLS: Four days old.

KING: You're a single parent. Was it harder to adopt?

MILLS: Not really. I don't think so, you know.

KING: How long did it take from the time you said I wanted to do this to getting the baby?

MILLS: About nine months, strangely enough.

KING: You're kidding, right?

MILLS: No, it really did, because I adopted out of state so I had to do a lot of things with that, and then it took -- and I wanted a girl. It was the only criteria that I had. I just felt I would be better able as a single mother to bring up a girl, and so...

KING: So you cut the odds in half then?

MILLS: Right, and the agency kept having boys. They'd call me up, "We have a boy." Nope.

KING: As a single -- did being single have any block to it?

MILLS: No.

KING: Why did you want to adopt? Why did you want a baby as a single woman?

MILLS: I felt I was at a place in my life where I could finally give to

someone else, you know. I had so much time with focus just on me, careerwise and everything, and it was great, it was wonderful, but I wanted to be able to share a lot of what I learned, what I knew. I just had a lot of love that I thought I could give to a child.

KING: No regrets.

MILLS: God no. KING: You adopted a black child.

MILLS: Half. She's biracial.

KING: But when you look at her, she's black, right?

MILLS: Yes.

KING: Was that any problem for you?

MILLS: No, it wasn't. As a matter of fact, they called me when they finally had a girl and they said, we have a girl. They said, but there's one thing -- because I'd said -- they'd said "We'll get you a blond, blue-eyed baby," and I called them back and said, you know, the men in my life that I've always loved have been dark haired, dark skinned, you know, and so they called me up and said, you said you like dark men. How dark?

(LAUGHTER)

MILLS: And I said "What do you mean?" And they said, well, the baby is biracial. Her biological father is black, her mother, white. They said, "You have overnight to think about it," and I went "All right," And I did. I thought about it. I didn't sleep that night, talked to my family and everything, and I said, I don't care. For me, it makes no difference whatsoever. I felt that this child -- I just had this feeling in my heart that this child was for me. God sent her.

KING: It wouldn't have bothered you either, Marie?

MILLS: Absolutely...

KING: It would have meant nothing to you?

MILLS: Well, no, one of my children is half Hispanic. And you know what, I look at her, I think she looks more like me than any of my other kids, because I've got the chocolate eyes and...

KING: Jann, do any white parents adopt black children?

HEFFNER: Well, there's a federal law called MIBA, the Multiethnic Placement Act, that in a sense makes it illegal to hold up an adoption of a child just for race purposes. Now, of course, it's always easier in terms of culture and being able to understand some of the physical characteristics, if African Americans do adopt African American kids, and that's why one of the things that we really try to do is encourage more and more African American parents and single individuals to sign up and learn about this so that they can, in fact, adopt these youngsters.

KING: By the way, Jann, can an African-American parent adopt a white child?

HEFFNER: Sure.

KING: There's no problem? Works both ways?

HEFFNER: It works both ways. You have to be able to understand the culture and work with all of those issues and make sure that you have friends of that other culture.

KING: Are there any problems, Donna, with mommy, why am I a different color than you?

MILLS: No. It started out with, why is your hair blond and mine isn't? That's the first thing she saw. And there are questions about it, but it isn't a problem. And like Jann said, you have to be sure that you know the -- what it means to a child to have an ethnic and racial identity from the way they look. So I am very concerned about her always having children of color in her classes as friends. She has a -- teachers that are black. I try to keep her in a very mixed world, and she seems to be taking to it quite well and very, very happy.

OSMOND: I think more importantly than color, any of those issues, is love, and I think that's the most important issue, is that your child feels loved.

KING: Dave, Hillary says that the stigma of adoption, that's over, what you felt when you didn't want to talk about it, that's over now? People do happily discuss it, true?

THOMAS: I think so. I think it's true more and more.

KING: We've gone way beyond that in the last 20 years.

THOMAS: Absolutely. And there's more people -- adoption is -- you know, let me give you a good example. We -- I want to ask you something in just a minute, but I might as well do it right now. We have a postage stamp, adoption stamp, that's going to be coming out May 10.

KING: Really?

There it is.

THOMAS: It's Steven Spielberg -- Children's Action Network and Steven Spielberg -- we're going to sell a stamp in L.A., and I would like to invite you with the postmaster general, you, Marie, Valerie now and Donna, all to participate, and it's for awareness, and I think that this stamp...

OSMOND: Do I get a hamburger for it?

THOMAS: Yes. we'll work...

OSMOND: And French fries.

THOMAS: Not a problem.

OSMOND: I want a cheeseburger. THOMAS: Larry, we think this stamp is just

going to be -- the awareness is just going to be unbelievable. We want to sell 200 million stamps, and this is all for awareness.

KING: It's about time, about time.

THOMAS: Let me get a break and we'll pick up on that.

There's a stamp coming in May.

When we come back, we'll be joined by Valerie Harper. And as we go to break, Michael Reagan talks about being adopted -- watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, SEPTEMBER 13, 1996)

MICHAEL REAGAN, RADIO TALK SHOW HOST: I went to my father one time. I said, "Dad, if you could do one thing as president, I wish you could hold a press conference, and one time tell the members of the press to quit referring to me as the adopted son of Ronald Reagan and Jane Wyman." I said, "It drives me absolutely nuts. I am your son. That's the bottom line."

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: Our guest earlier was Hillary Clinton. Our subject is adoption.

With us is Marie Osmond, the host of "Donny and Marie"; Donna Mills, who is probably the most successful actress in the history of nighttime television; Dave Thomas, the senior chairman and founder of Wendy's, in Columbus, Ohio. With him is Jan Heffner, the executive director of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

We're now joined by Valerie Harper. Rhoda! Valerie Harper is the adopted mother who has adopted a girl -- who adopted a girl nearly 4 years old, and that girl turns 17 next week. Her name is Cristina. We'll talk about that.

But Dave, you wanted to add one thing about this stamp. What was it?

THOMAS: Well, I just wanted to mention that it's for awareness. And to kick this off, Rosie O'Donnell really helped us a lot to launch this. And the Post Office and the postmaster-general and all the people from the Post Office are just really supermotivated to get this stamp out.

So I hope that you will consider helping to sell this stamp in L.A.

KING: I'll be happy to. And it sells for the same price as the face of the stamp, right?

THOMAS: Yes, right, right. KING: You just want the stamp out there.

THOMAS: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

KING: All right. Valerie Harper -- Valerie Harper joins us. You adopted a 4-year-old?

VALERIE HARPER, ADOPTIVE MOTHER: That's right. Cristina was four.

KING: Why? Were you married at the time?

HARPER: Oh, absolutely. Tony and I wanted to adopt.

KING: You had no children?

HARPER: No. Tony had four sons, big ones, and he thought I should be a mother. And it's the best thing I ever did, was listen to my husband.

And we were looking at infants. We worked through a wonderful local attorney, Durand Cook, who is still in the adoption business, and we adopted privately. And we were thinking of it, about infants, and then suddenly this little one came up and she was four.

KING: How did you -- you had to know the parents then.

HARPER: No, not at all. This was Durand.

KING: Where was she?

HARPER: She was on the East Coast.

KING: In a foster home?

HARPER: No. She was in a care situation. And she -- we saw an album that had been kept for her, and we just said, this is our child, exactly what Marie and Donna have expressed. I just knew.

And she adopted us, because 4 years old is quite an advanced child. And Durand said to us, Valerie, Tony, understand, if it doesn't work out over the weekend, if it feels strange, there are couples waiting for this little girl. She's an adorable little -- your coloring, green-eyed.

And I said - I said, well, I don't think that'll occur. But she got off the plane. She leapt into my arms. She adopted us.

And I saw Shirley MacLaine a couple of days later with this little munchkin. She's very light, thin little thing. Also built like Donna, only taller now. And I had her on my hip, and Shirley at a shop in Malibu said, "What's this?" I said, "This is my new daughter." And she's going, mommy, mommy, let's go, and she's pulling my hair.

And I said, "Shirley, it's only two days and she's calling me mommy." And Shirley said: "It's a miracle. Just accept it, Valerie!"

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It is a miracle.

HARPER: And I said, "Shirley, of all people to meet in the world, you are the great one to say" -- she said: "You're her mother. She's your daughter. You have found each other in the universe." So just accept it as a miracle that it is.

KING: But there has to be some...

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I believe they do pick you. I do believe it.

HARPER: Oh, I -- oh, I...

KING: Even as infants.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I believe that...

HARPER: Oh, yes.

KING: But isn't there an adjustment with a 4-year-old? I mean...

HARPER: Not with Cristina.

KING: It's got a personality.

HARPER: It was amazing. It was effortless.

But you know, having your kids, having biological kids, it's all a crap shoot, Larry.

KING: Of course.

HARPER: You don't know how they're going to turn out.

KING: You're not kidding.

HARPER: And Cristina used to say to kids: "Your parents had you. They had to take what they got. My parents picked me."

(LAUGHTER)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: My daughter says that too.

KING: Did you ever find out who her parents were?

HARPER: Oh, sure, we know. And I want her -- we know some, and when she's 18, it's her choice.

KING: If she wants to see them, that's fine?

HARPER: Oh, absolutely. It's not the stigma, like when we were kids, Larry.

KING: Jan, this should be very encouraging to you.

HEFFNER: Oh, well, it certainly is. And Larry...

KING: Because that's the hardest to adopt, is not infants, it's those beyond infancy.

HEFFNER: Well, the average age of a youngster who is waiting for adoption right now is between 8 and 9 years old, and about 50 percent of the kids are

minority youngsters, and many of them are in sibling groups. And so what we're asking folks to do, if they'd like to understand a little bit more about these youngsters, is there's a number of really terrific Web sites out there. The one that we happen to fund is www.adopt.org, which is Faces of Adoption, and you can see 2,000, 3,000 youngsters that are available for adoption.

KING: You can see them.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Oh, that's great.

KING: That's a great idea.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Isn't that fabulous?

KING: And you can contact the Dave Thomas Foundation in Columbus, Ohio as well. And you have a Web site, Donna.

MILLS: Yes. I have a Web site that'll be up in the next month.

KING: To do what?

MILLS: It's DonnaMillsOnline.com, and it's a -- it's a celebrity Web site, it's a fan Web site. But it also is to discuss adoption, ecology, all kinds of things that I'm passionate about. And we can have chats online and a lot of information.

KING: Would you adopt a child with a disability?

MILLS: Absolutely.

KING: Would you? Would you?

HARPER: Yes. As a matter of fact...

OSMOND: You know, it's interesting because -- no, no, go ahead.

HARPER: No. I was just going to say I have a Web site also with -- all about the stamp and several books and Durand's...

KING: Do adoptive -- do adopted people tend to get -- the senior executive producer of this program, whose name is Wendy, by the way...

HARPER: Wendy!

KING: ... she adopted. She's adopted two children. And she -- and I made her adopt. She didn't want to adopt. Well, initially. I made her adopt.

HARPER: Did you? Did you encourage her to do it?

KING: Well, I encouraged her to do it.

OSMOND: I think that people worry about, if they're going to love that child as much.

KING: That's right. But then, once they get it, they get caught up, right? They become adoption people.

OSMOND: Hey, when you change those diapers and you do those bottle feedings...

(LAUGHTER)

... I mean, that baby is yours. That baby grows up on you. It is yours.

HARPER: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

(CROSSTALK)

KING: So you don't look -- you don't look at your daughter as adopted?

HARPER: No. It's my child.

(CROSSTALK)

KING: You don't (UNINTELLIGIBLE) adopted?

OSMOND: No.

(CROSSTALK)

HARPER: No, it's my child. They do it in press. They say Valerie Harper and her adopted daughter. But it's my daughter.

MILLS: I don't like when they do that.

OSMOND: I don't even like them naming the numbers. I just say, you know, you have seven children.

HARPER: Yes. Exactly.

KING: All right. Let me get a break, and when we come back, we'll meet Nell Carter to complete our panel. Don't go away.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, MARCH 18, 1998)

KING: Did you like motherhood?

CONNIE CHUNG, JOURNALIST: I'm enjoying it tremendously.

KING: You have two now?

CHUNG: No, one.

KING: Just one?

CHUNG: Yes, just one.

KING: What is it like -- what is it like, the feeling of adoption?

CHUNG: It's extraordinary. It's -- it's parenthood. And...

KING: It's your baby.

CHUNG: Oh, absolutely, and I really believe that it was meant to be. It was meant to be that Matthew was our little boy. So it's wonderful.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: We complete our panel with one of our great entertainers, Nell Carter, an adoptive mother herself, two boys adopted as infants. They are now 10.

Were they twins?

NELL CARTER, ADOPTIVE MOTHER: No, they're two months five days apart.

KING: So it's amazing if it was biological, right?

(LAUGHTER)

And they are Joshua and Daniel.

CARTER: Yes.

KING: All right. Why did you adopt, Nell?

CARTER: Well, I had had so many miscarriages, and I really wanted a baby even if it meant not having a husband. And I decided to get rid of the husband and...

(LAUGHTER)

Really! And I went -- I got an attorney...

KING: Was it a good move?

CARTER: Great move. Paid a lot to get rid of him, but it was a great move.

I met with one lady, and she was going to have a baby in February. And I was all content and ready, and then on December 6, before, I had a phone call about this baby that had been born the night before. Would I like to meet this baby? I immediately got everyone together. Like they said, the child chooses you, why, I don't know. But I get on a plane, everyone is ready, checks, lawyers, everything. We get -- seats, everything, go there, and I go through this drill with the birth mother. She's very quiet, but her counselor was grilling me because I was in show business.

KING: Yes.

CARTER: And I was getting a divorce, and I was Jewish, and I was everything.

(CROSSTALK)

CARTER: Yes, yes, it happens.

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: Anyway...

KING: So when will they be born? Go ahead?

CARTER: They will. Anyway, I walked out and I turned around to the mother, I said, look, I'll just give you a check, because I felt like if I do a good deed, something will happen, and she started crying. She said, "Would you like to see the baby?" I said, "Yes," She took me, and I went into the apartment -- I won't go through the whole story -- I walked upstairs. There is this old lady standing by the door holding this baby in a bundle. And I don't know, I just felt like please let me hold him. I won't look at him. Just let me hold him. They put that baby in my arms, and I promise you, I knew at that moment, this is my baby.

KING: What does it cost, Donna, to adopt?

MILLS: Well, it doesn't -- I mean, it's not like you...

KING: Not as expensive as you would think, right?

MILLS: Well, you pay the expenses of the birth mother in the hospital.

KING: You pay the lawyer or whoever handles it, right?

MILLS: Right, the agency.

KING: But it's not like a hundred thousand dollars.

HARPER: No. No. In fact, in our case, Larry, it was very inexpensive, because there were no birth -- there wasn't the pregnancy to go through or hospital -- not at all. It was very inexpensive.

(CROSSTALK)

OSMOND: But I think now they're being much more thoughtful of the birth mothers.

HARPER: Yes. OSMOND: Because now you're not only paying for the hospital and things like that, but you're paying for to them see -- you know, to have someone to talk to afterwards, to help them get through that transition period, which they have proven now that these girls that do put their children up for adoption, that they go on being much stronger women and they end up being more responsible, getting an education. They feel good about their decision.

KING: Jann, do you have to own a home to adopt?

HEFFNER: Oh, no, Larry. Oh, no.

KING: Can you adopt if you make \$35,000 a year?

HEFFNER: Oh, certainly.

KING: you can?

HEFFNER: In fact -- oh, yes. You can be single. You don't have to own a home. It's -- they will make sure...

KING: Can you be gay?

HEFFNER: There are a number of gay couples that have adopted. And the other thing I wanted to mention is, in terms of the youngsters that are in the foster care system, that these kids actually, because of the fact that they have been in foster care, there is a subsidy that is available with these youngsters also to allay expenses, and all of your adoption expenses are paid for. You don't need to put any out-of-pocket money out.

KING: You were telling, Donna, me about an organization called Pact?

MILLS: Pact, yes, it's an agency that helps people that want to adopt transracially, or you know, either white there's want to adopt blacks, but it helps them know what to do for the children.

CARTER: My children are biracial.

KING: Do you agree with everyone, though, that the child picks you?

CARTER: I honestly believe that.

HARPER: I was just going to say what Donna talking about, we've come such a long way, Larry, ladies, because a very famous novelist, Pearl S. Buck, was so horrified at all the babies that were left in Asia in the late '40s after our boys had been there. They were absolutely despised in their communities, and our State Department and the Veteran's Administration saying they didn't exist. And those children that were biracial were put into insane asylums, because adoption agencies in America would not take them. So Pearl Buck built up her own. It's called Welcome House. It's still operating. But it's so wonderful where we've come from the late '40s to now.

KING: Dave, is there preferences? For example Rosie O'Donnell was on. I think she's adopted three children now.

THOMAS: Right.

KING: Is it easier for her to adopt than other people because she's Rosie O'Donnell? No?

THOMAS: No, I don't really think so. Do you, Jan?

HEFFNER: No.

KING: Anybody think so? Anybody think you have a break because you're who you are?

OSMOND: I think it used to be that they were very careful to say there are so many children to go around, and we'll give you one or two, but I think that door is opening, and I think that they know that family and love is the most

important thing, and sometimes these children fill a wonderful camaraderie, and they know their special. And it's just like you said, it's getting more awareness out there.

KING: Donna, you were going to say?

MILLS: Oh yes. People know that there are children out there, and you know, they -- it's just so much easier. It used to be if you weren't of the same religion, you couldn't adopt a child. My aunt and uncle...

(CROSSTALK)

KING: There were Jewish adoption agencies for Jews, Catholics for Catholics.

MILLS: Yes.

HARPER: And redefining family and what the family is.

OSMOND: Also they're giving the birth mother more choice.

KING: I want to talk about that.

And I know you have a song or a poem.

OSMOND: Well, no, no. Because all the girls will be interested in this, and so will Dave and Jann.

OSMOND: I am not going sing.

(LAUGHTER)

HARPER: You have got the pipes.

KING: As we go to break, Greg Louganis talks about being adopted. Watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, FEBRUARY 28, 1995) GREG LOUGANIS, OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST: There was a lot of thought going -- that went into me being adopted, you know, the decision to put me up for adoption, and so then I knew that, you know, my natural parents loved, me and they cared about me enough to try and give me a better chance than they could provide.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: Let's include a call.

Crystal River, Florida, hello.

CALLER: Yes, hello.

KING: Hi.

CALLER: I am a 14-year-old girl, and I was adopted when I was 12 years old. I noticed that the show was more or less oriented around children being adopted,

but the truth is adopting an older child can be just as fulfilling, and I spent 10 years in the system due to difficulties in the courts and things like that.

And I have a few questions. One of which is, what can be done to get children through the court systems more efficiently?

KING: Jan Heffner, do you know the answer to that?

HEFFNER: I certainly would speak to the answer. But I want to say, hi, Ashley, how are you doing?

KING: Oh, you know this girl?

HEFFNER: She is a wonderful youngster who was in the, quote, system until the time she was about 12 years old, and actually a pair that I know who had done a tremendous job in producing videos for us adopted Ashley.

And I would say, Ashley, that you are flourishing, and your parents are so proud of you. And this goes to show that youngsters, no matter what age they are, can, if given the right kind of love and support, can do a tremendous job in terms of growing up.

KING: Twelve is old, though, isn't it? You would adopt a 12-year-old?

OSMOND: You know, I believe that you know as a mother. I believe that couple knew that was their child. I believe if that feeling happened to me, I would do it.

KING: So don't rule it out, right?

MILLS: If that was presented to me, yes.

KING: Yes, OK. Miami, hello.

CALLER: Hi. My question for Jann Heffner.

KING: Yes?

CALLER: I am an adoptive mother, and I am very familiar with the world of adoption, and I have noticed, in recent times, a disproportionate number of adoptive children are receiving the diagnosis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and similar disorders.

My questions for Jan are -- I've wondered if you've noticed this trend, if adoptive parents are made aware of this, and if you have any theories as to why this is happening?

KING: What would be the connection, Jan?

HEFFNER: Well, a lot of these youngsters, if you'll remember, at least once in the foster care system, many of them have moved around a number of times, and unfortunately, they haven't been able to stay maintained in a school system and to have the kind of consistent -- kind of attention that would be really important for them.

And so ADHD also is a diagnosis that in many cases can be dealt with fairly well, but it's also one that is...

KING: Understandable.

HEFFNER: Yes, it's very understandable.

KING: Now...

CARTER: But you don't have to be adopted to have this.

KING: No, you don't.

HARPER: That's right.

HEFFNER: That's true, very true.

OSMOND: Good grief, look at Donny.

(CROSSTALK)

KING: Let me -- that's funny. We're going to get a break, come back, we'll have a closing comment for everybody. And we're going to have Marie read -- she's going to read the song. Don't go away.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: Marie has something special here. What is this?

OSMOND: Well, no, this is a -- this is a song that a very dear friend of mine wrote, Mike McLean (ph). And I felt it was inspired. I actually recorded it and put it with a doll that I did that was for adoption.

KING: Sing it.

OSMOND: Well, I don't know if I'll sing it but...

KING: Sort of sing it.

OSMOND: It's from the adoptive mother's point of view. It says: "So many wrong decisions in my past, I'm not quite sure..."

KING: This is the adoptive mother?

OSMOND: Yes. "... if I could ever hope to trust my judgment anymore. But lately I've been thinking, because it's all I've had to do. And in my heart I feel that I should give this child to you. And maybe you can tell your baby when you love him so that he's been loved before" -- I can't sing -- "by someone who delivered your son from God's arms to my arms to yours."

And it says: "And if you choose to tell him and if he wants to know how the one who gave him life could bear to let him go, just tell him there was sleepless nights. I prayed and paced the floor and knew the only peace I'd find is if this child was yours." And it says...

KING: I don't think Donna can finish it, because she's lost it.

OSMOND: It says...

CARTER: No. "I know that you don't have to do this, but could you kiss him once for me the first time that he ties his shoe or falls or skins his knees?" -- my goodness, "and could you hold him twice as long when he makes his first mistake and try to tell him that he's not alone? Sometimes that's all it takes."

OSMOND: "And he's not alone." And then she says, "I know how much he'll ache." And it says: "This may not be the answer for another girl like me and I'm not on a soap box singing how we all should be. I'm just trusting in my feelings and I'm trusting God above, and I'm trusting that you can give this baby both his mother's love."

HARPER: Oh, that's beautiful.

OSMOND: And it's true.

CARTER: I want a copy.

HARPER: Oh, and Cristina's 13th birthday, we read a note to her from her birth mom. It was -- we sat together, and -- and I blessed the woman who...

(CROSSTALK)

HARPER: ... baby for me.

KING: Donna, do you think of, Donna -- I know this, you know, this is obviously very moving. Do you think of the birth mother?

MILLS: I do, because I get so much love from my child and that woman who gave birth to her isn't getting that love. So I do think of her.

KING: Dave, do you ever...

OSMOND: But you know what? Somehow I truly believe God compensates.

KING: Dave, do you ever think about your real mother?

THOMAS: Well, I do, but I never get the opportunity to meet her or my father. But Larry, I'll tell you what's really important. We really need to take the red tape out of adoption, because these kids...

(CROSSTALK)

CARTER: Yes.

HARPER: Here, here.

THOMAS: ... they're losing their childhood really fast. And you know, it's something that this is a the right thing to do, and that's the reason why we're doing the postage stamp. We're going to have a big special on -- I hate to mention the network -- but on CBS, and it's with Steven Spielberg and Action

Network. It'll be on December 21st about adoption.

Now, we run one -- I hope someone's seen it -- was December 23rd, and we had all kind of stars on it. And people donated their time, Henry Winkler and

Steven Spielberg and Stevie Wonder and...

KING: And you're going to do another one this year?

THOMAS: We're going to do another one this year.

HARPER: Fabulous.

CARTER: Can I say something? There are a lot of people who think that you should not adopt a black child if you're not black or you should not -- you know, for those reasons.

(CROSSTALK)

CARTER: I totally disagree. You can hate me if you want to. But my children -- I love them because I love them. And there are so many children being held back...

HARPER: That's right.

CARTER: ... because someone there who can love them. You know, just give it to them.

KING: Ladies, is there any negative about it? HARPER: And we need to get some velocity on this. I really love what Dave said. We've got to move it, because they're only children for so long.

OSMOND: You know what? Our children are losing their childhoods so much anyway to...

HARPER: That's true.

(CROSSTALK)

KING: Is there any negative about adoption?

HARPER: None.

MILLS: But you said something, Larry. You said, do you ever think about your real mother? We're their real mothers.

KING: OK, wrong word. I should have said biological mother.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Biological.

MILLS: Yes, yes.

KING: Dave, I salute you for all you do, Dave.

THOMAS: Thank you.

KING: Anything we can do to help you let us know.

THOMAS: Well, thanks Larry. Thanks a million.

KING: Jan, keep up the good work.

(CROSSTALK)

And isn't it nice that maybe years ago four of you couldn't have assembled and talked about this, or wouldn't have been talked about?

HARPER: That's right, it wasn't.

OSMOND: And Larry, thank you for bringing us here.

HARPER: Oh, it's so wonderful you're doing this hour.

KING: Thank you all, thank Hillary Clinton earlier, and Marie Osmond, Donna Mills, Valerie Harper, Nell Carter, Dave Thomas and Jan Heffner. Thanks to all the biological mothers and the adoptive mothers.

A wild show on pro wrestling coming up tomorrow night. Stay tuned for CNN "NEWSSTAND." I'm Larry King. For all of us here in Los Angeles, good night.

TO ORDER A VIDEO OF THIS TRANSCRIPT, PLEASE CALL 800-CNN-NEWS OR USE OUR SECURE ONLINE ORDER FORM LOCATED AT www.fdch.com

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 17, 2000

Governor's Association Task Force on Infant Mortality. In Arkansas, she helped establish the first neo-natal nursery in the state at Arkansas Children's Hospital, and now serves on the Hospital's Board of Trustees.

Outstanding Mother and Advocate: In 1984, Mrs. Clinton was named the Young Mother of the Year in Arkansas. She has also been recognized by the National Law Journal, the University of Arkansas, and the National Women's Economic Alliance for her work to improve the quality of life for families and children in America. She has also been acknowledged for her efforts to protect children from abuse and neglect.

Promoting Children and Family Interests: In 1977, Hillary Clinton founded Arkansas' Advocates for Children and Families, an organization that promotes parenting, and health and education for Arkansas' children. She also joined the Board of Directors of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) in 1976, and chaired the Board from 1986 until earlier this year. CDF advocates on behalf of American children and their families. The organization has a special interest in the needs of poor children.

Helping Disadvantaged Parents Prepare their Children for School: Hillary Clinton brought the Home Instruction Program for Pre-school Youth to Arkansas. This program trains disadvantaged parents to teach their pre-school children the skills they will need to succeed in school. It encourages parents to take an active role in the education of their children.

- In her book, First Teachers, Barbara Bush praises Hillary Clinton's Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youth. Mrs. Bush told USA Today, August 14, 1992, that she had heard about Hillary Clinton's work on literacy and was so impressed that she invited her to talk about it at a White House tea.
- What Hillary Clinton has stood for over the course of the last 20 years, and what she and Bill Clinton still believe, is common sense: children need to grow up in a strong and loving family. Her primary

concern on behalf of children has been that families should be allowed to flourish so that children too can thrive.

Republican allegations are purely political, but accurately reflect the Republicans' callous policies toward children and families.

- In addition to her concern about the problems of child abuse and neglect, Hillary Clinton has been troubled by extreme situations where parents make decisions that could harm a child. She wrote about a case where a child had a cleft palate -- an easily correctable facial disfigurement -- and the parents refused to take corrective action. Hillary Clinton suggested that in circumstances such as these, where children face "long term and possibly irreparable" damage, they should have a legal recourse. Hillary Clinton wrote, however, that disputes between children and their parents should "in all but the most extreme cases . . . be resolved by the families, not the courts." ("Children's Rights: A Legal Perspective," page 26, Children's Rights, Teachers College Press, 1979)

- Hillary Clinton's views -- that children who could suffer irreparable harm as a result of their parents' decisions should have a legal recourse -- are borne out by current law. The Republicans' false accusations -- that Hillary Clinton thinks children should sue their parents when they object to taking out the trash -- are cynical and show their contempt for the serious problem of child abuse in this country. Do the Republicans believe that children who are abused or neglected should not have any recourse?

- In a 1973 article in the Harvard Educational Review, Hillary Clinton recounted the history of family law. The Republicans now distort her words and suggest that she equated marriage to slavery. This could not be further from the truth. In fact, Hillary Clinton's historical comparison was hardly uncommon. Consider a recent law review article by Judge Charles D. Gill of Connecticut, which similarly reviewed the legal antecedents to current law. He noted that historically "slaves, children and, to a large degree women, were deprived of rights." Judge Gill was honored by the Bush Administration in 1989 for "his distinguished legal career" promoting the rights of child victims and witnesses.

- The Republicans argue whatever is politically expedient. When 12-year old Walter Polovchak wanted to stay in the United States instead of returning with his parents to his home in the Soviet Union, the Republicans agreed. The case went all the way to the Court of Appeals in 1985, and the Republican Administration argued that Walter should be able to stay in the U.S. over his parents objections. We did not hear the Republicans speaking out against children's rights then.

- The Republicans have often been on the wrong side of children's issues. In the early twentieth century, conservative political forces opposed child labor laws, arguing that these laws would constitute an unreasonable government interference in the economic and privacy rights of the family. In attacking Hillary Clinton, the Republicans are making the same claims about laws that protect children from abuse.

- The Reagan and Bush Administrations have the worst record on children's issues in recent history. Every year since Reagan and Bush took office, the number of children in poverty has grown at a faster rate than in the previous 14 years. Now, one in five children live in poverty. Ten million children have no health insurance, and millions of children receive an inadequate education. President Bush has developed no new programs for America's children.

- President Bush has vetoed legislation that would allow parents to take leave to take care of sick, newborn or newly adopted children. Seventy-two industrialized nations provide such leave; the U.S. does not.



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HILLARY CLINTON: AN ADVOCATE FOR AMERICA'S FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Hillary Clinton has been a leading advocate for children. For more than 20 years, she has worked -- as a wife, mother, volunteer and lawyer -- to improve education, strengthen families, and promote health care for children. She is proud of her achievements and will continue to be a voice for children and families when Bill Clinton is elected President of the United States.

- Hillary Clinton cares deeply about her own family and America's children. She believes that we must invest in our children's education and health if we want a promising future. As First Lady, Hillary Clinton would continue to talk to people around the country and be a voice for mothers, children and families.

Improving the Quality of Education: Hillary Clinton is an active parent in the Little Rock School District, working to improve the quality of education. She chaired the Arkansas Education Standards Committee, which recommended changes to strengthen the accreditation standards for the state's public schools. These standards have been a model for states around the nation.

Reducing Infant Mortality: Hillary Clinton served on the Southern Governor's Association Task Force on Infant Mortality. In Arkansas, she helped establish the first neonatal nursery in the state at Arkansas Children's Hospital, and now serves on the Hospital's Board of Trustees.

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- Hillary Clinton raised the issue of infant mortality with President Bush. He wrote to thank her for making him aware of gravity of the problem -- the dimensions of which he found surprising.
- What Hillary Clinton has stood for over the course of the last 20 years, and what she and Bill Clinton still believe, is common sense: children need to grow up in a strong and loving family. Her primary concern on behalf of children has been that families should be allowed to flourish so that children too can thrive.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

April 17, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON
EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

The East Room

10:45 A.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Please be seated. Welcome to the White House and to this very special White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning. We are delighted that you can join us today not only here in the East Room, but I want to give a special welcome to the thousands of people who are joining this conference via satellite from universities, hospitals and schools around the country. There are nearly 100 sites in 37 states.

Now, at first glance, it may seem odd to hold a conference here at the White House devoted to talking about baby talk. But that discussion has never been more important, because science, as we will hear from the experts who are with us today, has now confirmed what many parents have instinctively known all along, that the song a father sings to his child in the morning, or a story that a mother reads to her child before bed help lay the foundation for a child's life, and in turn, for our nation's future.

So the President has convened this conference with a clear mission: to give the leading experts in the field of early childhood development, the scientists and pediatricians, the researchers and all of the others, the opportunity to explain their discoveries and to put this invaluable body of knowledge at the service of America's families.

But this is not just for America's families. This information is crucial for anyone in the position of leaving an impression on a young child's growing mind -- day-care workers, teachers, doctors and nurses, television writers and producers, business leaders, government policy-makers, all of us.

It is astonishing what we now know about the young brain and about how children develop. Just how far we have come is chronicled in a report being issued today by the Families and Work Institute, entitled, "Rethinking the Brain." Fifteen years ago, we thought that a baby's brain structure was virtually complete at birth. Now, we understand that it is a work in progress, and that everything we do with a child has some kind of potential physical influence on that rapidly-forming brain.

A child's earliest experiences, their relationships with parents and care-givers, the sights and sounds and smells and feelings they encounter, the challenges they meet determine how their brains are wired. And that brain shapes itself through repeated experiences. The more something is repeated, the stronger the neuro-circuitry becomes, and those connections, in turn, can be

permanent. In this way, the seemingly trivial events of our earliest months that we cannot even later recall -- hearing a song, getting a hug after falling down, knowing when to expect a smile -- those are anything but trivial.

And as we now know, for the first three years of their life, so much is happening in the baby's brain. They will learn to soothe themselves when they're upset, to empathize to get along. These experiences can determine whether children will grow up to be peaceful or violent citizens, focused or undisciplined workers, attentive or detached parents themselves.

We now have reached the point of understanding that a child's mind and a child's body must be nourished. During the first part of the 20th century, science built a strong foundation for the physical health of our children -- clean water and safe food, vaccines for preventable diseases, a knowledge of nutrition, a score of other remarkable other lifesaving achievements. The last years of this century are yielding similar breakthroughs for the brain. We are completing the job of primary prevention, and coming closer to the day when we should be able to ensure the well-being of children in every domain -- physical, social, intellectual, and emotional.

I have very high hopes not only for this conference, but for what I hope will come from it. But there are, however, two things I hope this conference will not do. The first is I hope this information will not burden or overwhelm parents. Parenting is the hardest job in the world, and the information we offer today is meant to help parents, not to make them anxious or imprison them in a set of rules. If you forget to read to your child one night, please, that's okay. (Laughter.)

Think of this conference as a map. And like any good map, it shows you a lot of different ways to get where you need to go. Many American parents have been asking for just such a map. A new survey, "From Zero to Three," the National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families shows a real hunger on the part of parents for knowledge on how they can play a positive role in their child's early development. And I hope this conference in one of the ways we answer that call.

The second thing I hope does not happen is to create the impression that once a child's third birthday rolls around, the important work is over. The early years are not the only years. The brain is the last organ to become fully mature anatomically. Neurological circuitry for many emotions isn't completed until a child reaches 15. So there is always room for appropriate stimulation, loving and nurturing care by adults who are invested in a child. There's always something that concerned adults can do.

And that has special relevance for adoption. Adoptive parents can make an enormous difference for a child at any time, and especially for older children.

That said, here is what I hope the conference will accomplish. I hope it will get across the revolutionary idea that the activities that are the easiest, cheapest and most fun to do with your child are also the best for his or her development -- singing, playing games, reading, story-telling, just talking and listening. Some of my best memories are reading to our daughter, even if I fell asleep in the nine hundredth reading of "Goodnight, Moon." But reading to her when she was young was a joy for Bill and me, and we think also a joy for her. But we had no idea 15, 16, 17 years ago that what we were doing was literally turning on the power in her brain, firing up the connections that would enable her to speak and

read at as high a level as she possibly could reach.

I hope that the science presented in this conference will drive home a simple message, one supported in great detail by a report being issued today by the President's Council of Economic Advisors. If we, as a nation, commit ourselves now to modest investments in the sound development of our children, including especially our very youngest children, we will lay the groundwork for an American future with increased prosperity, better health, fewer social ills and ever greater opportunities for our citizens to lead fulfilling lives in a strong country in the next century.

There's a quote I particularly like from the Chilean poet, Gabriella Mistral, that reminds us, "Many things we need can wait; the child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood being made, his mind being developed. To him, we cannot say, tomorrow. His name is today." We have known this instinctively, even poetically; now we know it scientifically.

And I'm pleased to introduce someone who has been saying this and practicing it for a long time -- maybe not in poetry, but certainly in the countless stories and books and songs that he has shared not only with our daughter, but with our nephews and, really, any small child who ever crosses his path. As the President of the United States and as a father, he has acted on these beliefs, putting the well-being of children at the very center of national policy. So it pleases me greatly to introduce my fellow reader of "Good Night, Moon," the President, Bill Clinton. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, and welcome to the White House. I was relieved to hear Hillary say that the brain is the last organ to fully develop. It may yet not be too late for me to learn how to walk down steps. (Laughter.) Or maybe I was thinking it was because I was always hugged when I fell down as a child, I did this subconsciously on purpose. (Laughter.)

Let me begin by thanking the members of the Cabinet who are here. I see Secretary Riley and Secretary Glickman. I thank Governor Romer and Governor Chiles for being here. I think Governor Miller is coming. There are many others who are here. Congresswoman De Lauro is either here or coming. Thank you, Governor Miller. I see I was looking to the left there. (Laughter.) He's from Nevada -- he just went up five points in the polls when I said that. (Laughter.)

Let me say, first of all, the first time I met Hillary, she was not only a law student, she was working with the Yale Child Study Center, and she began my education in these issues. And for that, I am profoundly grateful. And I thank her for bringing the scientists, the doctors, the sociologists, the others whose work is the basis for our discussion today here. And I, too, want to thank the thousands of others who are joining us by satellite.

This unique conference is a part of our constant effort to give our children the opportunity to make the most of their God-given potential and to help their parents lead the way, and to remind everyone in America that this must always be part of the public's business because we all have a common interest in our children's future.

We have begun the job here over the last four years by making education our top domestic priority, by passing the Family Leave act and now trying to expand it and enact a form of flex time which will give parents more options in how they take their overtime

in pay or in time with their children, by the work we have done to expand the Family and Medical Leave Act and by the work we've tried to do to give parents more tools with the v-chip and the television rating system, and the work we are still carrying on to try to stop the advertising and marketing and distribution of tobacco to our children, and other work we've done in juvenile justice and trying to keep our kids away from the dangers of alcohol and drugs.

All these are designed to help our parents succeed in doing their most important job. Now it seems to me maybe the most important thing we can actually do is to share with every parent in America the absolutely stunning things we are learning from new scientific research about how very young children learn and develop. In that regard, I'd like to thank Rob Reiner and others who are committed to distributing this information, and I'd like to thank the media here in our Nation's Capital and throughout the country for the genuine interest that they have shown in this conference.

I think there is an instinctive understanding here that this is a very, very big issue that embraces all of us as Americans, and that if we learn our lessons well and if we're patient in carrying them out, as Hillary said, knowing that there is no perfect way to raise a child, we are likely to have a very positive and profound impact on future generations in this country. So I want to thank, again, all of you for that.

Let me say there are some public programs that bear directly on early childhood development -- the Head Start program, which we've expanded by 43 percent over the last four years; the WIC program, which we've expanded by nearly 2 million participants. I have to say that I was a little disappointed -- or a lot disappointed to see a congressional committee yesterday vote to underfund the WIC program. I hope that if nothing else happens out of this conference, the results of the conference will reach the members of that congressional committee and we can reverse that before the budget finally comes to my desk.

I would also like to remind all of you that this conference is literally just a start. We have to look at the practical implications of this research for parents, for care-givers, for policy-makers, but we also know that we're looking at years and years of work in order to make the findings of this conference real and positive in the lives of all of our children. But this is a very exciting and enormous undertaking.

This research has opened a new frontier. Great exploration is, of course, not new to this country. We have gone across the land, we have gone across the globe, we have gone into the skies, and now we are going deep into ourselves and into our children. In some ways, this may be the most exiting and important exploration of all.

I'm proud of the role that federally-funded research has played in these findings in discovering that the earliest years of life are critical for developing intellectual, emotional and social potential. We all know that every child needs proper nutrition and access to health care, a safe home and an environment; and we know every child needs teaching and touching, reading and playing, singing and talking.

It is true that Chelsea is about to go off to college, but Hillary and I have been blessed by having two young nephews now -- one is about two and one is about three -- and we're learning things all over again that, I must say, corroborate what the scientists are telling us.

We are going to continue to work on this, and I know that you will help us, too. Let me just mention two or three things that we want to work on that we think are important. We've got to do a lot more to improve the quality, the availability and the affordability of child care. Many experts consider our military's child care system to be the best in our country. I'm very proud of that, and not surprised.

The man responsible for administering the Navy's child care system, Rear Admiral Larry Marsh, is here with us today. He leads a system that has high standards, including a high percentage of accredited centers, a strong enforcement system with unannounced inspections, parents have a toll-free number to call and report whatever concerns they may have, training is mandatory and wages and benefits are good, so, staff tends to stay on.

I am proud that the military places such importance on helping the families of the men and women who serve our country in uniform. But it's really rather elementary to know that they're going to do a lot better on the ships, in the skies, in faraway lands if they're not worried about how their children are faring while they're at work serving America.

To extend that kind of quality beyond the military, I am issuing today an executive memorandum asking the Department of Defense to share its success. I want the military to partner with civilian child care centers to help them improve quality, to help them become accredited, to provide training to civilian child care providers, to share information on how to operate successfully, and to work with state and local governments to give on-the-job training and child care to people moving from welfare to work.

I think this is especially important. Let me say in the welfare reform bill, we put another \$4 billion in for child care. In addition to that, because the states are getting money for welfare reform based on the peak case load in welfare in 1994, and we've reduced the welfare rolls by 2.8 million since then, most states, for a period of time until an extra session comes along, will have some extra funds that they can put into more child care. This gives states the opportunity they have never had before to train more child care workers, to use funds to help even more people move from welfare to work and perhaps even to provide more discounts to low-income workers to make child care affordable for them.

This welfare reform effort, if focused on child care, can train lots of people on welfare to be accredited child care workers and expand the availability of welfare in most of the states of the country. It's not true for every state, because some of them have had smaller drops in the case load and three have had no drops. But, by and large, the welfare reform bill, because of the way it's structured, gives all of you who care about child care about a year or two to make strenuous efforts, state by state, to create a more comprehensive quality system of child care than we have ever had before. And I certainly hope that what we can do here, plus the support of the military, we'll see dramatic advances in that regard.

I'd like to thank the people here who have done that work. And I'd like to say that we are going to hold a second conference, this one devoted exclusively to the child care issue here at the White House in Washington this fall. And I hope all of you who care about that will come back.

The second thing we want to do is to extend health care coverage to uncovered children. The budget I have submitted will

extend coverage to as many as 5 million children by the year 2000 with the children's health initiative in the budget proposal -- to strengthen Medicaid for poor children and children with disabilities, to provide coverage for working families through innovative state programs, to continue health care coverage for children of workers who are between jobs. There is an enormous amount of interest in this issue in both parties, I'm happy to say, in the Congress in this session. And I quite confident that if we'll all work together, we can get an impressive expansion in health care coverage for children in this congressional session.

I'm pleased that Dr. Jordan Cohen, the President and CEO of the Association of American Medical Colleges is with us today to lend his association's strong support to these efforts. With the support of leaders in medicine, again I say, I am convinced we'll have a bipartisan consensus that will extend coverage to millions more uninsured children.

The third thing we want to do is this: Because we know the great importance of early education, we're going to expand Early Head Start enrollment by at least one-third next year. Early Head Start was created in 1994. It's been a great success in bringing the nutritional, educational and other services of Head Start to children aged three and younger and to pregnant women. It has been a real success and we need to expand it.

Today we are requesting new applications for early Head Start programs to accomplish the expansion. And to help parents to teach the very young, we developed a tool kit called, "Ready, Set, Read," part of our America Reads challenge, designed to make sure that every child can read independently by the 3rd grade. This kit gives tips on activities for young children. It's going out to early childhood programs all across the country along with a hotline number for anyone else who wants the kit.

The fourth thing we're going to do is to protect the safety of our children more. In particular, we have to help young children more who are exposed to abuse and violence. Let me tell you, as you might imagine, I get letters all the time from very young children. And my staff provides a significant number of them for me to read. The Secretary of Education not very long ago gave me a set of letters from children who were quite young, a couple of years ago gave me a set of letters from children who were in the 3rd grade. But sometimes I get them from kindergarten children and 1st grade children, talking about what they want America to look like.

And it is appalling the number of letters I get from five- and six-year-olds who simply want me to make their lives safe; who don't want to worry about being shot; who don't want anymore violence in their homes; who want their schools and the streets they walk on to be free of terror.

So, today the Department of Justice is establishing a new initiative called "Safe Start," based on efforts in New Haven, Connecticut, which you will hear about this afternoon. The program will train police officers, prosecutors, probation and parole officers in child development so that they'll actually be equipped to handle situations involving young children. And I believe if we can put this initiative into effect all across America, it will make our children safer. And I'm glad we're announcing it today during Victims of Crime Week.

We all know that it's going to take a partnership across America to help our children reach their full potential. But the toughest job will always belong to our parents -- first teachers,

main nurturers. Being a parent is a joy and a challenge. But it's not a job you can walk away from, take a vacation from, or even apply for family leave from. (Laughter.) The world moves too fast, and today, parents have more worries than ever. Work does compete with family demands, and finding a balance is more difficult than before. That's why this must always be part of the public's business.

Let me come now to the bottom line. The more we focus on early years, the more important they become. We know that these investments of time and money will yield us the highest return in healthier children, stronger families and better communities.

Now, let me say, finally, I know that none of us who are in politics, none of us who are just parents, will ever know as much as the experts we're about to hear from today. But what they're going to tell us is the most encouraging thing of all, which is, they have found out that we can all do the job. No matter how young, a child does understand a gentle touch or a smile or a loving voice. Babies understand more than we have understood about them. Now we can begin to close the gap and to make sure that all children in this country do have that chance to live up to the fullest of their God-given potential.

Again, I thank you all for being here. I thank our experts, I thank the First Lady. And I'd like to ask Dr. David Hamburg to come up and sit there and take over the program.

David?

Thank you. (Applause.)

END

11:10 A.M. EDT

A CHALLENGE TO THE NATION: SAFE AND PERMANENT HOMES FOR ALL CHILDREN

Today, President Clinton issued a challenge to the nation and signed a directive to members of his Cabinet to take new actions to move children more rapidly from foster care to safe, permanent homes. The goal of the President's ambitious new initiative is to at least double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed each year. The directive focuses on securing homes for the tens of thousands of children in foster care who cannot return safely to their homes and for whom adoption is a goal. After consulting with Congressional, state and civic leaders, agencies will report back to the President within 60 days on steps to reach the directive's goals, which include:

I. Doubling the Number of Children Adopted or Permanently Placed by 2002:

Create Incentives for States: To shift the focus from paperwork to successful outcomes, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will work with states to set specific targets for increases in the number of children adopted or found permanent placement. In return, the federal government will provide a new per child financial incentive to states to increase the number of adoptions from the public welfare system. This action should nearly pay for itself, as increasing the number of adoptions will reduce expenditures in the foster care system. Progress in meeting the numerical targets will be compiled and published in a state-by-state annual report. Successful states will be recognized for their accomplishments.

Breakdown Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption: HHS will continue to aggressively implement the laws signed by President Clinton in 1994 and 1996, which prohibit adoption agencies from denying or delaying placement of a waiting child based on race, color, or national origin, and encourage recruitment of adoptive parents.

II. Moving Children More Rapidly From Foster Care to Permanent Homes:

Decrease Procedural Delays: President Clinton is directing HHS to consult with Congress, states and civic leaders to propose changes to federal laws, policies and regulations and clarification of the "reasonable effort" requirement, to help states focus on finding permanent homes for children from the moment they enter the foster care system.

Help States Identify and Address Barriers to Permanency: As part of his budget proposal in February, the President will propose financial assistance for states to identify barriers to permanency and to develop strategies for children who have been waiting for a particularly long time. The President's initiative also directs HHS to encourage alternative permanency arrangements, such as guardianship and kinship care, for children for whom adoption is not a viable option.

III. Increasing Public Awareness:

Call to American Families, Communities and Business: The Clinton Administration will launch a new campaign in partnership with state, civic and business leaders, to increase public awareness about children waiting for adoption and to encourage all Americans to consider the rewards and responsibilities of adoption -- in new public service announcements, print materials, and on the Internet.

Provide Information on the Benefits of Adoption: Federal agencies will form partnerships to inform people of the new adoption tax credits, the Family and Medical Leave Act benefits, and other supports for adoptive parents, as well as recognize private sector companies with model policies to encourage adoption. The Office of Personnel Management will provide support and information to federal employees who are interested in becoming adoptive parents.



Ruby Shamir
04/18/2000 03:33:38 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Erika A. Batcheller/WHO/EOP@EOP

cc:

Subject: Adoption and Foster Care

Here's a blurb on HRC's Adoption and Foster Care record. I am compiling more comprehensive information. Also below I have attached the portion from the "grid" on this, but it is for internal use only. Let me know if you have any questions.

Supporting the Neediest of Children. As the Administration's most prominent advocate on foster care and adoption, the First Lady has worked on behalf of the over 500,000 children who live in foster care because of abuse and neglect. She has promoted the adoption of children living in foster care and worked for passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, two pieces of landmark legislation which reformed our nation's child welfare system by putting considerations of children's health and safety first.

Children & Families: Child Welfare and Adoption

Objective:

To move children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes and increase the number of adoptions.

Accomplishments:

Leadership in Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and Adoption 2002 Initiative

- Received HHS National Progress Report on Adoption which demonstrated significant increases in the national adoption rate (9/24/99)
- Bill signing ceremony of Adoption and Safe Families Act (11/19/98)
- Leadership in enactment of Adoption and Safe Families Act incorporating key recommendations for Adoption 2002 report (including internal meetings and congressional outreach)
- Berkeley, CA speech on significance of Adoption and Safe Families Act (11/24/97)
- Leadership in development of HHS Adoption 2002 report- with legislative and administrative recommendations- as required by POTUS Executive Memorandum
- Adoption 2002 Report Presentation by HHS to the President at Valentine's Day event (2/14/97)

- Leadership in development of Executive Memorandum on improving foster care and adoption
- Executive Memorandum issued at Oval Office POTUS radio address with foster care families (12/14/96)
- Convened Foundation Leaders to discuss foster care issues (8/2/96)
- Columns on bill (11/20/97 & 11/18/97)

Leadership on Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

- Bill signing ceremony of Foster Care Independence Act (12/14/99)
- Leadership in development and enactment of Bill
- Event with Mrs. Gore announcing new support for Transitioning Foster Care Youth (1/29/99)
- Destination Future Conference speech on emancipation from foster care (9/11/98)
- Roundtable discussion with California Youth Connection members on emancipation from foster care (11/24/97)
- WH Event to Unveil FY2000 Budget Proposal

Adoption Promotion and Foster Care Improvement Campaign

- Children's Action Network Adoption Event (12/20/99)
- Participated in the Jewish Child Care Association's 175th Anniversary Celebration, New York (4/19/99)
- Dave Thomas Adoption Law Symposium Video (2/5/99)
- White House event to mark Adoption Month (11/24/98)
- National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse award and speech (10/6/98)
- Speech at Kellogg Foundation Family for Kids Conference (6/25/97)
- National Council on Adoption Speech (4/16/97)
- Mother's Day Adoption Roundtable with adoptive mothers and children (5/10/96)
- National Adoption Month event at the White House (11/13/95)• Sustained theme in books and various columns (9/29/99, 9/23/98, 2/10/98, 11/18/97, 6/24/97, 12/17/96, 5/14/96, 7/30/95)

Leadership on other key legislation

- Adoption Tax Credit and MEPA strengthening (1996)
- FMLA covering time off for adoption (1993)
- Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (1994)

Children & Families: Child Welfare and Adoption

- last resort of child
- partnerships
- small money
- need for money

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Future Focus:

Develop a courts reform and support initiative

Continue to monitor Adoption and Safe Families and Foster Care Independence Act implementation

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SECTION: NATIONAL AFFAIRS; Pg. 44

LENGTH: 1390 words

HEADLINE: Inside Hillary's D.C. Game

BYLINE: By Debra Rosenberg

HIGHLIGHT:

She has played a major role on 'her' issues. Now that she's running for the Senate, her aides want the word out.

BODY:

Rarely able to sleep in, **Hillary Clinton** got up early one February morning in 1995 and glanced at stories on the front page of The Washington Post. Nothing too exciting: a federal crackdown on telemarketers, a marathon swimmer setting a record. Then a headline caught Hillary's eye. The Defense Department was attempting to slash \$150 million for breast-cancer research that had been tucked into the Pentagon budget. The First Lady was furious. For years she'd worked to raise awareness about the disease and fund efforts to find a cure. Now her own administration was cutting back. She quickly called her top staffers: this is wrong, she told them.

Hillaryland went into action. Her staff talked to White House chief of staff Leon Panetta. He wasn't surprised to hear from them. Panetta had already gotten an earful from the First Lady's husband. Panetta fired off a letter telling Defense Secretary William Perry that "the president was very disturbed" about the funding cuts. Before the sun set that day, the Pentagon was in retreat, with Perry vowing to protect the money.

When Bill Clinton ran for president in 1992, he offered the country a "two for one" deal: elect him and get **Hillary** free. Mrs. **Clinton** envisioned herself breaking from the mold of past First Ladies and promoting a far more sweeping policy agenda. Yet those expectations were crushed early on. Her first major undertaking--the elaborate plan to reform the nation's health-care system--was a painful failure, widely ridiculed as cumbersome and confusing. Wounded, she publicly retreated to less controversial issues--preserving the arts, preventing teen pregnancy, curbing school violence. Mrs. Clinton did little to counter a growing public view that she had become a more traditional First Lady. This was partly out of necessity. After health care, Hillary was a political pariah. Few in the Capitol or White House wanted her associated with their causes. "She became a sadder person," says one former administration aide. "Whatever sun she had in her view of Washington was erased."

Yet behind the scenes, Mrs. Clinton was anything but a retiring First Lady. Largely ignored by the press, she quietly continued working on the wide range of child and family issues she had long cared deeply about. Over the past seven years, she has forced through major initiatives on **adoption**, child care, welfare reform and foreign aid--and has even managed to salvage provisions from her health-care plan. Her public-approval ratings also have improved--slowly, at first, then rapidly when she played the loyal wife during the Lewinsky scandal. Hillary can often get bureaucratic wheels moving--or stop them dead--with a simple phone call, making her a critical resource for frustrated policy warriors.

Now, as she officially launches her New York campaign for the Senate, Hillary's aides have reversed their public-relations strategy and offered glimpses of the candidate as an aggressive and committed policymaker and strategist. Her supporters, who previously minimized Mrs. Clinton's policy role, are now being encouraged by the White House to describe every detail of her backstage dealings. That image may not match what Americans seek in a First Lady, but aides hope it's exactly what they want in a senator.

After the health-care debacle, Hillary vowed to take "smaller steps" toward her goals. Wary of the capital, she attended policy seminars and town-hall meetings around the country. She'd embarked on similar "listening tours" back in Arkansas (and has since revived the practice for her Senate campaign). Hillary would return full of ideas from her forays, lugging a crate packed with handscrawled notes, letters and newspaper articles. Staffers came to dread the sight of that crate, knowing they would be stuck listening to Hillary for hours as she sorted through the scraps of paper one by one, often reading them aloud. She prodded them to come up with solutions to the problems she'd encountered on the road. "I don't understand," she'd say. "Why can't we do this?" In the weeks after the marathon crate sessions, Mrs. Clinton's chief of staff, Melanne Verveer, and her policy team would scramble to answer their demanding boss's questions, meeting with White House policy staff and cabinet members and seeking the advice of professors and policy experts.

Mrs. Clinton often seemed most relaxed abroad, where she felt free to assert herself more boldly. At U.N. summits in Copenhagen and later Beijing, she had what one aide calls an "epiphany." She was surprised at how much even relatively small doses of foreign aid could improve the lives of children and families in developing countries. The word soon spread in policy circles that Hillary was passionate about protecting foreign-aid dollars. When the Republican Congress tried to slash those funds in 1995, the administration's foreign-aid chief, Brian Atwood, sought Mrs. **Clinton's** help. **Hillary** dispatched her staff to the White House to fight the cuts and instructed them to push the budget office for more money. The ploy worked. "Every single year she would convince them they had to go \$500 million or \$1 billion more," Atwood recalls. At one official luncheon, Atwood says, the president ribbed him about Hillary's cash grabs. "The First Lady called me this morning," Clinton told him. "Every time she travels she wants more money for your agency."

On road trips, Mrs. Clinton was also besieged by gulf-war vets complaining of mysterious ailments. She instructed her staff to look into it, and hired a former congressional aide to brief her on the issue. When the Pentagon was slow to act, Hillary prodded the president and wrote him a lengthy memo. Her husband eventually took up the cause. He delivered a major policy speech on gulf-war syndrome, and appointed a presidential commission to study it.

At times the First Lady has broken with her deliberate, staff-led approach and done the pushing herself. In late 1997 Hillary's long-sought efforts to speed up **adoption** procedures--another "listening tour" issue--finally came to the Senate floor. But there was a snag. Democratic Sen. Carl Levin tied an amendment to the bill, a plan to set up a national registry making it easier for adoptees and birthparents to find each other. The amendment threatened to kill the bill. Hillary invited Levin to the White House for a chat. The two talked alone for half an hour. When Levin emerged, he withdrew his plan. Yet Mrs. Clinton has been reluctant to make noise on Capitol Hill. "The majority up here has such a strong and negative reaction to her, it's often more productive for her to be sub rosa," says one senior Democratic Senate staffer.

Still, Hillary gained a reputation as a West Wing fixer. When former Food and Drug Administration head David Kessler prepared to resign in early 1997, he fretted about a piece of unfinished business: requiring drug companies to test their products for the safety of children as well as adults. Though he'd only met her a few times, Kessler went to see Mrs. Clinton. "I need you to help me see that this gets done," he said. Hillary agreed to shepherd the proposal and, by the end of 1998, the FDA had issued new rules.

Health care remains at the top of the First Lady's agenda, though she has embraced a more modest approach. In 1997 the White House planned to spend \$24 billion to provide health-insurance coverage to low-income families. Hillary suggested a different strategy: focus only on insuring children--which would be hard for Republicans to oppose--and come back to parents later. The law passed; at Hillary's (and Al Gore's) urging, the president included coverage for parents in next year's budget. She also persuaded the White House to double federal funding for children's hospitals to \$80 million, and fought to win Medicare coverage for annual mammograms.

In the better part of a year that Mrs. Clinton has spent "listening" to New York voters, she has collected

dozens of new stories. The crate is once again full, this time with tales of falling milk prices and high electricity rates, crime and school overcrowding--just the sort of worthy, wonky issues to quicken Hillary's heart. But this time she hopes that taking her causes public will get another Clinton elected to office.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO: Power Player: Wounded by the health-care debacle, her numbers soared during the Lewinsky scandal ; **PHOTO:** Smaller Steps: Hillary never stopped pushing her favorite issues - children, families and health care

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: February 8, 2000

FOCUSTM

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THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION RECORD ON ADOPTION

Our Nation has no greater responsibility than to ensure that every child has the chance to live up to his or her God-given potential. We can help meet that challenge by identifying a permanent, loving family for every child waiting in the foster care system.

-- President Clinton, National Adoption Month Proclamation, November 1996

President Clinton is committed to giving the over 450,000 children in foster care what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home. The Clinton Administration has taken several important steps to encourage and increase adoptions and to support the families that choose to open their hearts and their homes to these children. The President has championed programs that find and assist adopting families, and has committed his Administration to breaking down barriers, including high adoption costs and complex regulations.

Today the President announced a new directive to the Departments of Health and Human Services, Treasury, Labor and Commerce and the Office of Personnel Management to develop a plan to: increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year, move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, and create a new public awareness campaign on the importance of adoption. These actions build on previous initiatives, including:

MAKING ADOPTION AFFORDABLE FOR FAMILIES

In August, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 which provides a \$5000 tax credit to families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This policy will alleviate a significant barrier to adoption, helping middle class families for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive and making it easier for families to adopt children with special needs.

BREAKING DOWN RACIAL AND ETHNIC BARRIERS TO ADOPTION

Strengthening the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994, the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 also ensures that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity.

PROVIDING SUPPORTS FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND ADOPTION

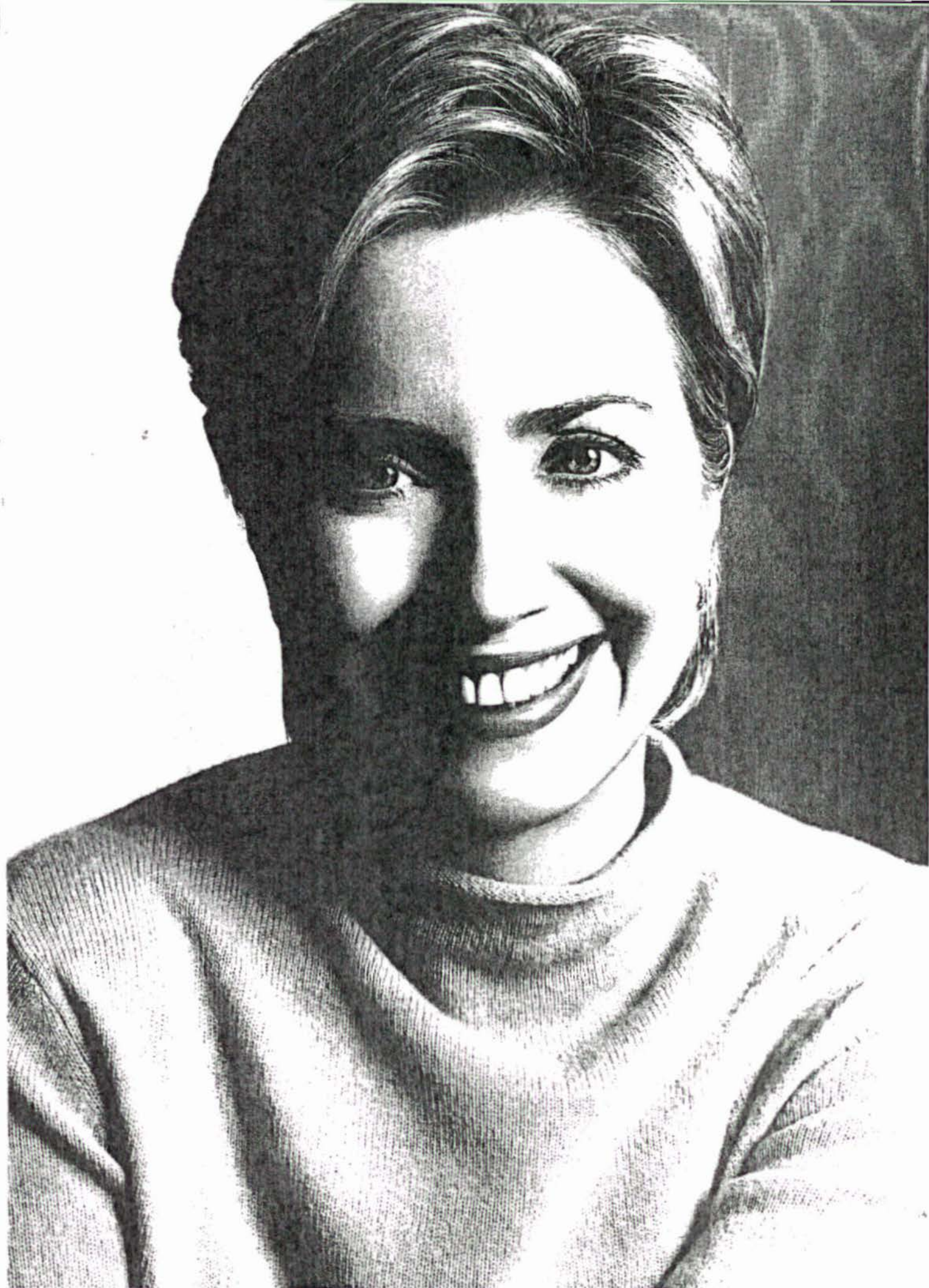
In 1993, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance. In addition, the welfare reform bill that the President signed into law maintains the guarantee of child protection and adoption, and does not reduce funds for child welfare, child abuse, foster care and adoption services.

GIVING STATES FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPORT

The Clinton Administration has granted child protection waivers to Delaware, Illinois, North Carolina, and Oregon, giving the states more flexibility in tailoring services to meet the needs of children and families. Up to six more states will receive approval for waivers. In addition, this administration has provided states with enhanced technical support and helped improve court operations so they can focus on successful outcomes. To prevent children from entering foster care in the first place, in 1993 the Clinton Administration secured federal funding to work with states, local governments and service providers to develop effective programs to serve children and families at risk.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Through speeches, writings, events and public service announcements, the President and First Lady have promoted the importance and benefits of adoption.



Hillary's views
are one of the most
important

factors as you think through
an idea," says a high-
ranking White House
official.

**FOR A WONDERFUL FIRST LADY,
HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON**

-EDWARD A. HANNA, MAYOR



"I don't think there's ever been a feeling that the first lady's staffers are outlanders or intrusive," says Sidney Blumenthal, who has been a senior adviser to the president since 1997. "They're considered integral. They have a certain esprit de corps, a staff of mostly women who have had enormous political and policy experience."

Hillary herself will occasionally attend senior staff meetings in the West Wing when the issues under discussion are strongly related to her expertise, such as children and health care. She will "listen to somebody saying that's not going to work. Then she will say, 'Well how do we make it work?'" Verveer says. "If she feels strongly about something and you're sitting with her in a meeting, you'll know that she feels strongly about it." In one session with a cabinet secretary this year, Hillary said flatly, "It's unconscionable that the regulations aren't out yet. Why don't we have this done? What are they going to say in two years' time?" She takes these gatherings seriously. "Well, we had the meeting," she'll say. "There were promises made. Let's see what happens now."

The exchange of information between the president's staff and Hillary flows both ways. The president's domestic-policy aides keep her informed of pending legislation that they know will be of interest to her. Or if they're working on an issue that they know she has strong feelings about or expertise in, they'll request her opinion, as they did last spring in the wake of the shooting in Littleton, Colorado. "When a tough decision has to be made, she's going to have the opportunity to offer strategic advice," Lew says. "Her views are one of the important factors as you think things through." Still, there's no evidence that the West Wing capitulates to please the boss's wife. What's more likely is that the president's advisers will meet with Hillary to get a read on how the president is thinking about an issue. One presidential aide says, "The Clintons think so similarly on important issues that she can be a good sounding board to the way he'll approach an issue."

Bill Clinton is an encyclopedia of policy, but even he concedes that his wife is better versed on children's issues than he is. "He sees this as one area where she has tremendous expertise," says Matthew Melmed, who is an informal adviser to Hillary and the director of Zero to Three, an organization that focuses on child-development issues. "He defers to her on this stuff."

Hillary's interest in children dates to her first year at Yale Law School, when she read an article in *Time* about Marian Wright Edelman, the children's-rights advocate who headed a fledgling Washington lobby called the Washington Research Project. When Edelman spoke on the New Haven campus in 1970, Hillary was there. Impressed by what she had heard, Hillary wrote to Edelman asking if she could work for the group over the summer vacation. Edelman had no budget but offered to take her as an unpaid intern. But Hillary secured grant money and went to work. Recognizing a promising student, Edelman recommended Hillary to Senator Walter Mondale's subcommittee on migrant

CONTINUED ON PAGE 135

From top: **Hillary** at a New York hospital at the start of her listening tour in July; at a Kosovar refugee camp last June with the **president**.

HILLARY'S POWERS

I asked Hillary what she considers to be her greatest achievements during her years at the White House. Without hesitation, she cited her role in initiating and shepherding the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 through Congress. Helping to pass that bill has given her, she says, "as much satisfaction as anything that I've done."

The genesis of the bill can be traced to the aftermath of the 1994 midterm elections. Soon after he became Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich declared that orphanages—like so many institutions of the Victorian era—weren't as grisly as novelists and liberals had made them out to be. Sensing an opportunity to

private discussions with the Children's Bureau, part of the Department of Health and Human Services Administration, about the federal government's role in child welfare. Just before the 1996 Democratic convention in Chicago, Hillary convened a meeting with about 20 foundation leaders to review the ideas that the policy experts had presented to her. It was, someone who was present says, the "bigger picture" she was interested in, and the opinions she heard in Chicago became "critical" to Hillary's thinking. The upshot of the meeting, according to one staffer, was what the government could do. Later that month, with Hillary's sup-

and Health and Human Services began hashing out recommendations and the specific legislative language to be used. The first lady and her longtime friend, Donna Shalala, the secretary of Health and Human Services, worked together closely, talking through some of the tougher issues. In early February 1997, Hillary combed through the emerging report, considering and reconsidering every detail. Among the most wrenching decisions was the issue of terminating parental rights. Hillary wanted to ensure support for families when appropriate. But as she had long advocated, she also wanted to guarantee that the health and safety of the child remained the paramount concerns during placement proceedings.

Mindful that health reform had been portrayed as byzantine and bureaucratic, Hillary also wanted to make certain that the effort would be simply and cogently understood. At her direction, an aide worked through the night on a terse executive summary of the report.

The formal presentation of the report, "Adoption 2002," released on Valentine's Day 1997, was staged around an Oval Office event. The Kansas girl whom Hillary had invited to speak at the White House in November 1995—who had been adopted in the interim—introduced the president. Her transformation was stunning. "She stood up straight. She was poised. She smiled. She talked. She looked you in the eye. She clearly had found so much confidence that stemmed from her new home," an observer says.

That summer, the White House found co-sponsorship interest on the Hill from Representatives David Camp, a Republican from Michigan, and Barbara Kennelly, a Democrat from Connecticut. They introduced a bill consistent with Hillary's recommendations, including one idea that had been lifted directly from the draft of her report. The government would give a per-child financial bonus to those states that increased adoption rates from the previous year. That summer, the legislation sailed through the House and was sent to the Senate. In the fall, Hillary continued to make speeches and appearances. By November, however, the Senate clock was ticking. The president's trade-negotiating authority had become the priority of the White House. There was a risk that Hillary's bill would die until the next session of Congress.

So Hillary herself began working the phones, calling friends on the Hill to get progress reports and rally sup-

"Every time Hillary goes on a trip," Vice President Al Gore says, "that's all we hear about from the president."

damage Gingrich politically, Hillary seized on the remark. In an article she wrote in *Newsweek* in January 1995, she declared that Gingrich's comment was absurd. Orphanages had become extinct, she said, because they were terrible places for children. Searching for ways to make herself relevant again, Hillary asked her staff to review government policy toward adoption. In the summer of 1995, she convened a White House meeting of policy experts to discuss the most pressing issues, such as long-term foster care and institutional barriers within the child welfare system, including cross-racial adoptions.

During National Adoption Month in November 1995, Hillary hosted the first in a series of events on the issue at the White House. With her on the dais that day was Dave Thomas, founder of the Wendy's fast-food chain and an ardent supporter of adoption: Thomas himself had been adopted. Also at the gathering were dozens of children waiting to be placed with foster families. One Kansas teenager—overweight, withdrawn, with clunky eyeglasses—read a poem about longing for a family and a room of her own. "Everyone was in tears," an observer recalls. Then Hillary spoke, challenging both the public and private sectors to do more to expedite adoptions.

As the public events continued throughout 1995 and '96, Hillary and her staff also plunged into a series of

port, Bill Clinton signed legislation that strengthened the 1993 Multi-Ethnic Placement Act and provided new tax credits for those who adopt.

Hillary then directed her staff to begin drafting more specific recommendations. Weeks before the 1996 election, some insiders thought that adoption was such a political winner that it could become part of Bill Clinton's reelection platform. But Hillary, wary that her husband's political enemies might use the issue as a way of attacking her influence in the White House, fought to keep it out of the platform. "So we waited," an aide says. After the elections, Hillary staged a forum on adoption that was broadcast from the Oval Office on November 14. Some children waiting to be adopted were invited. Hillary announced that the president was about to sign an executive memorandum, directing Health and Human Services to develop a plan within 90 days to double the number of adoptions by 2002 and to allow more children to be adopted more expeditiously.

Hard questions and policy negotiating followed. What was the five-year plan for doubling the adoption numbers from child welfare? How could new per-child incentives be created for states? The "reasonable effort" requirement to attempt to reunify a birth family before terminating parental rights differed from state to state—how could it be standardized? The White House

SMOKING

done. All this happened a year ago. Mann finally sent me a copy of the script a year ago, and I read this bullshit. You mean, the scene with the Shiite Muslim? "Of course." But it's not in the movie. "I know that it's not. But in the movie, [Bergman] is still sitting blindfolded in front of the sheikh." So? "It never took place. He had nothing to do with setting up the interview." We discuss his correspondence with Mann. "I sent him a nice letter. Where the fuck is it?" he says, rustling papers. "Here it is. The file. [It was] a nice letter..." Is it true that the Wigand affair was *60 Minutes*' lowest point? "It wasn't a low point for me. It was a high point because we finally got the piece on the air, and we never, never, never would have gotten it on the air without me. Lowell had nothing to do with getting it on the air. Nothing." (Bergman says that his dogged protests eventually led Wallace to fight for the story again.)

We also discuss Bergman's contention that Hewitt and Wallace are blackballing him from getting work on *60 Minutes II*. First he says it's "laughable." Later on, he adds, "You can rest assured Hewitt ain't going to hire him." That doesn't sound so unreasonable. Why would Bergman, who is now working for PBS's *Frontline* and the *New York Times*, want to return to a network that he has so little respect for?

It is doubtful that a supporting role in a Hollywood movie will erase the reputation of a heavyweight like Mike Wallace, though it may very well deify Bergman. But whatever Michael Mann leads his audience to conclude about these two men, the Wallace-Bergman wars have illustrated one sure truth: In life, as in great journalism and great art, one can be right yet wrong, have integrity yet be fallible, tell the truth yet lie, be well intentioned yet be a traitor.

Last April, Bergman's contract with CBS News expired. The producer, who is participating in the film's publicity campaign and may write a book about the Wigand affair, has not talked to Wallace since then. "There is no relationship," Wallace says. At the end of our interview, Wallace concludes with his uncannily familiar bluntness, "Lowell is a good reporter. Some people have penis envy, some have microphone envy. I hope he finds a job. I just don't want to work next door to him." ☐

MILLENNIUM MAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 123 back the [budget surplus] because the schools would suffer; we want to build new schools in this country. Excuse me. Since when has the federal government ever built schools?"

He never trusted Democrats. Problem is, he's now losing confidence in Republicans. No vision. No answers. No hope of recapturing the White House unless they change. "We want to know what our party really stands for other than, you know, trim the budget and balance the budget. I understand all that," Arnold notes. "But say what you really stand for rather than going from one convention to the next talking about what we're against—guys like [Pat] Buchanan going up there and speaking about, 'We are anti-gay and we're anti-lesbian and anti-immigration. We are anti-taxation and anti-federal government.'"

Don't forget anti-Clinton. He was not impressed by the sight of so many Republicans foaming at the mouth during the impeachment proceedings and Lewinsky scandal. "That was another thing I will never forgive the Republican party for," he sputters. "We spent one year wasting time because there was a human failure. I was ashamed to call myself a Republican during that period. Instead of devoting all this energy and all these hearings to how we're going to solve the problems of the inner cities.... No, it's like, 'This man has to be removed from office because he's a national threat.' Yeah, that's a good one."

Arnold refusing to pile on Bill Clinton. Arnold bashing Pat Buchanan. Arnold saying good things about decaying neighborhoods and minority kids, talkin' equal opportunity and tolerance. To Keith Rhodes, a New Yorker raised by a single mother and who believes Mike Tyson has a heart of gold, Arnold sounds like Conan the Humanitarian. He told him that when the two sat down for a drink last September.

"Arnold, you so-called Republican," Rhodes says. "You look and smell and taste and feel so much like a Democrat."

Arnold puffed on his cigar, blew some smoke in Rhodes's face, and gave him that Terminator stare that says, "Don't poosh it."

The pilot tells us to prepare for touchdown in San Antonio. Thousands of feet below, pulses are quickening at Edgar Allen Poe Middle School. Banners are being hung. Badminton players and pint-size gymnasts are loosening up to strut their stuff. Arnold is coming.

He checks his notes and asks if the mayor will be meeting their plane. "No," Reiss says. "He's gonna be at the school."

There will be many more mayors and many more schools and many more kids. Arnold is a driven machine. He brings Big Dreams. Someday soon, he vows, every city in the country "that suffers problems because of crime, teenage pregnancy, drug sales, gangs, and all those things" will be part of the Inner-City Games family.

"That's a lot of cities," someone observes.

The former Mr. Universe strikes a muscleman pose and triumphantly checks himself out. "Dat's a lot of brain," he says. "And a lot of body!" ☐

HILLARY'S POWERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 116 workers, and through her work for Mondale, the young Hillary was soon researching migrant problems in housing, sanitation, health, and education.

Returning to Yale for her second year, Hillary volunteered at the university's Child Study Center, where she befriended Sally Provence, who was pioneering research on brain development in early childhood. She also volunteered at New Haven Hospital, where she worked on cases of child abuse, and at the city's Legal Services, providing free legal aid to the poor. At Yale, Hillary put in a post-graduate year focusing on law and medicine at the Child Study Center. One of her professors in family law was Joseph Goldstein, who was in the process of co-editing a book titled *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*. Hillary was soon reviewing for Goldstein the history of children's legal rights. Her chapter for the book would be among the first writings to chronicle the judicial system's failure to address child abuse. It also laid down a new paradigm of adoption law: that a child's happiness mattered more than considerations such as wealth, birth family, race, or his or her potential adoptive parents. One of Hillary's first legal-aid cases involved a black foster-care child who was up for adoption. Hillary successfully argued that an older, low-income white woman who had been the foster parent for the child for two years should be able to adopt the girl. The woman and child had clearly become a family, Hillary said. Rather than be shuttled off to another foster home to wait for wealthier adoptive parents of similar racial makeup, the girl should stay in that home.

THE TRUTH ABOUT HILLARY CLINTON'S RECORD ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Once again, in a blatant effort to distract voters from the real issues of this campaign, the Republicans have launched an unjustified, specious and purely political attack on Mrs. Clinton. Distorting her words and ignoring her achievements on behalf of the families of America, the Republicans are keeping their promise that they will do anything to stay in the White House.

The Republicans are not interested in what Mrs. Clinton really has to say about children's issues. In a 1973 law review article, Hillary Clinton cited marriage and slavery as historical examples where laws, long since rejected, created relationships of dependency. It is outrageous to suggest that Mrs. Clinton ever "likened" the current institution of marriage to slavery. In fact, a Connecticut judge, the Honorable Charles D. Gill, honored by President Bush in 1989 for his work on behalf of children, used the same historical examples in a recent law review article on the status of the child.

The Republicans should also know better than to attack Hillary Clinton for her efforts to protect abused and neglected children. Hillary Clinton has advocated that when children face "long-term and possibly irreparable" damage, they should have legal recourse, but that disputes between children and their parents should "in all but the most extreme cases . . . be resolved by the families, not the courts." Her view is borne out in current law. Do the Republicans believe that abused or neglected children should have no recourse?

Enough of Republican scare tactics. Hillary Clinton has been a leading advocate of family values and child health and welfare for more than 20 years. She has worked to improve education, strengthen families, and promote health care for children. She is proud of her achievements and will continue to be a voice for children and families when Bill Clinton is elected President of the United States.

Improving the Quality of Education: Hillary Clinton is an active parent in the Little Rock School District, working to improve the quality of urban education. She chaired the Arkansas Education Standards Committee, which recommended changes to strengthen the accreditation standards for the state's public schools. These standards have been a model for states around the nation.

Reducing Infant Mortality: Hillary Clinton chaired the Southern Governor's Association Task Force on Infant Mortality. In Arkansas, she helped establish the first neo-natal nursery in the state at Arkansas Children's Hospital, and now serves on the Hospital's Board of Trustees.

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[Helping Disadvantaged Parents Prepare their Children for School:
Hillary Clinton brought the Home Instruction Program for Preschool
Youth (HIPPY) to the state of Arkansas. HIPPY trains
disadvantaged parents to teach their preschool children the skills
they will need to succeed in school. The program encourages
parents to take an active role in the education of their children.

Outstanding Mother and Advocate: In 1984, Mrs. Clinton was named
the Young Mother of the Year in Arkansas. She has also been
honored by the National Law Journal, the University of Arkansas,
and the National Women's Economic Alliance for her work to improve
the quality of life for families and children in America.

- * Barbara Bush wrote book & award in
which she praised the work on HIPPY program.
- invited to WHA tea, ^{HIPPY} program
in a book
- quote from USA Today.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 1999

PRESIDENT CLINTON SIGNS LANDMARK LAW
TO HELP FOSTER CARE YOUTH PREPARE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

December 14, 1999

President Clinton today will sign into law the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. This legislation, based on an initiative proposed by the President and the First Lady, will help ensure that young people who leave foster care get the tools they need to make the most of their lives. It empowers those leaving foster care by providing them better educational opportunities, access to health care, training, housing assistance, counseling and other services. The new law is only the latest instance of the Administration's longstanding commitment to children and families. :

FOSTER CARE YOUTH FACE CHALLENGES AS THEY ENTER ADULTHOOD. Nearly 20,000 young people leave foster care each year when they reach age 18 without an adoptive family or other guardian. Without the emotional, social and financial support that families provide, many of these youth find themselves inadequately prepared for life on their own. Studies show that within two to four years of leaving foster care, only half have completed high school, fewer than half are employed, one-fourth have been homeless for at least one night, 30 percent do not have access to needed health care, 60 percent of the women have given birth, and less than one in five are completely self-supporting.

NEW LEGISLATION PROVIDES NEW HOPE FOR THESE YOUTH. Under previous laws, federal financial support for these young people ended just as they were making the transition to independence. The Act the President will sign today authorizes \$700 million over five years to help these young people cross this critical bridge:

Doubling the Federal Independent Living Program. The Independent Living program, run through the states, helps older foster care children earn a high school diploma, participate in vocational training or education, and learn daily living skills such as budgeting, career planning and securing housing and employment. Today's new law doubles the program's funding to \$140 million per year, and invests \$350 million more over five years in these services. Under the new law, states are now required to serve youth up to 21 years old, enabling more young people to obtain a college education. It also enables states to provide time-limited financial assistance to help these youth with living expenses as they develop the skills and education needed to move successfully into the workforce. The Act the President will sign today also renames the program in honor of John Chafee, the late Senator who so effectively championed the needs of children.

Providing Health Insurance. Today, when young people emancipate from foster care, they face numerous health risks, but too often lose their health insurance. The new law grants states the option for these young people to remain eligible for Medicaid up to age 21. Today, HHS will issue guidance to all State Medicaid Directors encouraging them to take up this option.

Honoring America's Heroes. In an unrelated provision, the Act provides a special monthly cash benefit to Filipino veterans who served under the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II if they were eligible for

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and later choose to move outside the United States. Previously, Filipino veterans who were eligible to receive SSI benefits would lose them if they were to return to the Philippines.

A RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION. With today's new law, the Administration adds to an unprecedented record of promoting the well-being of children and providing them permanent, loving homes. In 1998 there were a record 36,000 adoptions from foster care, the first significant increase in the history of the program. From 1996 to 1998, the number of adoptions nationwide rose 29 percent -- from 28,000 to 36,000 -- and is on a pace to meet the President's goal of 56,000 adoptions in 2002. Among the President's other steps to improve child welfare and encourage adoption:

Increasing the Transitional Living Program. Last month the President secured in the budget agreement a 40 percent increase in the Transitional Living program, which provides funds to local community-based organizations for residential care, life skills training, and other support services to homeless adolescents. The program will now be funded at \$20.7 million.

Enacting the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Based on the Administration's Adoption 2002 report, this landmark law made the health and safety of children a clear priority, provided the first-ever financial incentives for states to increase adoptions, tightened the time frames for making permanent placements of children, and removed other barriers to adoption.

Making Adoption Affordable. In 1996, President Clinton enacted a \$5,000 tax credit for families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the President provided more support for families who adopt with a \$500 per-child tax credit. And under the Family and Medical Leave Act, parents can take time with a newly adopted child without losing their jobs or health insurance.

Breaking Down Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption. New inter-ethnic adoption provisions signed into law by the President ensure that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity.

Giving States Flexibility and Support. The Clinton Administration has given 25 states waivers to test innovative strategies for improving state child welfare systems. The Administration has provided states technical support to improve court operations and grants to support local adoption projects, and has also secured federal funding for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program to serve at-risk children and families.

Using the Internet to Promote Adoption. In November 1998, the President issued a directive to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care. HHS will develop a national Internet site by the year 2002.

###

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Vice President
(Athens, Greece)

For Immediate Release

November 20, 1999

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Hillary and I are very pleased that the Congress today approved H.R. 3443, the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. This legislation helps ensure that young people in foster care get the tools they need to make the most of their lives. It builds on proposals in my budget to empower those leaving foster care, by providing them access to health care, better educational opportunities, training, housing assistance, counseling, and other support and services. We cannot let these young people walk their tough road alone.

Each year, approximately 20,000 18 year-olds leave our nation's foster care system without an adoptive family or other permanent family relationship. Without the emotional, social, and financial support that families provide, many of these young people are not adequately prepared for life after foster care. Unfortunately, federal financial support ends just as they are making the critical transition to independence. This bill addresses that problem and will help these youth in their effort to become successful, independent adults.

I am also pleased that the Act provides additional funds for the adoption incentive payments, which are bonuses to the states for increasing the number of children adopted from public foster care. This additional funding will enable states to receive the full amount of the bonuses they have earned through outstanding performance.

Today's legislation is a fitting tribute to the late Senator John Chafee, who was a chief sponsor of the Act. A fierce champion of children, Senator Chafee paid particular attention to our nation's most vulnerable young people. I am pleased that the bill renames the Independent Living Program in his honor.

I would also like to thank the House and Senate Leadership, as well as Representatives Nancy Johnson and Ben Cardin, Chairman William Roth Jr., and Senators Jay Rockefeller, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Charles Grassely, John Breaux, James Jeffords, Jack Reed, and Susan Collins for their hard work and dedication to this issue. I look forward to signing this bill into law.

###

Rosie
Shaw

MEMORANDUM

TO: HRC
FROM: Lissa, Erika
RE: Rosie O'Donnell Show on Foster Care
DATE: May 5, 2000

You are scheduled to appear on the Rosie O'Donnell show to discuss your efforts to reform our nation's foster care system and promote adoption. You'll be the only guest on stage with Rosie (although several others will speak from the audience) and you're on for the full hour. Unlike your previous appearances, **Monday's show will air live.**

We have given Rosie a good amount of background about your long commitment to reforming the foster care system, including your role in passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the Foster Care Independence Act. She'll ask you about both pieces of legislation as well as your personal interest in these issues. Following is a rundown of each segment of the show.

Segment 1

Scott Viera and his foster mother, Judy Couture, will do the show's opening announcement from the audience. A short video highlighting the story of the Costello family will follow. The Costellos have 9 kids – 3 adopted, 3 foster kids, 3 biological. Rosie will introduce them in the audience.

Segment 2

Rosie will introduce you and you'll join her on stage. She'll ask about your personal interest in foster care and the experiences (in law school, etc.) that inspired your commitment to these issues.

Segment 3

This segment will focus on the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the Foster Care Independence Act. Following an opening discussion, Rosie will ask you about Alex Braggs, the subject of the video for which you recorded the voice over. (You met Alex at an event in West Islip, NY. His foster parents wanted to adopt him but his mother and father never terminated their parental rights. The foster parents did adopt his younger brothers and moved to Florida. Alex plans to attend school in the state to be close to his family.)

Rosie will turn to you to introduce the video (intro will be scripted on teleprompter). Following the video, Braggs and his foster mother will be introduced in the audience.

Segment 4

A short video will be shown about Gladstone, a group home in Miami for sexually and physically abused girls ages 2-17. Following the video, Shawn McGhee, the North American Director for Home Depot, will present a check for \$1 million to Steve Manne, director of Gladstone. The funds will be used to build new group homes around the country and to wire them for the Internet.

Segment 5

You and Rosie will briefly discuss challenges still facing our foster care system — lack of qualified foster parents, need for more foster parents of color, etc. Sharon Davis, author of *Do You Want to Be a Foster Parent?*, will speak from the audience.

The show will wrap up in segments 6 and 7.

Additional briefing material follows, including:

- 1) Memo on your record on foster care and adoption
- 2) Fact sheet on the Adoption and Safe Families Act
- 3) Fact sheet on the Foster Care Independence Act
- 4) Fact sheet on Administration progress report on adoption efforts
- 5) Remarks from adoption and foster care events

MEMORANDUM ON FOSTER CARE

TO: Rosie O'Donnell
FROM: Lissa Muscatine, Erika Batcheller
RE: First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's accomplishments on foster care
Date: April 20, 2000

The First Lady has worked tirelessly for more than 30 years to reform our nation's foster care system and promote adoption. She has devoted her time to numerous child advocacy groups, including the Carnegie Council on Children, the Children's Defense Fund, and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and as an attorney she has represented both prospective parents and foster children. As First Lady, she has been the Administration's most prominent advocate on these issues, and her leadership has been instrumental to the passage of groundbreaking legislation to make it easier for children to move from foster care to permanent homes and to increase the number of adoptions. Her deep commitment to children in foster care also has been key to raising public awareness of the importance and rewards of adoption.

The First Lady's interest in foster care and adoption dates to her first year at Yale Law School. After reading an article in Time magazine about child advocate Marian Wright Edelman and her lobbying group, the Washington Research Project (which later evolved into the Children's Defense Fund), Mrs. Clinton contacted Edelman and secured an internship with the organization for the summer. Her experience there would set the stage for a lifelong commitment to a wide range of children's and family issues.

Returning to New Haven her sophomore year, Mrs. Clinton volunteered at Yale's Child Study Center and the New Haven Hospital, where she worked with the staff to draft guidelines for the treatment of abused children. She also volunteered at Legal Services, a legal aid group that provided free assistance to the poor.

One of Mrs. Clinton's first legal aid cases left an indelible imprint on her thinking about the needs of children in foster care. The case involved a black child and her low-income, white foster mother, who wanted to adopt the girl. Mrs. Clinton argued successfully that the mother should not be denied permanent custody simply because of racial or financial reasons. She argued that the child's best interest was to stay with her foster mother, who had provided a safe, stable home and family for more than two years. The many foster care cases she handled at Legal Services would give her a deep appreciation for the importance of ensuring the best interests of the child remain paramount during placement proceedings.

During a postgraduate year at Yale's Child Study Center, Mrs. Clinton wrote a chapter for a family law professor's book, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, that documented her conviction that America's judicial system had failed abused and neglected children. She also challenged deeply rooted traditions about the factors that should inform adoption decisions, presenting a legal argument that a child's happiness should outweigh considerations such as wealth, race or birth family.

After her husband was elected governor of Arkansas, Mrs. Clinton continued to press forward to protect children from abuse and neglect. In 1977, she founded Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, an organization dedicated to providing parenting skills and health and education services for Arkansas children. She also joined the Board of Directors of the Children's Defense Fund in 1976, and chaired the board from 1986 to 1992.

Throughout her husband's presidency, Mrs. Clinton has used her position as First Lady to champion a host of children's and family issues, focusing on some of our nation's most vulnerable children – those trapped in the foster care system. In the summer of 1995, she convened a meeting of policy experts to examine some of the most pressing issues surrounding adoption, including long-term foster care and institutional barriers within the child welfare system, including cross-racial adoptions.

That year, Mrs. Clinton, together with the President, launched a national public awareness campaign to promote the benefits of adoption and improvements to foster care. During National Adoption Month in 1995, she hosted the first in a series of events on the issue at the White House. She held numerous meetings and public events with adoptive families and children in foster care, and devoted a significant number of speeches and writings to the cause of adoption. Her efforts during this period would culminate in one of her most rewarding achievements, passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, landmark legislation that reformed our nation's child welfare system by putting considerations of children's health and safety first.

Throughout 1995 and 1996, Mrs. Clinton quietly convened a series of meetings with officials at the Department of Health and Human Services, foundation leaders and other policy experts to discuss ideas for reforming foster care and speeding up adoption procedures. Publicly, Mrs. Clinton also pressed for passage of new tax credits for those who adopt and the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, which would remove race or ethnicity as an obstacle to adoption. She also strongly supported an extension of Family and Medical Leave Act benefits to adoptive parents who wished to take time off work to care for their children. Her vocal advocacy helped usher these key bills through Congress.

As a result of her meetings with adoption policy experts, Mrs. Clinton and her staff in 1996 began to formulate specific proposals for legislative reforms. In November, she held a White House forum on adoption that was broadcast live from the Oval Office. At the event, she announced that the President would sign an Executive Order directing his administration to develop a plan to double the number of adoptions by 2002.

Mrs. Clinton was deeply involved in the development of the report and worked closely with Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to craft policies that would ensure the health and safety of the child remained the guiding principles during placement proceedings. The formal report, "Adoption 2002," was unveiled on Valentines Day 1997 and included a series of incentives for states to expedite adoption procedures and limit the amount of time children spend in foster care. The goal was to double the number of children moving into permanent homes from 27,000 a year in 1996 to 54,000 a year by 2002. The report was based on three key principles; that every child deserves a safe, permanent family; that children's health and safety should be the paramount concern; and that foster care is by definition temporary.

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 19, 1997

PRESIDENT CLINTON SIGNS
THE ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILIES ACT OF 1997

November 19, 1997

Today, President Clinton signs into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, to help thousands of children waiting in foster care move more quickly into safe and permanent homes. This overwhelmingly bipartisan legislation was based in large part on the recommendations of the Administration's Adoption 2002 report. The report takes its name from one of the President's central goals which is, at a minimum, to double the number of adoptions to 54,000 by the year 2002.

The Act makes sweeping changes in federal law on adoption and foster care enacted in 1980. The new law makes clear that the health and safety of children must be the paramount concerns of state child welfare services. It sets swifter time frames for making permanent placement decisions and terminating parental rights for children. For the first time, states will have financial incentives to increase adoptions. Children with special needs and ongoing medical needs are ensured health care coverage. Federal funds will continue for programs that work to keep families together when it is appropriate and safe to do so.

Ensuring that Children are Safe

Clarifies Reasonable Efforts: As the President proposed, the new law ensures that children's health and safety are the primary concerns of the public child welfare system. It clarifies that there are instances when states are not required to make reasonable efforts to keep children with their parents, such as when a parent has been convicted of murdering another child or a child has been abandoned, tortured, or chronically abused.

Doubling the Number of Children
Adopted or Permanently Placed by 2002

Creates Financial Incentives: The new law contains the President's plan to offer a financial bonus to states that increase the number of children who are adopted from the public foster care system. These incentives will help to double the number of children adopted. For every additional child adopted, a state will receive \$4,000, with an additional \$2,000 paid for each child with special needs. The Act authorizes \$20 million for each of 5 years (FY 1999 to FY 2003) for the bonuses, though eventually the bonuses will be offset by savings in foster care expenses.

Establishes Tighter Time Limits: Children who cannot safely return to their own families often wait far too long in foster care -- typically over 3 years, and many times even longer. Under the new law, permanency hearings will now be held no later than 12 months after a child enters foster care, 6 months earlier than under previous law, and states must initiate termination of parental rights proceedings, except in specified circumstances, for any child who has been in foster care

for 15 of the previous 22 months.

Breaking Down Barriers, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and Achieving Accountability

Eliminating Obstacles: The new law prohibits delaying or denying adoptions across state or county lines, thereby breaking geographic barriers to adoption.

Providing Supportive Services: The new law ensures that children with special needs keep health insurance coverage when they are adopted, either through Medicaid or through the new children's health program. In addition, the new law reauthorizes the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program, renamed Promoting Safe and Stable Families, which provides services to strengthen families before crises occur and to ensure safe, stable homes for children who return to their families.

Emphasizing Results for Children: The new law authorizes HHS, in consultation with states, to develop new measures to track and rate state performance efforts in providing child welfare services to ensure successful results for children.

Recognizing Success: Prior to the bill signing today, HHS recognized 13 awardees for significant achievement in helping both adopted children and those waiting for adoption. Among the awardees are families, foundations, members of the media, and states that have improved the management of child welfare programs.

THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION RECORD ON ADOPTION

November 19, 1997

"I am pleased that the Senate and the House of Representatives have passed historic, bipartisan legislation to promote adoption and improve our nation's child welfare system, giving our nation's most vulnerable children what every child deserves -- a safe and permanent home."
-- Statement by President Clinton, November 13, 1997

The Clinton Administration has previously taken several important steps to encourage and increase adoptions and to support the families who choose to open their hearts and their homes to these children. Since taking office in 1993, the President has championed programs that find and assist adoptive families, and has committed his Administration to breaking down barriers, including high adoption costs and complex regulations. These steps include:

MAKING ADOPTION AFFORDABLE FOR FAMILIES. Last year, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, which provides a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This provision has alleviated a significant barrier to adoption, helping middle class families for whom adoption may have been prohibitively expensive and making it easier for families to adopt children with special needs. Since President Clinton took office, the number of children with special needs who have been adopted with federal adoption assistance has risen by 60 percent. This year, in signing the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, President Clinton ensured more support for families who adopt children with the \$500 Per-Child Tax Credit.

GIVING STATES FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPORT. To test innovative strategies to improve child welfare systems, the Clinton Administration has granted child welfare waivers to California, Delaware, Indiana, Illinois, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio and Oregon, giving the states more flexibility in tailoring services to meet the needs of children and families. Up to two more states will receive approval for waivers under previous authority. Under the new Adoption and Safe Families Act, HHS will grant up to 10 waivers per year to states. In addition, this Administration has provided states with enhanced technical support and helped improve court operations. In September, HHS awarded 40 demonstration grants totalling \$7.9 million, to states, local agencies, courts, private organizations, and others committed to promoting adoption for innovative programs to increase adoptions and reduce the number of children in foster care. To prevent children from entering foster care in the first place, in 1993, the Clinton Administration secured federal funding for the Family Preservation and Family Support Program to help states, local governments and service providers develop effective programs to serve children and families at risk.

BREAKING DOWN RACIAL AND ETHNIC BARRIERS TO ADOPTION. The Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, also ensures that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity by strengthening the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994.

PROVIDING SUPPORTS FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND ADOPTION. In 1993, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance. In addition, the welfare reform bill that the President signed into law maintains the guarantee of child protection and adoption, and does not reduce funds for child welfare, child abuse, foster care and adoption services.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS. Through speeches, writings, events and public service announcements, the President and First Lady have promoted the importance and benefits of adoption.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 1999

PRESIDENT CLINTON SIGNS LANDMARK LAW
TO HELP FOSTER CARE YOUTH PREPARE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

December 14, 1999

President Clinton today will sign into law the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. This legislation, based on an initiative proposed by the President and the First Lady, will help ensure that young people who leave foster care get the tools they need to make the most of their lives. It empowers those leaving foster care by providing them better educational opportunities, access to health care, training, housing assistance, counseling and other services. The new law is only the latest instance of the Administration's longstanding commitment to children and families.

FOSTER CARE YOUTH FACE CHALLENGES AS THEY ENTER ADULTHOOD. Nearly 20,000 young people leave foster care each year when they reach age 18 without an adoptive family or other guardian. Without the emotional, social and financial support that families provide, many of these youth find themselves inadequately prepared for life on their own. Studies show that within two to four years of leaving foster care, only half have completed high school, fewer than half are employed, one-fourth have been homeless for at least one night, 30 percent do not have access to needed health care, 60 percent of the women have given birth, and less than one in five are completely self-supporting.

NEW LEGISLATION PROVIDES NEW HOPE FOR THESE YOUTH. Under previous laws, federal financial support for these young people ended just as they were making the transition to independence. The Act the President will sign today authorizes \$700 million over five years to help these young people cross this critical bridge:

Doubling the Federal Independent Living Program. The Independent Living program, run through the states, helps older foster care children earn a high school diploma, participate in vocational training or education, and learn daily living skills such as budgeting, career planning and securing housing and employment. Today's new law doubles the program's funding to \$140 million per year, and invests \$350 million more over five years in these services. Under the new law, states are now required to serve youth up to 21 years old, enabling more young people to obtain a college education. It also enables states to provide time-limited financial assistance to help these youth with living expenses as they develop the skills and education needed to move successfully into the workforce. The Act the President will sign today also renames the program in honor of John Chafee, the late Senator who so effectively championed the needs of children.

Providing Health Insurance. Today, when young people emancipate from foster care, they face numerous health risks, but too often lose their health insurance. The new law grants states the option for these young people to remain eligible for Medicaid up to age 21. Today, HHS will issue guidance to all State Medicaid Directors encouraging them to take up this option.

Honoring America's Heroes. In an unrelated provision, the Act provides a special monthly cash benefit to Filipino veterans who served under the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II if they were eligible for

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and later choose to move outside the United States. Previously, Filipino veterans who were eligible to receive SSI benefits would lose them if they were to return to the Philippines.

A RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION. With today's new law, the Administration adds to an unprecedented record of promoting the well-being of children and providing them permanent, loving homes. In 1998 there were a record 36,000 adoptions from foster care, the first significant increase in the history of the program. From 1996 to 1998, the number of adoptions nationwide rose 29 percent -- from 28,000 to 36,000 -- and is on a pace to meet the President's goal of 56,000 adoptions in 2002. Among the President's other steps to improve child welfare and encourage adoption:

Increasing the Transitional Living Program. Last month the President secured in the budget agreement a 40 percent increase in the Transitional Living program, which provides funds to local community-based organizations for residential care, life skills training, and other support services to homeless adolescents. The program will now be funded at \$20.7 million.

Enacting the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Based on the Administration's Adoption 2002 report, this landmark law made the health and safety of children a clear priority, provided the first-ever financial incentives for states to increase adoptions, tightened the time frames for making permanent placements of children, and removed other barriers to adoption.

Making Adoption Affordable. In 1996, President Clinton enacted a \$5,000 tax credit for families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the President provided more support for families who adopt with a \$500 per-child tax credit. And under the Family and Medical Leave Act, parents can take time with a newly adopted child without losing their jobs or health insurance.

Breaking Down Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption.* New inter-ethnic adoption provisions signed into law by the President ensure that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity.

Giving States Flexibility and Support. The Clinton Administration has given 25 states waivers to test innovative strategies for improving state child welfare systems. The Administration has provided states technical support to improve court operations and grants to support local adoption projects, and has also secured federal funding for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program to serve at-risk children and families.

Using the Internet to Promote Adoption. In November 1998, the President issued a directive to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care. HHS will develop a national Internet site by the year 2002.

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PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES FIRST ADOPTION BONUS AWARDS TO STATES AND
UNVEILS REPORT THAT SHOWS ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY IS WORKING
September 24, 1999

Today, the President and First Lady will announce bonus awards of \$20 million to 35 states that have increased the number of children adopted from the public foster care system. These bonuses, awarded for the first time today, were first proposed by President Clinton's Adoption 2002 initiative and included in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

The President also will announce \$5.5 million in grants to innovative programs that remove barriers to adoption, and he unveiled a national progress report on adoption that documents the success of the Administration's strategy. From 1996 to 1998, the number of adoptions nationwide rose 29 percent - from 28,000 to 36,000 - and is on a pace to meet the President's goal of 56,000 adoptions in 2002. This is the first significant increase in adoptions since the national foster care program was established nearly 20 years ago.

INCENTIVE AWARDS SUCCEED IN INCREASING ADOPTIONS. In the Administration's Adoption 2002 proposal and the adoption law of 1997, the President created the first-ever financial incentive for states to increase adoptions of children from the foster care system. Today, the President will release \$20 million in bonus awards to 35 states that in 1998 exceeded their average adoption rate from 1995 to 1997. The \$20 million in bonuses provide for up to \$4,000 per adopted child, and \$6,000 for each child with special needs. In fact, the states' performance in 1998 was so strong that it would have entitled them, under the law, to an additional \$22.5 million.

INNOVATIVE GRANTS REDUCE BARRIERS TO ADOPTION. The President today also will announce \$5.5 million in new awards under the Adoption Opportunities program. This program provides grants to public and private organizations to eliminate barriers to adoption, particularly for children with special needs. This year's grants reward a variety of initiatives, including efforts to increase adoptions of minority children, targeted field research, and awards for collaborative planning to increase adoptions across jurisdictional lines.

REPORT SHOWS CLINTON ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY IS WORKING. Since taking office, the President has championed efforts to make foster care work better, to find and assist adoptive families, and to break down barriers to adoption. Today, the President will receive a progress report from the Department of Health and Human Services that documents the effectiveness of the Administration's strategy.

- Reforming the Child Welfare System. In 1997, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act. This landmark law was passed largely on recommendations from the Administration's Adoption 2002 report, which the President requested by executive memorandum in order to meet his goal of doubling adoptions by 2002. The law expedited permanent placement decisions for children, ensured health insurance coverage for all special-needs children in subsidized adoptions, and created the bonus awards released today.

- Making Adoption Affordable for Families. The Small Business Job

Protection Act of 1996, signed by the President in 1996, provides a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This provision helps middle class families for whom adoption - particularly of children with special needs - might have been prohibitively expensive.

- Giving States More Flexibility and Support. The Administration has granted waivers to 20 states and the District of Columbia to test innovative strategies for improving child welfare systems. In addition, it has secured new funds to support state implementation of the 1997 law and has, through the Adoption Opportunities program, supported local initiatives to promote adoption and provide post-adoptive services.

- Using the Internet to Make Adoption Easier. In 1998, the President directed HHS to develop Internet tools to link children in foster care more quickly to possible adoptive families. Secretary Shalala reported that HHS will launch a national web site by September 2001 to break down geographic barriers to adoption.

- Removing Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption. New inter-ethnic adoption provisions, passed as a part of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, help ensure that the adoption process is free of delays and discriminatory practices driven by race, culture and ethnicity. These provisions strengthened the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, which the President signed in 1994.

- Providing Supports for Child Protection and Adoption. The Family and Medical Leave Act, signed by the President in 1993, enables working parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance coverage. The 1996 welfare reform law signed by the President also maintains child protection and adoption guarantees.

NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS. To follow through on this record of achievement, the President and First Lady today will urge Congress to provide new support for young people leaving foster care. Under the current system, federal financial assistance for young people in foster care ends just as they are making the critical transition to independence. The President's FY 2000 budget request increases funding by nearly \$300 million to help these youth secure health care, life skills training, and educational opportunities. With the Administration's strong support, the House has already passed bipartisan legislation to address these needs. The President today urged the Senate to take prompt action on the companion measure and to safeguard the interests of vulnerable young people leaving foster care.

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND FIRST LADY
AT ADOPTION BILL SIGNING

The East Room

1:53 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you and welcome to the East Room. Please be seated. We are delighted to have all of you join us today for this very important event and one that many of you in this room have worked for and looked forward to for many years.

There are some people that I would like to acknowledge and introduce before we get started. You will hear from the four members of Congress who are here on the stage, Representative Kennelly, Representative Camp, Senator Chafee and Senator Rockefeller. Also attending are Senator Craig, Senator DeWine, Senator Landrieu, Representative Levin, Representative Oberstar, Representative Maloney, and Representative Morella. And I'd like to ask all the members of Congress to please stand. (Applause.)

This was truly a bipartisan piece of legislation. It could not have been passed without the strong support of the members whom you see, including the sponsors who are here on the stage. It was also a work that was very much in the heart of Secretary Donna Shalala and her team from HHS -- Richard Tarplin, Mary Bourdette, and Carol Williams. And I'd like to ask the Secretary and her team to stand please. (Applause.)

There were also a number of members of the White House staff who worked very hard with members of Congress and with members of the HHS contingent, and I'd like to acknowledge just a few of them -- John Hilley, Bruce Reed, Elena Kagan, and in particular Jen Klein and Nicola Rabner. I want to thank all of them. (Applause.)

I'm also pleased that we have Governor Romer of Colorado. We have children, families, advocates, and leaders of the child welfare constituency here in our audience.

Nearly a year ago, the President and I met with children waiting in the foster care system for caring families to call their own. There the President pledged to reform the child welfare system to work better for the children it serves, to put their health and safety first, and to move children more quickly into safe and permanent homes. Today we as a nation make good on that pledge.

And for the thousands of American children who wait for a stable, loving home that will always be there, it is not a moment too soon. Right now there are nearly half a million children in foster care. For most, foster care is a safe haven on the road to a permanent home or back home. Too many, however, make countless detours along the way, shuffling from family to family without much hope that they will ever find permanent parents to love and take care of them. These children who will enter this holiday season unsure about whether the family they celebrate this year will be there with them next year deserve better.

We know it makes a difference for children to have permanent loving homes. It's not only research that tells us this; we know it by our intuition, by our own experience and we have all seen it firsthand. It was here in this room two years ago that a young woman named Deanna -- a child waiting to be adopted in foster care stood up and read a poem about what she wanted in life, and it wasn't real complicated. It is what all of us want. I'm happy that because of that event here in the East Room, she was able to meet a family who did adopt her. And I saw her last year at an event in Kansas City and almost didn't recognize her -- from a shy, withdrawn 13-year-old, she had blossomed into a cheerful, outgoing, confident teenager with a brilliant smile.

This landmark legislation that the President is about to sign will see to it there are more stories like Deanna's. This legislation stands as proof of what we can accomplish when we come together. As we see today, the national government does have an important role to play in reforming our foster care system, and giving guidance to courts and states in offering incentives to speed up and increase the numbers of adoptions, and in making sure that the health and safety of our children is always the first priority.

But we know even more, all Americans have a role and a responsibility. Businesses can make it easier for their employees to adopt a child. And I want to single out Dave Thomas of Wendy's, who has led the way in showing all of us how that can be done. (Applause.)

Religious leaders can help spread the word about the joys of adoptions. Parents thinking about adoption can expand their search to reach out to kids in foster care. And if we reform the system so that it works the way that it should, more Americans will look to American children to adopt and not feel compelled to go overseas to adopt children. (Applause.)

With us today are some extraordinary Americans who have answered this call. This morning, the Department of Health and Human Services observed National Adoption Month by honoring outstanding achievements with the 1997 Adoption 2002 Excellence Awards. Secretary Shalala developed these awards at the request of the President. The winners are dedicated individuals and organizations, both large and small, who have worked to move children out of the foster care system and into permanent, loving homes. Some of them have been at the forefront of this issue for years; some have promoted and supported adoption in their communities; and some are parents who have opened their homes and hearts to our nation's most vulnerable children.

I'd like to ask all the honorees who were honored this morning to please stand. (Applause.) We want to thank you for the work you have done, for the example you have set. And we hope that through these awards, in conjunction with this legislation, there will be many, many more in your ranks in the years to come.

* * * * *

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sue Ann. Thank you, Aaron (phonetic). And I want to thank the Badeau family for showing up. I think it's fair to say it was a greater effort for them than for anyone else here. (Laughter.) I appreciate the rest of your presence. It was easier for me than anybody; I just had to come downstairs. (Laughter.) But I'm grateful that they're here.

Secretary Shalala, I thank you and your staff for your remarkable work on this. And I thank the members of the White House staff, all the

members of Congress who are present here. And especially I thank Senators Rockefeller and Chafee and Congressmen Camp and Kennelly for their work and for what they said here.

Congratulations to the Adoption 2002 Excellence Award winners. I thank all the advocates who are here. And I say a special word of thanks, along with all the others who have said it, to the First Lady, who has been passionately committed to this issue for at least 25 years now that I know. Thank you, Governor Romer, for coming. And thank you, Dave Thomas, for what you've done.

Again let me say to all the members of Congress who are here, Republicans and Democrats alike, I am very grateful for what you've done. This, after all, is what we got in public life for, isn't it?

Before I make my brief remarks, if you'll forgive me and understand, I have to make one public statement today about the situation in Iraq.

As I have said before, I prefer to resolve this situation peacefully, with our friends and allies, and I am working hard to do just that. But I want to be clear again about the necessary objective of any diplomacy now underway. Iraq must comply with the unanimous will of the international community and let the weapons inspectors resume their work to prevent Iraq from developing an arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The inspectors must be able to do so without interference. That's our top line; that's our bottom line. I want to achieve it diplomatically. But we're taking every step to make sure we are prepared to pursue whatever options are necessary.

I do not want these children we are trying to put in stable homes to grow up into a world where they are threatened by terrorists with biological and chemical weapons. It is not right. (Applause.)

It's hard to believe now, but it was just a little less than a year ago when I directed our administration to develop a plan to double the number of children we move from foster care to adoptive homes by the year 2002. We know that foster parents provide safe and caring families for children. But the children should not be trapped in them forever, especially when there are open arms waiting to welcome them into permanent homes.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act, which I am about to sign, is consistent with the work of the 2002 report and our goals. It fundamentally alters our nation's approach to foster care and adoption. And fundamentally, it will improve the well-being of hundreds of thousands of our most vulnerable children. The new legislation makes it clear that children's health and safety are the paramount concerns of our public child welfare system. It makes it clear that good foster care provides important safe havens for our children, but it is by definition a temporary, not a permanent, setting.

The new law will help us to speed children out of foster care into permanent families by setting meaningful time limits for child welfare decisions, by clarifying which family situations call for reasonable reunification efforts and which simply do not. It will provide states with financial incentives to increase the number of children adopted each year. It will ensure that adopted children with special needs never lose their health coverage -- a big issue. Thank you, Congress, for doing that. It will reauthorize federal funding for timely services to alleviate crisis before they become serious, that aid the reunification of families that help to meet post-adoption needs.

With these measures we help families stay together where reunification is possible and help find safe homes for children much

more quickly when it is not. We've come together in an extraordinary example of bipartisan cooperation to meet the urgent needs of children at risk. We put our differences aside, and put our children first.

This landmark legislation builds on other action taken in the last few years by Congress: the Adoption Tax Credit I signed into law August to make adopting children more affordable for families, especially those who adopt children with special needs; the Multiethnic Placement Act, enacted two years ago, ensuring that adoption is free from discrimination and delay, based on race, culture, or ethnicity; and the very first law I signed as President, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or their health insurance.

We have put in place here the building blocks of giving all of our children what should be their fundamental right -- a chance at a decent, safe home; an honorable, orderly, positive upbringing; a chance to live out their dreams and fulfill their God-given capacities.

Now, as we approach Thanksgiving, when families all across our country come together to give thanks for their blessings, I would like to encourage more families to consider opening their homes and their hearts to children who need loving homes. You may not want to go as far as the Badeaus have -- (laughter) -- but they are a shining example of how we grow -- (applause) -- they are a shining example of how we grow when we give, how we can be blessed in return many times over. We thank them and all -- all of the adoptive parents in the country.

For those who are now or have been foster or adoptive parents, I'd like to say thank you on behalf of a grateful nation, and again say at Thanksgiving, let us thank God for our blessings and resolve to give more of our children the blessings they deserve.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

2:19 P.M. EST

For Immediate Release

September 24, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT ADOPTION EVENT

Presidential Hall

10:00 A.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you, and please be seated. And welcome to the White House for a celebration and a wonderful announcement for so many children and families around our country.

I'm delighted that we've been joined by members of Congress, including Senator Carl Levin and Representative Dave Camp and Representative Nancy Johnson and Representative Tom Delay and Representative Ben Cardin and Representative Maxine Waters.

This is an issue that has been at the real heart of our efforts in the last several years to do what we could to give every child a chance to have a permanent loving home. And there are many people who have played a role in bringing us to this day. I want to acknowledge Olivia Golden and Pat Montoya, from HHS. I want to acknowledge the Brown, the Manis, the Keane and the Vasquez family. Carol Williams, the former Children's Bureau director and a champion of adoption; the many adoption advocates who are here.

And there's one very special champion of foster children who I would like to introduce to you. She is an eight-year-old girl who heard about how many foster children could not afford to use anything but garbage bags for luggage when they were told they had to move. So she decided to collect suitcases for them, and so far she has collected 1,000. And I'd like to ask Makenzi Snyder to stand, please.
(Applause.)

This summer I saw a photograph that reminded me why the work we're doing to promote adoption in our country is so vitally important. It was a picture of a young woman in a green silk evening gown, with high heels and a lace shawl, and you could see the anticipation and excitement in her eyes. That was a picture of 17-year-old Deanna Collins. It was taken by her parents, her adoptive parents, on the night of her high school prom.

Looking at that picture, it was difficult for me to believe that the smiling, confident young woman was the same girl I had welcomed to the White House just four years ago. Back then, she was 13, and she'd already spent eight years in foster care. With her shoulders slumped forward, and her eyes downcast, she told the audience gathered in the East Room for National Adoption Month about her dreams of living in a place she could call home, with a room of her own and a family she could love.

Not long after that visit, Deanna's dream came true. And it's been my privilege to watch this young woman's life transformed by her adoption. With the love of her parents and the confidence that comes from knowing that, indeed, she always will have a place to call

home, no matter what else happens to her in life, she is thriving. She's a senior in high school, now, and plans to go to college and major in social work.

Every time I need inspiration for our fight to strengthen and increase adoption in America, I think of Deanna. I think of so many of the other children whom I've know. I think of the adult adoptees, who are telling us their stories, including Washington D.C.'s own Mayor, Tony Williams, who told us at another Adoption Month commemoration last year how, at the age of three, he was about to be declared unadoptable, and institutionalized by the state, when Virginia Williams opened her arms and welcomed him into her family.

Mrs. Williams is here today, and all of us are grateful for the love you gave that young three-year-old boy, and the second chance you gave to him. And I'd like to ask Mrs. Williams to please stand. (Applause.)

But we can't gather today and celebrate Dianna or Mayor Williams without thinking of the thousands of foster children in America who are still waiting for the same chance, either to go back safely to their own families where they will be given the love and the attention and the discipline that every child needs, or be given the chance in a new family.

For more than 25 years, as an advocate and an attorney, I have tried to work with so many others to address the challenges of foster care and adoption. I've represented perspective parents in court. I've represented foster children. I've worked on behalf of changes in legislation. I've listened to the frustrations that social workers and judges and police officers and parents and others feel about the red tape that so often keeps them from sharing their lives with children who badly need their love.

I've met foster children who have spent childhoods feeling alone and unloved, moving from home to home. Children such as the teenage boy the President and I met in the Oval Office two years ago. When we asked him where he lived, he looked down and he said, "All over Fairfax County."

In many ways, giving more of our children the chance to know the love and support of a family is a personal crusade for us. I know that many of you have been at the meetings and the roundtables and the celebrations of National Adoption Month that we've held here at the White House. And I've been very pleased and grateful to work with so many advocates like Wendy's founder, or Dave Thomas, who as an adopted child himself has dedicated much of his time and personal resources to promoting adoption.

With each meeting I became, along with all of you, more and more convinced that it was past time to reform our foster care system, to identify and eliminate the obstacles to change the placement procedures so that we could expedite the movement of children either home or into new homes.

We've made a lot of progress. We've helped adoptive parents carve out the time they need to care for their new children. The first bill the President signed into law was the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows new parents -- including adoptive parents -- to take time off and care for their children without fear of losing their jobs or health insurance.

We've put an end to racial discrimination in adoption. The President signed and strengthened the Multiethnic Placement Act, prohibiting adoption agencies from keeping children of one race from the

safe and loving arms of parents of another. We have made adoptions more affordable, putting in place tax credits for new adoptive families. And we're taking steps to use the Internet to help match waiting children with loving homes.

And most importantly, we've crafted legislation to dramatically reduce the amount of time a child spends in foster care. We've said that no child would have to wait longer than 12 months -- down from 18 months -- before the court considered his or her permanent placement. For the first time, we have offered states financial incentives to move more children out of foster care and into permanent homes. And we have given states the flexibility to try new strategies to accomplish that goal.

And we set an ambitious national goal of doubling the number of children adopted annually, from 28,000 to 56,000, by the year 2002. And though there were some moments when it looked like it wouldn't pass, we fought hard to make the Adoption and Safe Families Act the law of the land in 1997. In a few minutes, the President will offer new evidence of our continued success.

But we still have more to do. Two weeks after the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, I went to California to meet with a group of young people, who were aging or had already aged out of foster care. They told me about their struggles -- about being forced out of foster homes on their 18th birthdays; about living in homeless shelters, seeking sleep in emergency rooms while trying to finish school; about getting sick and having no one to turn to for medical care or comfort. These young people are our responsibility. We cannot ignore the potential of any one of these children.

One of the young women I met that day in California is now a student at the Yale Law School. And that's why I was pleased to announce a new proposal in the President's balanced budget, to help former foster children make the transition to independence. And I'm very happy that the House, under the bipartisan leadership of Representative Nancy Johnson and Representative Ben Cardin, both of whom are with us today, has passed the bill that will allow former foster children to remain on Medicaid until age 21 and will -- (applause) -- and will give them the extra help they need to finish high school, find work and a place to live.

Now I would call on the Senate to take action on the companion bill that is sponsored by Senators Chafee and Rockefeller. There is no reason we cannot pass this bill this year for the good of all of our children. And I hope every one of us here will do everything we can to make sure that the Senate does that, and then we can have, I think, another celebration to sign a bill that will make such a difference in the lives of older children in foster care.

The progress we celebrate today is due to the work of countless people, and many of you are here, and others are working on the front lines around our country and others are caring for children who are newly adopted in their homes.

I remember very well that a few years ago on Mothers Day, we had a roundtable for mothers and their adopted children. And at the end of the discussion, I went around the room asking the children if they had anything else to say, because some of them had not yet spoken up, and I didn't want them to leave and not have been heard. The final boy to speak looked up at the woman sitting next to him and said quietly, "I just want to thank my mother."

With that simple statement, and that adoring look, he summarized what all of us had been trying to say all afternoon. So,

to all of those of you who have been the mothers and fathers that have helped move our children into homes, and into a sense of love and security, we say thank you -- for opening your homes and your hearts.

And now it's my privilege to introduce someone who has done just that -- who with her husband, Steven, and her son Sean, have just finalized the adoptions of Sarah and Brian. Please join me in welcoming Dawn Keane. (Applause.)

* * * * *

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. When we have events here in this room, with people who have come to share their experiences, very often I feel like a fifth wheel. I think everything that needs to be said has already been said. (Laughter.) But I want to begin by thanking Dawn Keane for her wonderful statement; her husband, Steve; and Sean, Brian and Sarah. They're beautiful children. They did a good job at the microphone, didn't they? (Laughter.) I want to thank Olivia Golden and Pat Montoya for their work at HHS on this important issue.

I'd like to thank this remarkable bipartisan delegation from the House of Representatives here -- Dave Camp and Nancy Johnson and Ben Cardin and Maxine Waters, Sandy Levin and Congressman DeLay. This may be the only issue all six of these people agree on. (Laughter.) And -- Tom's nodding his head up and down. (Laughter.)

I'll tell you a funny story -- this is a true story. The other day I was reading a profile of Tom DeLay in the newspaper. And I got about halfway through, and he was giving me the devil for something; you know, he's very good at that. (Laughter.) And he started grinding on my golf game and saying that I didn't count my scores and all this, and I was getting really angry. (Laughter.) And then I get to the next part of the story, and it talks all about his experience and his commitment to adoption and to foster children, and the personal experience that he and his wife had. And my heart just melted. And all of a sudden, I didn't care what he said about my golf game. (Laughter.)

And I say that to make this point: The Keane family -- the Manis, the Brown, the Vasquez families who are behind me today -- they represent what we all know is basic and fundamental about our families and our country -- more important than anything else we can think of. And they open their homes and their hearts to children, and they open our hearts to them -- and to each other as we work for more stories like those we celebrate today.

I'd also like to say a special hello to the Badeau family. Some of you may remember this. Two years ago, almost, Sue and Hector Badeau joined us at the White House when I signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act. They brought 18 of the 22 children they have adopted. Now, you need to know that, as if they didn't have enough to deal with, this summer they also welcomed into their home a family of eight Kosovar refugees. So if you ever need proof that there's no limit to human goodness, you can look at Sue and Hector Badeau.

I'd like for them to stand. Where are they? There you go. They've got some of their kids here. Stand up. (Applause.) Thank you. God bless you. Thank you. (Applause.)

I would also like to say just a very brief word to Hillary. You heard her tell the story of her involvement in this, but when we were in law school together, before we were married, she was talking to me about how messed up the foster care and adoption laws were in the country, how many ridiculous barriers there were. And not long after

we moved to Little Rock and I became Attorney General of our state, she took a case for a young couple who had had a child from foster care for three years that they desperately wanted to adopt -- this is over 20 years ago. And together they changed the law in our state so that foster parents could be considered for adoption, something that used to be verboten in most states in the country.

So I've watched her work on these issues now for almost 30 years, and I am very grateful that one of the many blessings of our time in the White House has been the chance to make a difference on these adoption and foster care issues, and I thank her for making it possible. (Applause.)

Finally, let me say, again, I want to say a special word of thanks to the members of Congress in both parties who have come to this event today. We have had a raging, often stimulating, occasionally maddening, debate on what should be the role of government over the last five years in this town. But we have all agreed that government has a role to try to protect children, but to facilitate the most rapid, reasonable, orderly process for both foster care and for transition to adoption.

Hillary said that the House had adopted this provision to let kids coming out of foster care keep their Medicaid until they're 21. I'll just give you one more example of how these issues unify us. Within a 36-hour period, about six months ago, my cousin, who runs the public housing unit in the little town where I was born in Arkansas -- which has 8,000 or 10,000 people -- came up to a HUD conference. And she spent the night with me and were having breakfast, drinking coffee, and she says, you know, you've got to do something about these foster kids. They keep going out of the -- they come out of the foster homes and they've got no money and they need to do some things. And then the next day, literally within 36 hours, I'm talking to these people from New York City who tell me it's maybe the biggest social problem they have now, with all these kids coming out of foster care.

So this is an issue that spans the experience of America, the whole sweep of it. And I'm very grateful -- I'm grateful that we have this consensus and I'm grateful that they've acted on it. I urge the Senate to follow suit.

Now, you've already heard about the things that we're doing to try to double the number of children we help move into permanent homes. We have new evidence that these efforts are bearing fruit. The Department of Health and Human Services has just given me a report that tracks our progress in meeting our adoption goals. It shows that the number of adoptions from the foster care system increased from 28,000 in 1996, to 36,000 in 1998. That is the first significant increase in adoptions since the National Foster Care Program was created almost 20 years ago.

Now, that's an amazing thing. That's more than -- it's about a 30-percent increase. That's a very impressive increase in two years. And we are well on our way to meeting our goal of 56,000 in 2002, doubling the number. For all of you that had anything to do with that, I say thank you. You should be very proud of yourselves.

Now, if you look at this HHS report -- and I urge those of you who are interested in it to actually get it and scan it, at least -- you will see how much this bipartisan cooperation I talked about and the work that's being done by people in the trenches to clear away the barriers is making a difference -- a stunning example of what we can do when we put our children first. You will see that we have acted on each and every one of the 11 recommendations set forth in the original Adoption 2002 report. Breaking down barriers to adoptions, ensuring

accountability, rewarding innovation, supporting adoptive families themselves.

One of the key recommendations we adopted into law in 1997 was to give states, for the first time, financial incentives to help children move from foster to adoptive homes. Under the new bonus system, states are entitled to up to \$4,000 or \$6,000, depending on whether the child has special needs, for each adoption above their previous average.

Today, I have the honor of presenting the first round of these awards, worth \$20 million, to 35 of our 50 states. The good news is that these states did this, using creative new approaches and exceeding their own high goals. Illinois, for example -- listen to this -- the state of Illinois increased its options by 112 percent -- 112 -- yes, you can clap for Illinois. That's good. (Applause.)

Now, the bad news, if you can call it that, is that even though we believed this would work, we didn't think it would work this well this quickly -- (laughter) -- and we didn't put enough money in to give all the states all the money to which they're entitled. So I hope we can rectify that, because I think we all think that we want to give the states the incentives to figure out how best to do this.

But the fact is, I think all of us are very proud of what these states have done for some of their most vulnerable citizens. And I look forward to working with the Congress to make up this shortfall and get the other 15 states above their goals as well.

Today, I am also awarding \$5.5 million in adoption opportunity grants to outstanding public and private organizations in 16 of our states to help fund research and new ways of increasing inter-state adoptions, and adoptions of minority children. Together these efforts will help to accelerate the remarkable progress we've seen.

Now, again let me say, I think the big goal we ought to have for this legislative session is to get the Senate to follow the lead of the House, and schedule a vote on the Chafee-Rockefeller bill to ensure that the foster children are not cast out in the cold when their time in foster care ends. I hope -- I know if we can get it up and get it on the calendar, it will pass with the same overwhelming bipartisan support that we've seen in the House. So I urge all of you to do what you can to make sure that that is a big priority for the Senate, and I will do my part.

Together, we can help our foster children -- all of them -- first grow up in good homes, and, if they turn 18 as foster children, to make a good transition from transit to independence -- with health care, education, counseling and housing.

Now, ultimately, let me say the credit in all this does not really belong to all of the political leaders, even though they've worked very hard, all of us have together. It does not belong to all the public servants, even though there is a real new attitude, I think, in the organizations, the social services organizations, to try to do the right thing and move this along.

But none of this will work if there aren't good people in every community like the Keanes, the Manises, the Browns, the Vasquezes, the Badeaus, who are willing to give a child unconditional love and a good upbringing. They are the proof of the unlimited goodness of the human heart. All the rest of us are trying to do is to unleash it. And we need to keep right on doing that.

Thank you and God bless you all. (Applause.)

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT FOSTER CARE EVENT

Presidential Hall

5:45 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: Welcome to the White House, and please be seated. This is a truly wonderful day. In a few minutes the President will sign into law landmark legislation that will strengthen our foster care system, and give hope and help to thousands of young people struggling to make a safe transition to adulthood and independence.

None of this would have been possible without so many of you in this room. I want to thank Secretary Donna Shalala and her team at HHS, including Mary Burdette and Pat Montoya; and former commissioner, Carol Williams. I want to thank many members of Congress, and particularly those who are here with us today -- Senator Rockefeller and Senator Collins, Senator Chafee, and Representative Cardin.

I want to thank Mayor Williams and his mother, Virginia, who welcomed him into her family when he was 3 years old and authorities were about to declare him unadoptable. They are among the best advertisements for the rewards and possibilities of adoption in America.

I want to thank the Child Welfare League of America, the Children's Defense Fund, and all of the tireless child advocates who work to raise awareness about this issue. The Casey Family Program and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have give great support to young people in transition.

And I'd also like very much to thank someone who I'm sure is with us in spirit, the late Senator John Chafee. (Applause.) On the Friday before he died, I called Senator Chafee to wish him a happy birthday. I also managed to do a little lobbying for the Foster Care Independence Act, which had hit a few roadblocks in the Senate. By the end of our conversation, I think we were both feeling reenergized and inspired to work even harder for the young people who were counting on this bill.

I understand that one of his last instructions to his staff was to set up meetings with senators he felt could be swayed to support the bill. We all know that had he lived, John Chafee would not have rested until he had won all of the votes he needed. So we are very grateful today to be joined by his colleagues and, particularly, his son, Senator Lincoln Chafee.

Since the President took office we have seen a transformation in America's efforts to strengthen our foster care and adoption systems. With the Family and Medical Leave Act, we've helped adoptive parents, and all new parents, take time off to care for their children without fear of losing their jobs or their health insurance. We've put an end to racial discrimination in adoption, prohibiting agencies from denying qualified parents of one race to adopt a child of another.

In 1997, we passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which

cut dramatically the amount of time a child can spend in foster care, and set an ambitious goal of doubling the number of annual adoptions by the year 2002. And, as the President was able to announce just a few months ago, in September, we are well on our way to meeting that goal.

But it wasn't long after we passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act that we recognized we needed now to turn our efforts to a new challenge: helping those young people, who never did have the opportunity either to return home or be placed in a permanent family, fulfill their promise in adulthood.

Now, for many Americans, the 18th birthday is an important one. Turning 18 means you can vote. It means you can often go away to get a job or to school. But it should never mean that you're left on your own. For too many young people, turning 18 has been just the beginning of a lonely and sometimes harrowing journey toward adulthood. Just half of all young people who have aged out of foster care complete high school. Fewer than one in three have health care coverage. One in four have been homeless.

Two years ago, I went to California to meet a group of young people who had aged out of foster care. They told me about being forced out of their foster homes on their birthdays; about staying in a cold dorm room alone during the holidays because they had nowhere to go; about getting sick and having no insurance to get any medical care; about having literally no one to call for any kind of help.

They reminded me of the many small things we all take for granted in our own families. One young woman said to me, you know, it's almost Thanksgiving, and I have no one to call and ask how to bake a turkey.

I've been very moved and humbled by the resilience and determination I've seen in the young people I've met. Some of them are standing behind me. One is Joy Warren, who spent all of her teen years in foster care. Yet, she still found the commitment and strength not only to continue her education in college, but to attend the law school and become a powerful voice for foster children around America.

I think of Terry Harak, whom I had the honor of meeting at the White House last January. On her 18th birthday, in the middle of her senior year, she found herself without foster care, without a job and without a place to call home, because the rule has been you're out of foster care if you turn 18 or you finish high school, whichever happens first.

But Terry didn't give up. She spent the night at teachers' and friends' houses and metro terminals, even in hospital emergency rooms. And every morning she would wake up and get herself to school. And last June she graduated and today she is working and is a student in college.

But for every Terry or every Joy or any of the other success stories behind me, think of all those young people who don't finish high school and who risk slipping through the cracks of our society. That is why, last winter, I was very pleased to unveil a new proposal in the President's budget that would extend the foster care safety net to the young people who have aged out of the foster care system, but still need our help. And today I'm very pleased that that bill is about to become law.

The Foster Care Independence Act recognizes one fundamental principle: All of us must take responsibility for helping these young people build lives worthy of their spirit and potential. From this day forward we say to all Americans, no young person, especially those who

have not known the support of a safe, loving, permanent family, should have to make the passage to adulthood alone.

This has been a truly bipartisan achievement. And I want to thank everyone in Congress who helped, the former foster children who stepped forward to make their stories known, the newspapers and television stations that publicized their plight, the researchers who backed up their heartbreaking stories with hard statistics, and the advocates and private citizens who lobbied the Congress. In this season of giving, I can think of no better gift to give our children and our future.

Now I'm very proud to introduce two people who can tell us why this law is so important. Alfred Perez is one of the eloquent young people I met two years ago in California. He will speak first. He will be followed by Kristi Jo Frazier, of Cincinnati, Ohio. Both of them will tell us more about their challenges, and even more importantly, about their capacity to persist, their resilience, and their triumphs.

Please welcome Alfred Perez. (Applause.)

* * * *

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you, please be seated. At this moment, about all I can think of is, Merry Christmas. (Laughter.)

Senator Rockefeller, Senator Collins, Representative Cardin, thank you all for being here. And, Senator Chafee, thank you for being here, and with you, the spirit of your father, for all his great work on this.

I want to say a special word of thanks to our Mayor, Tony Williams, and his mom, Mrs. Virginia Williams. He has become America's Exhibit A of the potential for foster care success. He is a good man and she is a magnificent woman, and we thank them for being here. Thank you. (Applause.)

I thank Secretary Shalala and all of her staff. And I thank Alfred Perez and Kristi Jo Frazier, and the other young people behind me, for whom they spoke. They spoke so well and so bravely and so frankly. What they have achieved in their own lives is truly heroic, and we should all be very grateful that they are determined to make that kind of difference in the lives of other young people.

I want to thank the groups that have done so much to champion the cause of foster children -- the Child Welfare League of America, the Children's Defense Fund, the Annie Casey Foundation, the Casey Family Program. I want to thank especially -- I won't mention them, but they know who they are -- the people who have come up to me personally and lobbied me on this issue over the last couple of years. (Laughter.)

I've got a cousin that's been a friend of mine over 50 years, all my life; we were little kids together. She runs a public housing program in the little town in Arkansas where we were born. And she came up here to a HUD conference on kids aging out of foster care. And she spent the night with me at the White House. I got up the next morning -- I never know, you know, what's on her mind -- this is about a year ago. And she said, Bill, you have got to do something about these kids that are aging out of foster care. She said, it's a huge problem in New York and California, but believe it or not, it's a problem at home, too. And nobody's doing anything about it. I want to thank all those people, and they know who they are.

And most of all, I want to thank Hillary. (Applause.) When we were in law school, she worked at the Yale Child Studies Center. Her

first job was with what became the Children's Defense Fund. When I became governor, in my first term she founded the Arkansas Advocates for Families and Children. She has always cared more about the welfare of all of our children than anything else, and our mutual responsibilities to them. And she challenged us a long time ago not to forget those foster children who leave the system each year with no financial or emotional support, no one to turn to. She put a lot of herself into getting this bill passed.

Hillary likes to quote the Chilean poet and teacher, Gabriela Mistral, about our responsibility to children: "Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are formed, his mind is developed. To him, we cannot say 'tomorrow.' His name is 'today.'"

We are here today because all of you, and especially the members of Congress from both parties, stood as one to say that America's foster children can finally have the name, 'today.'

The Foster Care Independence Act expands access to health care, education, housing and counseling for young people who must leave foster care when they turn 18. For the very first time, states will be able to pay housing costs and health insurance for people under 21.

The bill also gives states more resources and flexibility to help former foster children finish high school and go on to college; to help young people get jobs and vocational training; to provide counseling for young people learning to live on their own -- you've already heard how important that is -- and above all, to make sure young adults leaving foster care know they are not out there alone.

The bill makes \$700 million available to the states over five years under very flexible conditions. I challenge the states to use every penny of it. And I know I can depend upon the advocates here -- (laughter) -- to make sure they do.

You also have to help the states, though -- to design good programs, to implement them so the money will be spent with maximum impact. We simply cannot afford to have our high school students sleeping in metro stations, as some of these young people had to do.

We cannot afford to lose our future entrepreneurs and teachers and lawyers to the kinds of obstacles the young people behind me have faced. We can't afford to give up on the future, and these young people are a big part of our future, and our shared responsibility.

We have tried to help America's most vulnerable children grow up healthy and safe, to make the transition into happy, productive adults. We've tried to encourage adoption so that we can end the sadness of young people shuttling from house to house and never knowing a home. We've made adoptions easier and more affordable, given states more flexibility, passed incentive programs for states to promote adoption. These worked so well we actually ran out of money to reward the states. (Laughter.)

I'm pleased that this bill also authorizes additional funds that program needs, because it is working. Our most recent figures show that adoptions are up 29 percent, the first significant increase in two decades. (Applause.)

Now, when we get to the end of the session, sometimes we have to combine a bunch of things in bills, just to get all our work done. And I want to mention one other thing this bill does that is unrelated to young people aging out of foster care or to adoption. This bill includes a provision to honor and assist veterans from other lands who fought with and as a part of the United States Armed Forces during World

War II. It creates a special cash benefit under Social Security for veterans who want to leave the United States and return to their homelands.

We have 10 such veterans, 10 Filipino veterans, who are here with us today. I want to thank them for their service, and I ask them to stand and be recognized. We thank you. (Applause.)

So this bill keeps a promise to our children and a promise to our veterans. It was passed with overwhelming support from both parties, proving that we can put partisanship aside, and when we do, it's good for America.

I hope that we will see more of this in the new year. I hope that we can use the historic millennial year to take the rest of the steps we need to deal with the aging of America, by securing Social Security and Medicare, to give our children health coverage, to raise the minimum wage, to pass the common-sense legislation on gun safety and hate crimes, to do the things that we need to do to support working family, including the patients' bill of rights.

These young people here should give us all a lot of courage -- and a lot of heart. They represent, out of the most difficult circumstances, the very best not only of our country, but of what is at the core of human nature. And in this special season for so many of the world's great religious faiths, we should be very grateful for the gifts they have given us, the gifts they will give us, and the gifts so many other children will be able to give because of this legislation.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Now I'd like to ask the members of Congress to come up here, we'll sign the bill.

(The bill is signed.) (Applause.)

END 6:20 P.M. EST

Post

Praxis

MEMORANDUM ON FOSTER CARE

TO: Rosie O'Donnell
FROM: Lissa Muscatine, Erika Batcheller
RE: First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's accomplishments on foster care
Date: April 20, 2000

The First Lady has worked tirelessly for more than 30 years to reform our nation's foster care system and promote adoption. She has devoted her time to numerous child advocacy groups, including the Carnegie Council on Children, the Children's Defense Fund, and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and as an attorney she has represented both prospective parents and foster children. As First Lady, she has been the Administration's most prominent advocate on these issues, and her leadership has been instrumental to the passage of groundbreaking legislation to make it easier for children to move from foster care to permanent homes and to increase the number of adoptions. Her deep commitment to children in foster care also has been key to raising public awareness of the importance and rewards of adoption.

The First Lady's interest in foster care and adoption dates to her first year at Yale Law School. After reading an article in Time magazine about child advocate Marian Wright Edelman and her lobbying group, the Washington Research Project (which later evolved into the Children's Defense Fund), Mrs. Clinton contacted Edelman and secured an internship with the organization for the summer. Her experience there would set the stage for a lifelong commitment to a wide range of children's and family issues.

Returning to New Haven her sophomore year, Mrs. Clinton volunteered at Yale's Child Study Center and the New Haven Hospital, where she worked with the staff to draft guidelines for the treatment of abused children. She also volunteered at Legal Services, a legal aid group that provided free assistance to the poor.

One of Mrs. Clinton's first legal aid cases left an indelible imprint on her thinking about the needs of children in foster care. The case involved a black child and her low-income, white foster mother, who wanted to adopt the girl. Mrs. Clinton argued successfully that the mother should not be denied permanent custody simply because of racial or financial reasons. She argued that the child's best interest was to stay with her foster mother, who had provided a safe, stable home and family for more than two years. The many foster care cases she handled at Legal Services would give her a deep appreciation for the importance of ensuring the best interests of the child remain paramount during placement proceedings.

During a postgraduate year at Yale's Child Study Center, Mrs. Clinton wrote a chapter for a family law professor's book, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, that documented her conviction that America's judicial system had failed abused and neglected children. She also challenged deeply rooted traditions about the factors that should inform adoption decisions, presenting a legal argument that a child's happiness should outweigh considerations such as wealth, race or birth family.

After her husband was elected governor of Arkansas, Mrs. Clinton continued to press forward to protect children from abuse and neglect. In 1977, she founded Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, an organization dedicated to providing parenting skills and health and education services for Arkansas children. She also joined the Board of Directors of the Children's Defense Fund in 1976, and chaired the board from 1986 to 1992.

Throughout her husband's presidency, Mrs. Clinton has used her position as First Lady to champion a host of children's and family issues, focusing on some of our nation's most vulnerable children – those trapped in the foster care system. In the summer of 1995, she convened a meeting of policy experts to examine some of the most pressing issues surrounding adoption, including long-term foster care and institutional barriers within the child welfare system, including cross-racial adoptions.

That year, Mrs. Clinton, together with the President, launched a national public awareness campaign to promote the benefits of adoption and improvements to foster care. During National Adoption Month in 1995, she hosted the first in a series of events on the issue at the White House. She held numerous meetings and public events with adoptive families and children in foster care, and devoted a significant number of speeches and writings to the cause of adoption. Her efforts during this period would culminate in one of her most rewarding achievements, passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, landmark legislation that reformed our nation's child welfare system by putting considerations of children's health and safety first.

Throughout 1995 and 1996, Mrs. Clinton quietly convened a series of meetings with officials at the Department of Health and Human Services, foundation leaders and other policy experts to discuss ideas for reforming foster care and speeding up adoption procedures. Publicly, Mrs. Clinton also pressed for passage of new tax credits for those who adopt and the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, which would remove race or ethnicity as an obstacle to adoption. She also strongly supported an extension of Family and Medical Leave Act benefits to adoptive parents who wished to take time off work to care for their children. Her vocal advocacy helped usher these key bills through Congress.

As a result of her meetings with adoption policy experts, Mrs. Clinton and her staff in 1996 began to formulate specific proposals for legislative reforms. In November, she held a White House forum on adoption that was broadcast live from the Oval Office. At the event, she announced that the President would sign an Executive Order directing his administration to develop a plan to double the number of adoptions by 2002.

Mrs. Clinton was deeply involved in the development of the report and worked closely with Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to craft policies that would ensure the health and safety of the child remained the guiding principles during placement proceedings. The formal report, "Adoption 2002," was unveiled on Valentines Day 1997 and included a series of incentives for states to expedite adoption procedures and limit the amount of time children spend in foster care. The goal was to double the number of children moving into permanent homes from 27,000 a year in 1996 to 54,000 a year by 2002. The report was based on three key principles; that every child deserves a safe, permanent family; that children's health and safety should be the paramount concern; and that foster care is by definition temporary.

With the unveiling of the report, Mrs. Clinton turned to Capitol Hill to pursue legislative reforms. The White House secured bipartisan co-sponsors in the House who introduced a bill based on Mrs. Clinton's recommendations, and she began holding numerous private meetings with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to generate support for the measure. The legislation, backed by Reps. David Camp, R-Mich., and Barbara Kennelly, D-Conn., easily passed the House that summer.

Throughout the fall of 1997, Mrs. Clinton continued to work quietly behind the scenes, holding countless meetings and personally lobbying lawmakers to ensure the bill had bipartisan sponsors in the Senate. She also continued to deliver speeches and hold other events to draw public support for the measure. The First Lady's strong leadership on behalf of the Adoption and Safe Families Act led to its passage on November 14, and it was signed into law four days later. The bill took historic steps to prevent children from languishing in foster care by dramatically speeding up adoption procedures, limiting the amount of time children can spend in foster care to 12 months, removing institutional barriers to adoption and including innovative financial incentives for states to improve adoption rates each year.

The First Lady's most recent efforts on foster care have focused on addressing the unique challenges faced by older, unadopted foster children as they age out of the system. She provided key leadership in the development and enactment of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, a bill designed to assist older teens in foster care as they transition into independent living as adults. She worked very closely with Republican and Democratic sponsors in the House and Senate to shepherd the legislation through Congress. The bill, signed into law in December 1999, will help ensure that young people who leave foster care have the tools they need to succeed, including better educational opportunities, access to health care, training and housing assistance, counseling and other services.

Mrs. Clinton's efforts to make foster care work better, to find and assist adoptive families, and to break down barriers to adoption have transformed our nation's child welfare system. Between 1996 to 1998, the number of adoptions nationwide rose 29 percent and is on pace with the President's goal of 56,000 adoptions in 2002. This is the first significant increase in adoptions since the national foster care program was established nearly 20 years ago.

Attached you will find additional background information, including:

- Remarks by the President and First Lady at Presentation of Adoption 2002 Report (2/14/97)
- Remarks by the President and First Lady at signing of Adoption and Safe Families Act (11/19/97)
- Background press briefing on Adoption and Safe Families Act (11/19/97)
- Fact sheet on Adoption and Safe Families Act (11/19/97)
- Remarks by First Lady on New Efforts to Support Transitioning Foster Care Youth (1/29/99)
- Remarks by the President and First Lady at White House Adoption Event (9/24/99)
- Fact Sheet on Administration Progress Report on Adoption Efforts (9/24/99)
- Remarks by the President and First Lady at signing of Foster Care Independence Act (12/14/99)
- Fact Sheet on Foster Care Independence Act (12/14/99)

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 14, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT PRESENTATION OF ADOPTION 2002 REPORT

The Oval Office

12:51 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: I want to welcome all of you to the White House and wish you a happy Valentine's Day. I am delighted that we are holding this event on a day when we think about all kinds of love, and we are gathered to announce a plan that we hope can bring the love of a permanent family to the hundreds of thousands of children waiting in our foster care system.

Two months ago the President directed Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to investigate the barriers that keep so many of our children in the limbo of foster care. He asked the Secretary to report to him with specific recommendations on how best to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, and how to meet a national goal of doubling the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002.

In a few minutes, Olivia Golden, Acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, will present her department's findings to the President. I'm very impressed by the hard work that went into this report. It is based on extensive interviews, surveys and consultations with placement agencies, adoption and child welfare advocates, and social workers nationwide. I'm particularly pleased that careful attention was paid to the thoughts and observations of adoptive and foster parents because they know better than anyone the strengths and shortcomings of our system.

This report makes it very clear that foster care should never be a permanent solution. No child should grow up in foster care. Children deserve prompt, efficient decision-making from the adults who serve them. They deserve schedules for permanent placement that respect their developmental needs. And they deserve federal leadership to make that happen.

Ensuring the safety and timely placement of a child with a permanent loving family should be the mission of our foster care system. But for too many years this mission has been obscured as too many children have literally grown up or spent the majority of their childhoods in the system. They have led transient lives, moving from one foster family to the next, experiencing few constants but growing case files and dreams for permanent families. We can no longer afford these delays.

In recent years we have learned much about the tremendous influence that adults caring for children in their earliest years can have on their intellectual, neurological, and emotional development. Children who have adults to talk to them, read to them, make them feel secure and loved throughout their earliest years will thrive. And we cannot afford to let any child who could be in such a loving situation go without it.

That is why steps to secure permanent, safe, and loving homes for children, whether they are with their biological families

or others, should begin as soon as a child enters the foster care system, not after four days or five months or six years of shuttling from placement to placement.

We have already witnessed important steps to remedy the situation. Two years ago, the President and Congress made it illegal to deny or delay an adoption simply because the adoptive parents and children were not of the same race. Last year, the administration and Congress strengthened that legislation. The President also signed a \$5,000 tax credit for families who adopt. And families who adopt children with special needs can receive \$6,000.

Decorating the Oval Office today are valentines created by some of the 600 children waiting in Iowa in foster care. Each valentine, sponsored by the Iowa Citizens Foster Care Review Board, tells the story of a child waiting to be adopted. The paper hearts list the age the child came into the foster care system, the age the child became free for adoption, and the number of days they have been waiting for a family.

Every year these valentines are placed on trees at the Iowa State Capitol. This Valentine's Day, the children decided to send their valentines to the White House, as well. Some of them sent letters to accompany their valentines -- letters such as this one: "Dear President, my name is Rollie. I am 12. I live in Iowa. I like to play football and basketball. I've been waiting eight years for an adoptive family. I'm hoping for a family with pets, a brother and a sister, and nice parents."

Let's all work together so that Rollie and thousands of other children waiting in foster care can see their dreams come true.

Now, it is my great pleasure to introduce the acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, Olivia Golden, who will tell us more about today's report.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GOLDEN: Mrs. Clinton, thank you for that introduction and for your leadership. And thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to be here today. Secretary Shalala wished she could be here, and it's an honor for me to be here in her place.

Mr. President, in December you told us that you wanted

to double the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed from foster care by the year 2002. You wanted to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, and you told us to come back in 60 days with a plan for how to do it. Let me tell you what we've done.

To prepare our report to you we consulted with leaders in Congress, in state and local governments, child welfare experts, community leaders and foster and adoptive parents. Hundreds of people talked with us; 200 sent us letters. It was an enormously exciting process, because what we heard was a sense of joy and excitement from all over the country that under the leadership of the President and the First Lady the nation was ready to join together to address this issue. And we learned a tremendous amount from this process. What we learned from this consultation will guide our work on this initiative and on all of our work with children in the child welfare system.

So again, I want to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to do this work.

The report, Adoption 2002, that I have the honor to present today is an action plan to make sure that all of the 450,000 children in foster care have a real chance for a loving, permanent home, and that we're able to meet the President's goal of doubling by the year 2002 the number of children adopted or placed in permanent homes.

Let me give you just a few highlights of the report. The report begins with the 10 principles that we learned from our consultations and that will guide our work. The first, as the First Lady said, is that every child deserves a safe, permanent family. The report commits us to setting goals with every state to double adoptions by the year 2002. And for the first time that we know of in federal child welfare spending, we've put dollars behind results, paying for performance to make sure that states receive incentives if they in fact move ahead on adoption.

The report proposes several major changes in federal legislation to help more children find permanent homes and remove procedural barriers. And it proposes targeted funding for states to help them dismantle procedural and other barriers to permanency. And it proposes activities to break down racial and ethnic barriers to adoption. And finally, the report proposes a comprehensive technical assistance plan to bring the best talent in the nation to help the

courts, state child welfare agencies, community leaders to work together to ensure that children move promptly to a loving permanent home.

What we believe makes this exciting agenda possible is the excitement we've heard from community leaders across the country the partnership and commitment we've received from state and local leaders -- we have support from seven governors for our goals described in the report and we expect many more.

What makes it possible is bipartisan congressional commitment; and, most of all, what makes it possible is the leadership that we've experienced and the nation has experienced from the President and the First Lady. So it's a tremendous honor to be able today to present to you Adoption 2002.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Thank you very much, Olivia. Ladies and gentlemen and boys and girls, thank you all for being here. I also want to say a special word of thanks to some members of Congress who are not here today but who have done an enormous amount of work on this issue, including Senators Rockefeller, Chafee and DeWine, and Congresswoman Kennelly and Congressman Camp.

Let me begin by also saying happy Valentine's Day. All the kids look wonderful. The rest of us look all right, too -- (laughter) -- but the kids look especially wonderful.

I want to thank you, Olivia, for the work you've done. And I want to thank the First Lady for the work she has done on this issue over more than 20 years now. I'll never forget the first conversation we had, shortly we were married, about a case that she had involving a child in foster care who wanted to become an adopted child. I didn't know very much about it before then, and ever since then this issue has been of consuming interest to me because of what I learned through her. And I thank her for that.

We know that our children's fundamental well-being depends upon safety and stability; that without these, children have a very hard time in this complicated, challenging world of ours. We know that far too many of our own children are indeed now in danger in the homes in which they live. The public child welfare system was created to provide a temporary haven for those children, but not to let them languish forever in foster care.

As you heard Olivia say, we have nearly half a million of our children in foster care today. Nearly 100,000 will never return to their original homes. Many of those children still will never know what it's like to live in a real home until they grow up and start their own families. But it does not have to be that way. We can find adoptive and other permanent families for waiting children like these fine children who have joined us today and the children whose valentines you see hanging behind me and here in front.

In December I asked the Department of Health and Human Services to come up with an aggressive legislative and administrative strategy to double the number of children we move from foster care to permanent homes annually by the year 2002, and to move them there much more quickly. I'm proud to say that the Department went to work to produce this blueprint for achieving our goal.

Now we have to move quickly to put this plan into action, so that no child is deprived of a safe and permanent home for even one day longer than necessary. Every agency of every state, every family court, every case worker in the country must understand that children's health and safety are the paramount concerns of the child welfare system, especially when determining whether to remove a child from his or her home, or return them there.

We'll work with Congress to make sure the law explicitly reflects this priority. We'll issue guidelines to the states so there will be no question as to the law's meaning.

Second, to meet the goal of moving 54,000 children into permanent homes in 2002, we'll work with states and set yearly targets. We'll give them, as my balanced budget does, \$10 million a year for the next three years to give them the assistance they need to state agencies, courts and communities to devise such a system. We'll also have \$10 million to establish competitive grants for states to develop model strategies for moving children from foster care to permanent families.

Third, we'll propose legislation to give states bonuses, as Olivia said, for every child that is adopted over the prior year's total, with even larger bonuses when the child has special needs. The balanced budget will start paying for these bonuses, but we know they'll pay for themselves, since foster care costs far more than adoption. This isn't just cost effective -- of course, it's the

right thing to do.

Fourth, to achieve our goal of moving children more quickly, we'll work with Congress to shorten from 18 to 12 months the time a child waits for the first hearing. And we're going to call it a permanency planning hearing, so that there's no mistake as to its purpose.

Fifth, to give credit for model strategies that are working, we'll give national awards for excellence every year in November, National Adoption Month.

Finally, we'll redouble our efforts to make sure no child of one race is deprived of a loving home when a family of another race is prepared to give it. That is illegal and wrong and often hurts our very neediest children. The Department of Health and Human Services will continue to ensure that states are meeting their obligations under this law.

Putting this plan into action today will mean that we are ensuring that no child will languish in foster care when loving families are out there ready, willing and able to open their hearts and their homes. This is just one part of our strategy to guarantee the well-being of our most vulnerable children. By giving states the flexibility to develop their own strategies, we're moving closer to achieving that goal.

I'm proud to announce that we have approved Ohio's request for a waiver in dealing with their child welfare system. This is the fifth of its kind, and there will be more to come. It gives Ohio the authority to design and to test a managed care approach to improve child welfare services and move children out of foster care more quickly.

By working together across party lines at every level of government, in businesses, religious groups, communities, and in our homes, we can make sure that every child in America grows up in a safe and nurturing home. That is a goal every American should be proud to support. That is a gift of love we can make to all of our children. And if you look at the children here today, it's hard to think of anything more important we could be doing to say, Happy Valentine's Day.

Thank you. (Applause.)

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 1999

PRESIDENT CLINTON SIGNS LANDMARK LAW
TO HELP FOSTER CARE YOUTH PREPARE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

December 14, 1999

President Clinton today will sign into law the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. This legislation, based on an initiative proposed by the President and the First Lady, will help ensure that young people who leave foster care get the tools they need to make the most of their lives. It empowers those leaving foster care by providing them better educational opportunities, access to health care, training, housing assistance, counseling and other services. The new law is only the latest instance of the Administration's longstanding commitment to children and families.

FOSTER CARE YOUTH FACE CHALLENGES AS THEY ENTER ADULTHOOD. Nearly 20,000 young people leave foster care each year when they reach age 18 without an adoptive family or other guardian. Without the emotional, social and financial support that families provide, many of these youth find themselves inadequately prepared for life on their own. Studies show that within two to four years of leaving foster care, only half have completed high school, fewer than half are employed, one-fourth have been homeless for at least one night, 30 percent do not have access to needed health care, 60 percent of the women have given birth, and less than one in five are completely self-supporting.

NEW LEGISLATION PROVIDES NEW HOPE FOR THESE YOUTH. Under previous laws, federal financial support for these young people ended just as they were making the transition to independence. The Act the President will sign today authorizes \$700 million over five years to help these young people cross this critical bridge:

Doubling the Federal Independent Living Program. The Independent Living program, run through the states, helps older foster care children earn a high school diploma, participate in vocational training or education, and learn daily living skills such as budgeting, career planning and securing housing and employment. Today's new law doubles the program's funding to \$140 million per year, and invests \$350 million more over five years in these services. Under the new law, states are now required to serve youth up to 21 years old, enabling more young people to obtain a college education. It also enables states to provide time-limited financial assistance to help these youth with living expenses as they develop the skills and education needed to move successfully into the workforce. The Act the President will sign today also renames the program in honor of John Chafee, the late Senator who so effectively championed the needs of children.

Providing Health Insurance. Today, when young people emancipate from foster care, they face numerous health risks, but too often lose their health insurance. The new law grants states the option for these young people to remain eligible for Medicaid up to age 21. Today, HHS will issue guidance to all State Medicaid Directors encouraging them to take up this option.

Honoring America's Heroes. In an unrelated provision, the Act provides a special monthly cash benefit to Filipino veterans who served under the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II if they were eligible for

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and later choose to move outside the United States. Previously, Filipino veterans who were eligible to receive SSI benefits would lose them if they were to return to the Philippines.

A RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION. With today's new law, the Administration adds to an unprecedented record of promoting the well-being of children and providing them permanent, loving homes. In 1998 there were a record 36,000 adoptions from foster care, the first significant increase in the history of the program. From 1996 to 1998, the number of adoptions nationwide rose 29 percent -- from 28,000 to 36,000 -- and is on a pace to meet the President's goal of 56,000 adoptions in 2002. Among the President's other steps to improve child welfare and encourage adoption:

Increasing the Transitional Living Program. Last month the President secured in the budget a 40 percent increase in the Transitional Living Program, which provides funds to local community-based organizations for residential care, life skills training, and other support services to homeless adolescents. The program will now be funded at \$20.7 million.

Enacting the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Based on the Administration's Adoption 2002 report, this landmark law made the health and safety of children a clear priority, provided the first-ever financial incentives for states to increase adoptions, tightened the time frames for making permanent placements of children, and removed other barriers to adoption.

Making Adoption Affordable. In 1996, President Clinton enacted a \$5,000 tax credit for families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the President provided more support for families who adopt with a \$500 per-child tax credit. And under the Family and Medical Leave Act, parents can take time with a newly adopted child without losing their jobs or health insurance.

Breaking Down Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption. New inter-ethnic adoption provisions signed into law by the President ensure that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity.

Giving States Flexibility and Support. The Clinton Administration has given 25 states the authority to test innovative strategies for improving state child welfare systems. The Administration has provided states technical support to improve court operations and grants to support local adoption programs, and has also secured federal funding for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program to serve at-risk children and families.

Using the Internet to Promote Adoption. In November 1998, the President issued a directive to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care. HHS will develop a national Internet site by March 2002.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 24, 1999

PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES FIRST ADOPTION BONUS AWARDS TO STATES AND
UNVEILS REPORT THAT SHOWS ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY IS WORKING
September 24, 1999

Today, the President and First Lady will announce bonus awards of \$20 million to 35 states that have increased the number of children adopted from the public foster care system. These bonuses, awarded for the first time today, were first proposed by President Clinton's Adoption 2002 initiative and included in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

The President also will announce \$5.5 million in grants to innovative programs that remove barriers to adoption, and he unveiled a national progress report on adoption that documents the success of the Administration's strategy. From 1996 to 1998, the number of adoptions nationwide rose 29 percent - from 28,000 to 36,000 - and is on a pace to meet the President's goal of 56,000 adoptions in 2002. This is the first significant increase in adoptions since the national foster care program was established nearly 20 years ago.

INCENTIVE AWARDS SUCCEED IN INCREASING ADOPTIONS. In the Administration's Adoption 2002 proposal and the adoption law of 1997, the President created the first-ever financial incentive for states to increase adoptions of children from the foster care system. Today, the President will release \$20 million in bonus awards to 35 states that in 1998 exceeded their average adoption rate from 1995 to 1997. The \$20 million in bonuses provide for up to \$4,000 per adopted child, and \$6,000 for each child with special needs. In fact, the states' performance in 1998 was so strong that it would have entitled them, under the law, to an additional \$22.5 million.

INNOVATIVE GRANTS REDUCE BARRIERS TO ADOPTION. The President today also will announce \$5.5 million in new awards under the Adoption Opportunities program. This program provides grants to public and private organizations to eliminate barriers to adoption, particularly for children with special needs. This year's grants reward a variety of initiatives, including efforts to increase adoptions of minority children, targeted field research, and awards for collaborative planning to increase adoptions across jurisdictional lines.

REPORT SHOWS CLINTON ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY IS WORKING. Since taking office, the President has championed efforts to make foster care work better, to find and assist adoptive families, and to break down barriers to adoption. Today, the President will receive a progress report from the Department of Health and Human Services that documents the effectiveness of the Administration's strategy.

- Reforming the Child Welfare System. In 1997, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act. This landmark law was based largely on recommendations from the Administration's Adoption 2002 report, which the President requested by executive memorandum in order to meet his goal of doubling adoptions by 2002. The law expedited permanent placement decisions for children, ensured health insurance coverage for all special-needs children in subsidized adoptions, and created the bonus awards released today.

- Making Adoption Affordable for Families. The Small Business Job

Protection Act of 1996, signed by the President in 1996, provides a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This provision helps middle class families for whom adoption - particularly of children with special needs - might have been prohibitively expensive.

- Giving States More Flexibility and Support. The Administration has granted waivers to 20 states and the District of Columbia to test innovative strategies for improving child welfare systems. In addition, it has secured new funds to support state implementation of the 1997 law and has, through the Adoption Opportunities program, supported local initiatives to promote adoption and provide post-adoptive services.

- Using the Internet to Make Adoption Easier. In 1998, the President directed HHS to develop Internet tools to link children in foster care more quickly to possible adoptive families. Secretary Shalala reported that HHS will launch a national web site by September 2001 to break down geographic barriers to adoption.

- Removing Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption. New inter-ethnic adoption provisions, passed as a part of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, help ensure that the adoption process is free of delays and discriminatory practices driven by race, culture and ethnicity. These provisions strengthened the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, which the President signed in 1994.

- Providing Supports for Child Protection and Adoption. The Family and Medical Leave Act, signed by the President in 1993, enables working parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance coverage. The 1996 welfare reform law signed by the President also maintains child protection and adoption guarantees.

NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS. To follow through on this record of achievement, the President and First Lady today will urge Congress to provide new support for young people leaving foster care. Under the current system, federal financial assistance for young people in foster care ends just as they are making the critical transition to independence. The President's FY 2000 budget request increases funding by nearly \$300 million to help these youth secure health care, life skills training, and educational opportunities. With the Administration's strong support, the House has already passed bipartisan legislation to address these needs. The President today urged the Senate to take prompt action on the companion measure and to safeguard the interests of vulnerable young people leaving foster care.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 19, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND FIRST LADY
AT ADOPTION BILL SIGNING

The East Room

1:53 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you and welcome to the East Room. Please be seated. We are delighted to have all of you join us today for this very important event and one that many of you in this room have worked for and looked for for many years.

There are some people that I would like to acknowledge and introduce before we get started. You will hear from the four members of Congress who are here on the stage, Representative Kennelly, Representative Camp, Senator Chafee and Senator Rockefeller. Also attending are Senator Craig, Senator DeWine, Senator Landrieu, Representative Levin, Representative Oberstar, Representative Maloney, and Representative Morella. And I'd like to ask all the members of Congress to please stand. (Applause.)

This was truly a bipartisan piece of legislation. It could not have been passed without the strong support of the members whom you see, including the sponsors who are here on the stage. It was also a work that was very much in the heart of Secretary Donna Shalala and her team from HHS -- Richard Tarplin, Mary Bourdette, and Carol Williams. And I'd like to ask the Secretary and her team to stand please. (Applause.)

There were also a number of members of the White House staff who worked very hard with members of Congress and with members of the HHS contingent, and I'd like to acknowledge just a few of them -- John Hilley, Bruce Reed, Elena Kagan, and in particular Jen Klein and Nicole Rabner. I want to thank all of them. (Applause.)

I'm also pleased that we have Governor Romer of Colorado. We have children, families, advocates, and leaders of the child welfare constituency here in our audience.

Nearly a year ago, the President and I met with children waiting in the foster care system for caring families to call their own. There the President pledged to reform the child welfare system to work better for the children it serves, to put their health and safety first, and to move children more quickly into safe and permanent homes. Today we as a nation make good on that pledge.

And for the thousands of American children who wait for a stable, loving home that will always be there, it is not a moment too soon. Right now there are nearly half a million children in foster care. For most, foster care is a safe haven on the road to a permanent home or back home. Too many, however, make countless detours along the way, shuffling from family to family without much hope that they will ever find permanent parents to love and take care of them. These children who will enter this holiday season unsure about whether the family they celebrate this year will be there with them next year deserve better.

We know it makes a difference for children to have permanent loving homes. It's not only research that tells us this; we know it by our intuition, by our own experience and we have all seen it firsthand. It was here in this room two years ago that a young woman named Deanna -- a child waiting to be adopted in foster care stood up and read a poem about what she wanted in life, and it wasn't real complicated. It is what all of us want. I'm happy that because of that event here in the East Room, she was able to meet a family who did adopt her. And I saw her last year at an event in Kansas City and almost didn't recognize her -- from a shy, withdrawn 13-year-old, she had blossomed into a cheerful, outgoing, confident teenager with a brilliant smile.

This landmark legislation that the President is about to sign will see to it there are more stories like Deanna's. This legislation stands as proof of what we can accomplish when we come together. As we see today, the national government does have an important role to play in reforming our foster care system, and giving guidance to courts and states in offering incentives to speed up and increase the numbers of adoptions, and in making sure that the health and safety of our children is always the first priority.

But we know even more, all Americans have a role and a responsibility. Businesses can make it easier for their employees to adopt a child. And I want to single out Dave Thomas of Wendy's, who has led the way in showing all of us how that can be done. (Applause.)

Religious leaders can help spread the word about the joys of adoptions. Parents thinking about adoption can expand their search to reach out to kids in foster care. And if we reform the system so that it works the way that it should, more Americans will look to American children to adopt and not feel compelled to go overseas to adopt children. (Applause.)

With us today are some extraordinary Americans who have answered this call. This morning, the Department of Health and Human Services observed National Adoption Month by honoring outstanding achievements with the 1997 Adoption 2002 Excellence Awards. Secretary Shalala developed these awards at the request of the President. The winners are dedicated individuals and organizations, both large and small, who have worked to move children out of the foster care system and into permanent, loving homes. Some of them have been at the forefront of this issue for years; some have promoted and supported adoption in their communities; and some are parents who have opened their homes and hearts to our nation's most vulnerable children.

I'd like to ask all the honorees who were honored this morning to please stand. (Applause.) We want to thank you for the work you have done, for the example you have set. And we hope that through these awards, in conjunction with this legislation, there will be many, many more in your ranks in the years to come.

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sue Ann. Thank you, Aaron (phonetic). And I want to thank the Badeau family for showing up. I think it's fair to say it was a greater effort for them than for anyone else here. (Laughter.) I appreciate the rest of your presence. It was easier for me than anybody; I just had to come downstairs. (Laughter.) But I'm grateful that they're here.

Secretary Shalala, I thank you and your staff for your remarkable work on this. And I thank the members of the White House staff, all the

members of Congress who are present here. And especially I thank Senators Rockefeller and Chafee and Congressmen Camp and Kennelly for their work and for what they said here.

Congratulations to the Adoption 2002 Excellence Award winners. I thank all the advocates who are here. And I say a special word of thanks, along with all the others who have said it, to the First Lady, who has been passionately committed to this issue for at least 25 years now that I know. Thank you, Governor Romer, for coming. And thank you, Dave Thomas, for what you've done.

Again let me say to all the members of Congress who are here, Republicans and Democrats alike, I am very grateful for what you've done. This, after all, is what we got in public life for, isn't it?

Before I make my brief remarks, if you'll forgive me and understand, I have to make one public statement today about the situation in Iraq.

As I have said before, I prefer to resolve this situation peacefully, with our friends and allies, and I am working hard to do just that. But I want to be clear again about the necessary objective of any diplomacy now underway. Iraq must comply with the unanimous will of the international community and let the weapons inspectors resume their work to prevent Iraq from developing an arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The inspectors must be able to do so without interference. That's our top line; that's our bottom line. I want to achieve it diplomatically. But we're taking every step to make sure we are prepared to pursue whatever options are necessary.

I do not want these children we are trying to put in stable homes to grow up into a world where they are threatened by terrorists with biological and chemical weapons. It is not right. (Applause.)

It's hard to believe now, but it was just a little less than a year ago when I directed our administration to develop a plan to double the number of children we move from foster care to adoptive homes by the year 2002. We know that foster parents provide safe and caring families for children. But the children should not be trapped in them forever, especially when there are open arms waiting to welcome them into permanent homes.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act, which I am about to sign, is consistent with the work of the 2002 report and our goals. It fundamentally alters our nation's approach to foster care and adoption. And fundamentally, it will improve the well-being of hundreds of thousands of our most vulnerable children. The new legislation makes it clear that children's health and safety are the paramount concerns of our public child welfare system. It makes it clear that good foster care provides important safe havens for our children, but it is by definition a temporary, not a permanent, setting.

The new law will help us to speed children out of foster care into permanent families by setting meaningful time limits for child welfare decisions, by clarifying which family situations call for reasonable reunification efforts and which simply do not. It will provide states with financial incentives to increase the number of children adopted each year. It will ensure that adopted children with special needs never lose their health coverage -- a big issue. Thank you, Congress, for doing that. It will reauthorize federal funding for timely services to alleviate crisis before they become serious, that aid the reunification of families that help to meet post-adoption needs.

With these measures we help families stay together where reunification is possible and help find safe homes for children much

more quickly when it is not. We've come together in an extraordinary example of bipartisan cooperation to meet the urgent needs of children at risk. We put our differences aside, and put our children first.

This landmark legislation builds on other action taken in the last few years by Congress: the Adoption Tax Credit I signed into law August to make adopting children more affordable for families, especially those who adopt children with special needs; the Multiethnic Placement Act, enacted two years ago, ensuring that adoption is free from discrimination and delay, based on race, culture, or ethnicity; and the very first law I signed as President, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or their health insurance.

We have put in place here the building blocks of giving all of our children what should be their fundamental right -- a chance at a decent, safe home; an honorable, orderly, positive upbringing; a chance to live out their dreams and fulfill their God-given capacities.

Now, as we approach Thanksgiving, when families all across our country come together to give thanks for their blessings, I would like to encourage more families to consider opening their homes and their hearts to children who need loving homes. You may not want to go as far as the Badeaus have -- (laughter) -- but they are a shining example of how we grow -- (applause) -- they are a shining example of how we grow when we give, how we can be blessed in return many times over. We thank them and all -- all of the adoptive parents in the country.

For those who are now or have been foster or adoptive parents, I'd like to say thank you on behalf of a grateful nation, and again say at Thanksgiving, let us thank God for our blessings and resolve to give more of our children the blessings they deserve.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

2:19 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 24, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT ADOPTION EVENT

Presidential Hall

10:00 A.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you, and please be seated. And welcome to the White House for a celebration and a wonderful announcement for so many children and families around our country.

I'm delighted that we've been joined by members of Congress, including Senator Carl Levin and Representative Dave Camp and Representative Nancy Johnson and Representative Tom DeLay and Representative Ben Cardin and Representative Maxine Waters.

This is an issue that has been at the real heart of our efforts in the last several years to do what we could to give every child a chance to have a permanent loving home. And there are many people who have played a role in bringing us to this day. I want to acknowledge Olivia Golden and Pat Montoya, from HHS. I want to acknowledge the Brown, the Manis, the Keane and the Vasquez family. Carol Williams, the former Children's Bureau director and a champion of adoption; the many adoption advocates who are here.

And there's one very special champion of foster children who I would like to introduce to you. She is an eight-year-old girl who heard about how many foster children could not afford to use anything but garbage bags for luggage when they were told they had to move. So she decided to collect suitcases for them, and so far she has collected 1,000. And I'd like to ask Makenzi Snyder to stand, please.
(Applause.)

This summer I saw a photograph that reminded me why the work we're doing to promote adoption in our country is so vitally important. It was a picture of a young woman in a green silk evening gown, with high heels and a lace shawl, and you could see the anticipation and excitement in her eyes. That was a picture of 17-year-old Deanna Collins. It was taken by her parents, her adoptive parents, on the night of her high school prom.

Looking at that picture, it was difficult for me to believe that the smiling, confident young woman was the same girl I had welcomed to the White House just four years ago. Back then, she was 13, and she'd already spent eight years in foster care. With her shoulders slumped forward, and her eyes downcast, she told the audience gathered in the East Room for National Adoption Month about her dreams of living in a place she could call home, with a room of her own and a family she could love.

Not long after that visit, Deanna's dream came true. And it's been my privilege to watch this young woman's life transformed by her adoption. With the love of her parents and the confidence that comes from knowing that, indeed, she always will have a place to call

home, no matter what else happens to her in life, she is thriving. She's a senior in high school, now, and plans to go to college and major in social work.

Every time I need inspiration for our fight to strengthen and increase adoption in America, I think of Deanna. I think of so many of the other children whom I've know. I think of the adult adoptees, who are telling us their stories, including Washington D.C.'s own Mayor, Tony Williams, who told us at another Adoption Month commemoration last year how, at the age of three, he was about to be declared unadoptable, and institutionalized by the state, when Virginia Williams opened her arms and welcomed him into her family.

Mrs. Williams is here today, and all of us are grateful for the love you gave that young three-year-old boy, and the second chance you gave to him. And I'd like to ask Mrs. Williams to please stand. (Applause.)

But we can't gather today and celebrate Dianna or Mayor Williams without thinking of the thousands of foster children in America who are still waiting for the same chance, either to go back safely to their own families where they will be given the love and the attention and the discipline that every child needs, or be given the chance in a new family.

For more than 25 years, as an advocate and an attorney, I have tried to work with so many others to address the challenges of foster care and adoption. I've represented perspective parents in court. I've represented foster children. I've worked on behalf of changes in legislation. I've listened to the frustrations that social workers and judges and police officers and parents and others feel about the red tape that so often keeps them from sharing their lives with children who badly need their love.

I've met foster children who have spent childhoods feeling alone and unloved, moving from home to home. Children such as the teenage boy the President and I met in the Oval Office two years ago. When we asked him where he lived, he looked down and he said, "All over Fairfax County."

In many ways, giving more of our children the chance to know the love and support of a family is a personal crusade for us. I know that many of you have been at the meetings and the roundtables and the celebrations of National Adoption Month that we've held here at the White House. And I've been very pleased and grateful to work with so many advocates like Wendy's founder, or Dave Thomas, who as an adopted child himself has dedicated much of his time and personal resources to promoting adoption.

With each meeting I became, along with all of you, more and more convinced that it was past time to reform our foster care system, to identify and eliminate the obstacles to change the placement procedures so that we could expedite the movement of children either home or into new homes.

We've made a lot of progress. We've helped adoptive parents carve out the time they need to care for their new children. The first bill the President signed into law was the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows new parents -- including adoptive parents -- to take time off and care for their children without fear of losing their jobs or health insurance.

We've put an end to racial discrimination in adoption. The President signed and strengthened the Multiethnic Placement Act, prohibiting adoption agencies from keeping children of one race from the

safe and loving arms of parents of another. We have made adoptions more affordable, putting in place tax credits for new adoptive families. And we're taking steps to use the Internet to help match waiting children with loving homes.

And most importantly, we've crafted legislation to dramatically reduce the amount of time a child spends in foster care. We've said that no child would have to wait longer than 12 months -- down from 18 months -- before the court considered his or her permanent placement. For the first time, we have offered states financial incentives to move more children out of foster care and into permanent homes. And we have given states the flexibility to try new strategies to accomplish that goal.

And we set an ambitious national goal of doubling the number of children adopted annually, from 28,000 to 56,000, by the year 2002. And though there were some moments when it looked like it wouldn't pass, we fought hard to make the Adoption and Safe Families Act the law of the land in 1997. In a few minutes, the President will offer new evidence of our continued success.

But we still have more to do. Two weeks after the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, I went to California to meet with a group of young people, who were aging or had already aged out of foster care. They told me about their struggles -- about being forced out of foster homes on their 18th birthdays; about living in homeless shelters, seeking sleep in emergency rooms while trying to finish school; about getting sick and having no one to turn to for medical care or comfort. These young people are our responsibility. We cannot ignore the potential of any one of these children.

One of the young women I met that day in California is now a student at the Yale Law School. And that's why I was pleased to announce a new proposal in the President's balanced budget, to help former foster children make the transition to independence. And I'm very happy that the House, under the bipartisan leadership of Representative Nancy Johnson and Representative Ben Cardin, both of whom are with us today, has passed the bill that will allow former foster children to remain on Medicaid until age 21 and will -- (applause) -- and will give them the extra help they need to finish high school, find work and a place to live.

Now I would call on the Senate to take action on the companion bill that is sponsored by Senators Chafee and Rockefeller. There is no reason we cannot pass this bill this year for the good of all of our children. And I hope every one of us here will do everything we can to make sure that the Senate does that, and then we can have, I think, another celebration to sign a bill that will make such a difference in the lives of older children in foster care.

The progress we celebrate today is due to the work of countless people, and many of you are here, and others are working on the front lines around our country and others are caring for children who are newly adopted in their homes.

I remember very well that a few years ago on Mothers Day, we had a roundtable for mothers and their adopted children. And at the end of the discussion, I went around the room asking the children if they had anything else to say, because some of them had not yet spoken up, and I didn't want them to leave and not have been heard. The final boy to speak looked up at the woman sitting next to him and said quietly, "I just want to thank my mother."

With that simple statement, and that adoring look, he summarized what all of us had been trying to say all afternoon. So,

to all of those of you who have been the mothers and fathers that have helped move our children into homes, and into a sense of love and security, we say thank you -- for opening your homes and your hearts.

And now it's my privilege to introduce someone who has done just that -- who with her husband, Steven, and her son Sean, have just finalized the adoptions of Sarah and Brian. Please join me in welcoming Dawn Keane. (Applause.)

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. When we have events here in this room, with people who have come to share their experiences, very often I feel like a fifth wheel. I think everything that needs to be said has already been said. (Laughter.) But I want to begin by thanking Dawn Keane for her wonderful statement; her husband, Steve; and Sean, Brian and Sarah. They're beautiful children. They did a good job at the microphone, didn't they? (Laughter.) I want to thank Olivia Golden and Pat Montoya for their work at HHS on this important issue.

I'd like to thank this remarkable bipartisan delegation from the House of Representatives here -- Dave Camp and Nancy Johnson and Ben Cardin and Maxine Waters, Sandy Levin and Congressman DeLay. This may be the only issue all six of these people agree on. (Laughter.) And -- Tom's nodding his head up and down. (Laughter.)

I'll tell you a funny story -- this is a true story. The other day I was reading a profile of Tom DeLay in the newspaper. And I got about halfway through, and he was giving me the devil for something; you know, he's very good at that. (Laughter.) And he started grinding on my golf game and saying that I didn't count my scores and all this, and I was getting really angry. (Laughter.) And then I get to the next part of the story, and it talks all about his experience and his commitment to adoption and to foster children, and the personal experience that he and his wife had. And my heart just melted. And all of a sudden, I didn't care what he said about my golf game. (Laughter.)

And I say that to make this point: The Keane family -- the Manis, the Brown, the Vasquez families who are behind me today -- they represent what we all know is basic and fundamental about our families and our country -- more important than anything else we can think of. And they open their homes and their hearts to children, and they open our hearts to them -- and to each other as we work for more stories like those we celebrate today.

I'd also like to say a special hello to the Badeau family. Some of you may remember this. Two years ago, almost, Sue and Hector Badeau joined us at the White House when I signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act. They brought 18 of the 22 children they have adopted. Now, you need to know that, as if they didn't have enough to deal with, this summer they also welcomed into their home a family of eight Kosovar refugees. So if you ever need proof that there's no limit to human goodness, you can look at Sue and Hector Badeau.

I'd like for them to stand. Where are they? There you go. They've got some of their kids here. Stand up. (Applause.) Thank you. God bless you. Thank you. (Applause.)

I would also like to say just a very brief word to Hillary. You heard her tell the story of her involvement in this, but when we were in law school together, before we were married, she was talking to me about how messed up the foster care and adoption laws were in the country, how many ridiculous barriers there were. And not long after

we moved to Little Rock and I became Attorney General of our state, she took a case for a young couple who had had a child from foster care for three years that they desperately wanted to adopt -- this is over 20 years ago. And together they changed the law in our state so that foster parents could be considered for adoption, something that used to be verboten in most states in the country.

So I've watched her work on these issues now for almost 30 years, and I am very grateful that one of the many blessings of our time in the White House has been the chance to make a difference on these adoption and foster care issues, and I thank her for making it possible. (Applause.)

Finally, let me say, again, I want to say a special word of thanks to the members of Congress in both parties who have come to this event today. We have had a raging, often stimulating, occasionally maddening, debate on what should be the role of government over the last five years in this town. But we have all agreed that government has a role to try to protect children, but to facilitate the most rapid, reasonable, orderly process for both foster care and for transition to adoption.

Hillary said that the House had adopted this provision to let kids coming out of foster care keep their Medicaid until they're 21. I'll just give you one more example of how these issues unify us. Within a 36-hour period, about six months ago, my cousin, who runs the public housing unit in the little town where I was born in Arkansas -- which has 8,000 or 10,000 people -- came up to a HUD conference. And she spent the night with me and were having breakfast, drinking coffee, and she says, you know, you've got to do something about these foster kids. They keep going out of the -- they come out of the foster homes and they've got no money and they need to do some things. And then the next day, literally within 36 hours, I'm talking to these people from New York City who tell me it's maybe the biggest social problem they have now, with all these kids coming out of foster care.

So this is an issue that spans the experience of America, the whole sweep of it. And I'm very grateful -- I'm grateful that we have this consensus and I'm grateful that they've acted on it. I urge the Senate to follow suit.

Now, you've already heard about the things that we're doing to try to double the number of children we help move into permanent homes. We have new evidence that these efforts are bearing fruit. The Department of Health and Human Services has just given me a report that tracks our progress in meeting our adoption goals. It shows that the number of adoptions from the foster care system increased from 28,000 in 1996, to 36,000 in 1998. That is the first significant increase in adoptions since the National Foster Care Program was created almost 20 years ago.

Now, that's an amazing thing. That's more than -- it's about a 30-percent increase. That's a very impressive increase in two years. And we are well on our way to meeting our goal of 56,000 in 2002, doubling the number. For all of you that had anything to do with that, I say thank you. You should be very proud of yourselves.

Now, if you look at this HHS report -- and I urge those of you who are interested in it to actually get it and scan it, at least -- you will see how much this bipartisan cooperation I talked about and the work that's being done by people in the trenches to clear away the barriers is making a difference -- a stunning example of what we can do when we put our children first. You will see that we have acted on each and every one of the 11 recommendations set forth in the original Adoption 2002 report. Breaking down barriers to adoptions, ensuring

accountability, rewarding innovation, supporting adoptive families themselves.

One of the key recommendations we adopted into law in 1997 was to give states, for the first time, financial incentives to help children move from foster to adoptive homes. Under the new bonus system, states are entitled to up to \$4,000 or \$6,000, depending on whether the child has special needs, for each adoption above their previous average.

Today, I have the honor of presenting the first round of these awards, worth \$20 million, to 35 of our 50 states. The good news is that these states did this, using creative new approaches and exceeding their own high goals. Illinois, for example -- listen to this -- the state of Illinois increased its options by 112 percent -- 112 -- yes, you can clap for Illinois. That's good. (Applause.)

Now, the bad news, if you can call it that, is that even though we believed this would work, we didn't think it would work this well this quickly -- (laughter) -- and we didn't put enough money in to give all the states all the money to which they're entitled. So I hope we can rectify that, because I think we all think that we want to give the states the incentives to figure out how best to do this.

But the fact is, I think all of us are very proud of what these states have done for some of their most vulnerable citizens. And I look forward to working with the Congress to make up this shortfall and get the other 15 states above their goals as well.

Today, I am also awarding \$5.5 million in adoption opportunity grants to outstanding public and private organizations in 16 of our states to help fund research and new ways of increasing inter-state adoptions, and adoptions of minority children. Together these efforts will help to accelerate the remarkable progress we've seen.

Now, again let me say, I think the big goal we ought to have for this legislative session is to get the Senate to follow the lead of the House, and schedule a vote on the Chafee-Rockefeller bill to ensure that the foster children are not cast out in the cold when their time in foster care ends. I hope -- I know if we can get it up and get it on the calendar, it will pass with the same overwhelming bipartisan support that we've seen in the House. So I urge all of you to do what you can to make sure that that is a big priority for the Senate, and I will do my part.

Together, we can help our foster children -- all of them -- first grow up in good homes, and, if they turn 18 as foster children, to make a good transition from transit to independence -- with health care, education, counseling and housing.

Now, ultimately, let me say the credit in all this does not really belong to all of the political leaders, even though they've worked very hard, all of us have together. It does not belong to all the public servants, even though there is a real new attitude, I think, in the organizations, the social services organizations, to try to do the right thing and move this along.

But none of this will work if there aren't good people in every community like the Keanes, the Manises, the Browns, the Vasquezes, the Badeaus, who are willing to give a child unconditional love and a good upbringing. They are the proof of the unlimited goodness of the human heart. All the rest of us are trying to do is to unleash it. And we need to keep right on doing that.

Thank you and God bless you all. (Applause.)

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT FOSTER CARE EVENT

Presidential Hall

5:45 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: Welcome to the White House, and please be seated. This is a truly wonderful day. In a few minutes the President will sign into law landmark legislation that will strengthen our foster care system, and give hope and help to thousands of young people struggling to make a safe transition to adulthood and independence.

None of this would have been possible without so many of you in this room. I want to thank Secretary Donna Shalala and her team at HHS, including Mary Burdette and Pat Montoya; and former commissioner, Carol Williams. I want to thank many members of Congress, and particularly those who are here with us today -- Senator Rockefeller and Senator Collins, Senator Chafee, and Representative Cardin.

I want to thank Mayor Williams and his mother, Virginia, who welcomed him into her family when he was 3 years old and authorities were about to declare him unadoptable. They are among the best advertisements for the rewards and possibilities of adoption in America.

I want to thank the Child Welfare League of America, the Children's Defense Fund, and all of the tireless child advocates who work to raise awareness about this issue. The Casey Family Program and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have give great support to young people in transition.

And I'd also like very much to thank someone who I'm sure is with us in spirit, the late Senator John Chafee. (Applause.) On the Friday before he died, I called Senator Chafee to wish him a happy birthday. I also managed to do a little lobbying for the Foster Care Independence Act, which had hit a few roadblocks in the Senate. By the end of our conversation, I think we were both feeling reenergized and inspired to work even harder for the young people who were counting on this bill.

I understand that one of his last instructions to his staff was to set up meetings with senators he felt could be swayed to support the bill. We all know that had he lived, John Chafee would not have rested until he had won all of the votes he needed. So we are very grateful today to be joined by his colleagues and, particularly, his son, Senator Lincoln Chafee.

Since the President took office we have seen a transformation in America's efforts to strengthen our foster care and adoption systems. With the Family and Medical Leave Act, we've helped adoptive parents, and all new parents, take time off to care for their children without fear of losing their jobs or their health insurance. We've put an end to racial discrimination in adoption, prohibiting agencies from denying qualified parents of one race to adopt a child of another.

In 1997, we passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which

cut dramatically the amount of time a child can spend in foster care, and set an ambitious goal of doubling the number of annual adoptions by the year 2002. And, as the President was able to announce just a few months ago, in September, we are well on our way to meeting that goal.

But it wasn't long after we passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act that we recognized we needed now to turn our efforts to a new challenge: helping those young people, who never did have the opportunity either to return home or be placed in a permanent family, fulfill their promise in adulthood.

Now, for many Americans, the 18th birthday is an important one. Turning 18 means you can vote. It means you can often go away to get a job or to school. But it should never mean that you're left on your own. For too many young people, turning 18 has been just the beginning of a lonely and sometimes harrowing journey toward adulthood. Just half of all young people who have aged out of foster care complete high school. Fewer than one in three have health care coverage. One in four have been homeless.

Two years ago, I went to California to meet a group of young people who had aged out of foster care. They told me about being forced out of their foster homes on their birthdays; about staying in a cold dorm room alone during the holidays because they had nowhere to go; about getting sick and having no insurance to get any medical care; about having literally no one to call for any kind of help.

They reminded me of the many small things we all take for granted in our own families. One young woman said to me, you know, it's almost Thanksgiving, and I have no one to call and ask how to bake a turkey.

I've been very moved and humbled by the resilience and determination I've seen in the young people I've met. Some of them are standing behind me. One is Joy Warren, who spent all of her teen years in foster care. Yet, she still found the commitment and strength not only to continue her education in college, but to attend the law school and become a powerful voice for foster children around America.

I think of Terry Harak, whom I had the honor of meeting at the White House last January. On her 18th birthday, in the middle of her senior year, she found herself without foster care, without a job and without a place to call home, because the rule has been you're out of foster care if you turn 18 or you finish high school, whichever happens first.

But Terry didn't give up. She spent the night at teachers' and friends' houses and metro terminals, even in hospital emergency rooms. And every morning she would wake up and get herself to school. And last June she graduated and today she is working and is a student in college.

But for every Terry or every Joy or any of the other success stories behind me, think of all those young people who don't finish high school and who risk slipping through the cracks of our society. That is why, last winter, I was very pleased to unveil a new proposal in the President's budget that would extend the foster care safety net to the young people who have aged out of the foster care system, but still need our help. And today I'm very pleased that that bill is about to become law.

The Foster Care Independence Act recognizes one fundamental principle: All of us must take responsibility for helping these young people build lives worthy of their spirit and potential. From this day forward we say to all Americans, no young person, especially those who

have not known the support of a safe, loving, permanent family, should have to make the passage to adulthood alone.

This has been a truly bipartisan achievement. And I want to thank everyone in Congress who helped, the former foster children who stepped forward to make their stories known, the newspapers and television stations that publicized their plight, the researchers who backed up their heartbreaking stories with hard statistics, and the advocates and private citizens who lobbied the Congress. In this season of giving, I can think of no better gift to give our children and our future.

Now I'm very proud to introduce two people who can tell us why this law is so important. Alfred Perez is one of the eloquent young people I met two years ago in California. He will speak first. He will be followed by Kristi Jo Frazier, of Cincinnati, Ohio. Both of them will tell us more about their challenges, and even more importantly, about their capacity to persist, their resilience, and their triumphs.

Please welcome Alfred Perez. (Applause.)

* * * *

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you, please be seated. At this moment, about all I can think of is, Merry Christmas. (Laughter.)

Senator Rockefeller, Senator Collins, Representative Cardin, thank you all for being here. And, Senator Chafee, thank you for being here, and with you, the spirit of your father, for all his great work on this.

I want to say a special word of thanks to our Mayor, Tony Williams, and his mom, Mrs. Virginia Williams. He has become America's Exhibit A of the potential for foster care success. He is a good man and she is a magnificent woman, and we thank them for being here. Thank you. (Applause.)

I thank Secretary Shalala and all of her staff. And I thank Alfred Perez and Kristi Jo Frazier, and the other young people behind me, for whom they spoke. They spoke so well and so bravely and so frankly. What they have achieved in their own lives is truly heroic, and we should all be very grateful that they are determined to make that kind of difference in the lives of other young people. f

I want to thank the groups that have done so much to champion the cause of foster children -- the Child Welfare League of America, the Children's Defense Fund, the Annie Casey Foundation, the Casey Family Program. I want to thank especially -- I won't mention them, but they know who they are -- the people who have come up to me personally and lobbied me on this issue over the last couple of years. (Laughter.)

I've got a cousin that's been a friend of mine over 50 years, all my life; we were little kids together. She runs a public housing program in the little town in Arkansas where we were born. And she came up here to a HUD conference on kids aging out of foster care. And she spent the night with me at the White House. I got up the next morning -- I never know, you know, what's on her mind -- this is about a year ago. And she said, Bill, you have got to do something about these kids that are aging out of foster care. She said, it's a huge problem in New York and California, but believe it or not, it's a problem at home, too. And nobody's doing anything about it. I want to thank all those people, and they know who they are.

And most of all, I want to thank Hillary. (Applause.) When we were in law school, she worked at the Yale Child Studies Center. Her

first job was with what became the Children's Defense Fund. When I became governor, in my first term she founded the Arkansas Advocates for Families and Children. She has always cared more about the welfare of all of our children than anything else, and our mutual responsibilities to them. And she challenged us a long time ago not to forget those foster children who leave the system each year with no financial or emotional support, no one to turn to. She put a lot of herself into getting this bill passed.

Hillary likes to quote the Chilean poet and teacher, Gabriela Mistral, about our responsibility to children: "Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are formed, his mind is developed. To him, we cannot say 'tomorrow.' His name is 'today.'"

We are here today because all of you, and especially the members of Congress from both parties, stood as one to say that America's foster children can finally have the name, 'today.'

The Foster Care Independence Act expands access to health care, education, housing and counseling for young people who must leave foster care when they turn 18. For the very first time, states will be able to pay housing costs and health insurance for people under 21.

The bill also gives states more resources and flexibility to help former foster children finish high school and go on to college; to help young people get jobs and vocational training; to provide counseling for young people learning to live on their own -- you've already heard how important that is -- and above all, to make sure young adults leaving foster care know they are not out there alone.

The bill makes \$700 million available to the states over five years under very flexible conditions. I challenge the states to use every penny of it. And I know I can depend upon the advocates here -- (laughter) -- to make sure they do.

You also have to help the states, though -- to design good programs, to implement them so the money will be spent with maximum impact. We simply cannot afford to have our high school students sleeping in metro stations, as some of these young people had to do.

We cannot afford to lose our future entrepreneurs and teachers and lawyers to the kinds of obstacles the young people behind me have faced. We can't afford to give up on the future, and these young people are a big part of our future, and our shared responsibility.

We have tried to help America's most vulnerable children grow up healthy and safe, to make the transition into happy, productive adults. We've tried to encourage adoption so that we can end the sadness of young people shuttling from house to house and never knowing a home. We've made adoptions easier and more affordable, given states more flexibility, passed incentive programs for states to promote adoption. These worked so well we actually ran out of money to reward the states. (Laughter.)

I'm pleased that this bill also authorizes additional funds that program needs, because it is working. Our most recent figures show that adoptions are up 29 percent, the first significant increase in two decades. (Applause.)

Now, when we get to the end of the session, sometimes we have to combine a bunch of things in bills, just to get all our work done. And I want to mention one other thing this bill does that is unrelated to young people aging out of foster care or to adoption. This bill includes a provision to honor and assist veterans from other lands who fought with and as a part of the United States Armed Forces during World

War II. It creates a special cash benefit under Social Security for veterans who want to leave the United States and return to their homelands.

We have 10 such veterans, 10 Filipino veterans, who are here with us today. I want to thank them for their service, and I ask them to stand and be recognized. We thank you. (Applause.)

So this bill keeps a promise to our children and a promise to our veterans. It was passed with overwhelming support from both parties, proving that we can put partisanship aside, and when we do, it's good for America.

I hope that we will see more of this in the new year. I hope that we can use the historic millennial year to take the rest of the steps we need to deal with the aging of America, by securing Social Security and Medicare, to give our children health coverage, to raise the minimum wage, to pass the common-sense legislation on gun safety and hate crimes, to do the things that we need to do to support working family, including the patients' bill of rights.

These young people here should give us all a lot of courage -- and a lot of heart. They represent, out of the most difficult circumstances, the very best not only of our country, but of what is at the core of human nature. And in this special season for so many of the world's great religious faiths, we should be very grateful for the gifts they have given us, the gifts they will give us, and the gifts so many other children will be able to give because of this legislation.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Now I'd like to ask the members of Congress to come up here, we'll sign the bill.

(The bill is signed.) (Applause.)

END 6:20 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 19, 1997

PRESS BRIEFING BY
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR
DOMESTIC POLICY JENNIFER KLEIN

The Briefing Room

12:46 P.M. EST

MR. TOIV: Good afternoon. As you know, the President is going to sign the adoption legislation today, and here to brief on that is Jennifer Klein, who is Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, works closely with the First Lady's Office on these issues.

MS. KLEIN: As Barry said, today the President is going to sign historic legislation to change the nation's child welfare system. It's a fitting time to do this because November is National Adoption Month. The bill passed Congress with really hard work on both sides of the aisle and intense work by the administration and overwhelming bipartisan support.

I want to just take a step backward and tell you where this started. First and foremost, the First Lady has been committed to this issue for more than 25 years and has really been a leading force in the administration on adoption and child welfare and particularly on many of the provisions that are actually in this bill. A little less than a year ago, the President issued an executive memorandum directing Secretary Shalala to come back within 60 days with specific recommendations on strategies to move children from foster care to permanent homes and to double the number of children adopted or permanently placed by the year 2002.

The report came back to the President on February 14 of this year and it outlined a very ambitious agenda with three key principles -- the first was that every child deserves a safe, permanent family; second, that children's health and safety should be the paramount concern; and third, that foster care is not -- is by definition a temporary situation, not a place for children to grow up.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act that the President is going to sign today reflects those principles and includes many of the specific recommendations in that report. First, in terms of the goal, the bill actually in its preamble makes very clear that the health and safety of children must underlie all decisions in the child welfare system. And there's a number of provisions to that end.

A key one is the clarification of the reasonable efforts standard. The law both reaffirms the importance of making reasonable efforts to reunify families before children are placed in an adoptive or other permanent placement. But it also makes clear that there are certain circumstances where the child's safety is at stake where states are not required to keep children with their parents, such as cases where the child has been abandoned or tortured or chronically abused. At the same time, the legislation also reauthorizes the Family Preservation and Family Support Services program, which provides services to help

families stay together whenever possible.

Second, the legislation ensures that foster care is temporary, as it should be. It sets time limits and it promotes the adoption of children who can't return to their homes. In that vein, it includes the President's plan to provide financial incentives to states to increase the number of children who are adopted each year, and it authorizes \$20 million for each of five years to do that.

And in addition, the time that children must wait for hearings is shortened. Currently, there is an 18-month length of time for children before any permanency hearing is held. That's shortened to 12, and even shortened further for children who have been in the foster care system for a longer period of time. And finally, the law ensures that children with special needs will keep health insurance when they are adopted. Those are the outlines of the bill, and I'm happy to take any questions you have.

Q Don't you expect all of this to go through court litigation to actually take children away from their parents? I mean, I'm speaking from a lack of knowledge, but wouldn't there be all these obstacles every inch of the way?

MS. KLEIN: Well, the purpose of this bill is actually to help courts do their job better. For example, the reasonable effort standard that I mentioned, that's a standard that has been imposed in law, and in many cases, although this was not the intention of that provision which came into law in 1980, it has prevented courts from actually getting children moving to the right place, either back with their birth parents or in another situation if that's not going to work. And what this law does is clarify that standard so courts have more of a clear direction of what to do and how to do it more quickly.

Q There's a move in some states to restrict adoption to married couples only. Does the President have any thoughts on any restrictions that should be placed on who adopts?

MS. KLEIN: We haven't addressed that yet.

Q Does he intend to?

MS. KLEIN: I think the President feels strongly that -- first of all, I think that's a state decision. But, second of all, that states decide who the appropriate families for adoptive children to go to, and the most important thing is to look from the perspective of the child, of where that child is going to be the most safe and loved.

Q Who decides that?

MS. KLEIN: Basically, that's a state decision.

Q Is there a special system set up to check and make sure that more children are getting adopted? How are you going to monitor this law?

MS. KLEIN: Part of what was in Adoption 2002, the President's report, which is now in this law, is to set a goal of doubling the number of children that are adopted by the Year 2002. Last year it was 27,000 children by 2002; it would be 54,000 children out of the foster care system. And one of the things that's part of that provision is a tracking system. And it's actually sort of interesting because it's the first time there's every been performance-based standards in the child welfare system.

Q Were there federal adoption laws before this one?

MS. KLEIN: Yes. The first federal adoption law, the one before this, which was also the first, was passed in 1980. Thank you.

END

12:55 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the First Lady

For Immediate Release

January 29, 1999

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
ANNOUNCES NEW EFFORTS TO SUPPORT TRANSITIONING FOSTER CARE YOUTH

January 29, 1999

Today at the White House, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, accompanied by Mrs. Tipper Gore and Secretary Donna Shalala, announces that the President's FY 2000 budget will include \$280 million over five years in new support for young people who leave our nation's public foster care system at age 18 without an adoptive family or other permanent relationship.

Foster Care Youth Reaching Adulthood Face Tough Challenges. Nearly 20,000 young people leave foster care each year having reached the age of 18 without an adoptive family or other permanent relationship. Today, federal financial support for these young people ends just as they are making the critical transition to independence. Without the emotional, social and financial support that families provide, many of these youth are not adequately prepared for life on their own. Studies show that within two to four years of leaving foster care, only half have completed high school, fewer than half are employed, one-fourth have been homeless for at least one night, 30 percent did not have access to needed health care, 60 percent of the young women have given birth, and less than one-in-five are completely self-supporting.

New Support For Youth Leaving Foster Care. The President's FY 2000 budget will include \$280 million over five years to provide a framework for enhanced federal support to these young people:

Increasing the Federal Independent Living Program by 50 Percent. The Independent Living Program, run through the States, assists older foster care children to prepare for independence by helping them to earn a high school diploma, participate in vocational training or education, and learn daily living skills such as budgeting, career planning and securing housing and employment. Since 1992, the program's funding has been frozen at \$70 million. The President's budget will increase the program by 50 percent, investing \$175 million over five years in these services.

Offering Time Limited Economic Support. Young people often transition from foster care with no economic support. The President's budget will include \$50 million over four years to create new competitive grants to States to complement the Independent Living program services by providing time-limited financial support for these young people as they develop the skills and education needed to move into the workforce. Providing Health Insurance. Today, when young people emancipate from foster care, they face numerous health risks, but too often lose their health insurance. The President's budget will propose that these young people remain eligible for Medicaid up to age 21. His budget will include \$50 million over five years for this purpose.

Increasing the Transitional Living Program. The President's budget will include a 33 percent increase in the Transitional Living program, which provides competitive funds to local community-based organizations for residential care, life skills training, and other support services to homeless adolescents, ages 16-21. The program

is currently funded at \$15 million; the President's budget will increase that funding by \$5 million for FY 2000.

CLINTON ADMINISTRATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS
ON FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION
January 29, 1999

Today's announcement builds on a deep commitment by the President, the First Lady, and the Administration to facilitate adoptions and improve the child welfare system. Since taking office, President Clinton has championed efforts to make foster care work better for the children it serves, to find and assist adoptive families, and to break down financial, racial, geographic and bureaucratic barriers to adoption:

- Achieving Landmark Legislative Reform. On November 19, 1997, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, reforming our nation's child welfare system and making it clear that the health and safety of children must be the paramount concerns of state child welfare services. This landmark legislation was based in large part on the recommendations of the Clinton Administration's Adoption 2002 report, which the President requested by executive memorandum on December 14, 1996, to meet his goals of doubling adoptions and permanent placements by the year 2002 and moving children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes. The Act tightened time frames for making permanent placement decisions for children and ensured health insurance coverage for all special needs children in subsidized adoptions. Also, it created new financial incentives for states to increase adoptions, and continued funding for services to keep families together when it is appropriate and safe.

- Making Adoption Affordable for Families. In 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, which provides a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This provision has alleviated a significant barrier to adoption, helping middle class families for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive and making it easier for families to adopt children with special needs. Since President Clinton took office, the number of children with special needs who were adopted with federal adoption assistance has risen by over 60 percent. In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, President Clinton ensured more support for families who adopt children with the \$500 per-child tax credit.

- Giving States Flexibility and Support. To test innovative strategies to improve state child welfare systems, the Clinton Administration has granted waivers to 18 states, giving them more flexibility in tailoring services to meet the needs of children and families. In addition, the Administration has provided states with enhanced technical support and helped improve court operations. The President secured \$20 million in FY 1999 in new funds to support state efforts to implement the new adoption law. In addition, through the Adoption Opportunities program, the President has supported state and local innovative demonstration projects to promote adoption, provide post-adoptive services, and build new public-private partnerships. To prevent children from entering foster care in the first place, in 1993 the Clinton Administration enacted and secured federal funding for the Family Preservation and Support Program (renamed in 1997 the Preserving Safe and Stable Families Program) to help states, local governments, and service providers develop effective programs to serve children and families at risk.

- Using the Internet to Promote Adoption. In November, 1998, the President issued a new directive to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care. Effective use of the

Internet will help to meet the President's goal of doubling, by the year 2002, adoptions and other permanent placements from the public child welfare system.

- Breaking Down Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption. New inter-ethnic adoption provisions, passed as a part of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, ensure that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity by strengthening the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994.

- Providing Supports for Child Protection and Adoption. In 1993, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act, enabling parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance. In addition, the welfare reform legislation signed by the President maintained the guarantee of child protection and adoption, and did not reduce funds for child welfare, child abuse, and foster care and adoption services.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 1996

RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
TO THE NATION

The Oval Office

10:06 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Today we're taking important new steps to make adoption easier and to move children out of foster care faster. These efforts will help to give even more children what every child needs and deserves, loving parents, and a strong and stable home.

I'm delighted to be joined in the Oval Office today by a remarkable group of children and parents who know firsthand the tremendous possibilities of adoption; and by the First Lady who has worked so long and hard on this issue and whose efforts have made today possible.

I'm especially pleased to be able to take this action now, in this season of hope and light. The holidays we celebrate this month teach us that through faith and love we can truly repair the world. I can think of no better way to fulfill the promise of this season than to bring a child into a family and a family to a child.

There are more than 450,000 children in the nation's foster care system. They are placed there because of abuse, neglect or a home life that is neither safe, nor secure. While most of these children eventually return to their original homes, nearly 100,000 of them simply don't have that option. Those children wait far too long, typically three years or more, to find permanent homes and families to love them.

Promoting adoption has been at the heart of our administration's efforts to protect our children and strengthen our families. Earlier this year I was proud to sign a \$5,000 tax credit to help families adopt children. We put an end to racial preferences for adoption. No longer can laws keep children of one race from nurturing arms of adoptive parents of another. This is a good start, but we must do more.

That is why I have just signed a presidential directive with a clear goal: We will double the number of children we move from foster care to permanent homes, from 27,000 a year today, to 54,000 a year by the year 2002. With this effort we're saying no child should be trapped in the limbo of foster care; no child should be uncertain about what the word "family" or "parents" or "home" mean, particularly when there are open arms waiting to welcome these children into safe and strong households where they can build good, caring lives.

As part of this initiative, I'm directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, who is also with us today, to launch an extensive effort to determine what steps we must take to meet our goal. I want the Secretary to report back to me with her recommendations in 60 days. This report must tell us how we

can help states set and meet urgent new adoption targets. It must describe how we can improve coordination among local, state and federal authorities so that every community has access to the best ways to encourage adoption. And it must outline what sensible financial incentives we can provide states to raise adoption rates.

I also want the Secretary to determine what additional changes we can make in federal laws and regulations to ensure that children won't get trapped in foster care. And I want to know if there are any new provisions we can put in place to move children through the system faster and to protect them when they leave.

There are other steps we are taking immediately. I'm instructing the Departments of Treasury, Labor, Commerce, and Health and Human Services to launch an all-out effort to heighten public awareness about adoption and to recognize those in the private sector who are committing themselves to this important cause.

Let me also say how grateful I am to those in Congress of both parties who are working so hard to make adoption a reality for America's most vulnerable children. I want to thank especially Senators Rockefeller and DeWine, and Representatives Kennelly and Camp for their efforts.

The fact that we are commemorating the birth of a child that began life in a manger and became the Prince of Peace should remind us that the promise of God has been placed in every child. We must work tirelessly to make sure that every boy and girl in America who is up for adoption has a family waiting up* to reach him or her. No child should be in foster care for one day longer than he or she needs to be.

This is a season of miracles, and perhaps there is no greater miracle than finding a loving home for a child who needs one.

Thanks for listening.

MRS. CLINTON: We are so happy to have all of you here in the Oval Office with us today. And I know that the families that are here and the children and teenagers who are here all have a story to tell about how your families were created. And I would like to ask if I could -- I know that several of you actually were united with the children who are here because of television shows that you saw the children on. And perhaps you could tell us what happened and how that came to be.

Would you like to start? And maybe you should tell everyone who you are and introduce yourself.

Yes.

MR. BORIE: My name is Glenn Borie. My wife is Carolyn, and these are our four children -- John, Crystal, Charity and Dawn.

MRS. BORIE: We had been foster parents and were looking to adopt and knew that there were a lot of options. But seeing how children often get lost in the system, our hearts went towards them, knowing that -- very desirable and young and end up in the system for a long time and are less desirable to people at that point when they are available.

So we have been, by chance, by God's will, had the television on on a particular day when there was a talk show about adoption. And for a brief 20 seconds we saw Crystal on TV and just caught in our heart at that time. And as we saw the number for the National Adoption Center we found out she had three siblings.

Within a month the two older ones, John and Crystal, had moved in. We started visits with Charity and Dawn and two months later they moved in as well. Before they were separated in two foster homes for five years, so when the two younger ones moved in the week before Thanksgiving it was the first time in five years that they'd spent that together. And we just had a very thankful time to just thank God for an incredible family.

MRS. CLINTON: We're glad you're here today.

Did you also have a television?

MS. GRAY: Actually, no. I had adopted Michael when he was only eight years old -- I was 44 at the time, a divorced woman, wanted a child, and I was totally lost. This is the most amazing thing that I've ever experienced in my life, is having the gift of this beautiful child here.

And work for a company, Phoenix Insurance Company, which is an incredibly supportive company. And we have a subsidy for people up to \$2,000 for adoption of children. And the company has been supportive in a lot of ways. Me, as a single parent -- so it's just -- I'm delighted that you're doing this. Because as I go around and I tell people I adopted a child and I was 44 and he came from the state, I get all of these surprised looks -- how could you get him as a single parent, you know, are there children in the system. I think we have a huge job ahead of us in terms of educating people about getting children out of the public system. Kids are there and they need us.

MRS. CLINTON: I absolutely agree.

MS. GRAY: And they need companies like mine to support us.

MRS. CLINTON: And what about your family story.

MR. INGLESE: Hi, my name is Larry Inglese, and we were a foster family to start off with. I always loved children and wanted to have a lot of children. I saw this commercial on TV to open up your heart and your home to a special needs child. So I responded to that commercial and, of course, being a foster parent who liked having children in Pennsylvania, St. Joseph's called about adopting. And I went through with adoption of -- they set us up in a match party. And I met Jason there, who was 13 at the time.

THE PRESIDENT: How old are you now, Jason?

JASON INGLESE: I'm 15.

MR. INGLESE: He's going to be 16 next month. And him and I, we just, like, made eye contact. We sat down, we had lunch, we looked at each other in the eye and we both knew at that minute I was his father and he was my son. There was no doubt, no doubt whatsoever. But they had another family that had wanted Jason with two parent -- I'm a single parent, and they had a two-parent home. But that lady there kept changing her mind back and forth, so I said -- the two of us came to -- you know, this isn't for sure with her, I think I should get first choice over Jason because I'm willing to make a commitment now. And she agreed.

He was sure and I was sure, and through adoption got him. And then sometime later I was ready for the next one, and the caseworker was calling around, trying to find a home for Michael. Michael has got cerebral palsy and he's got mild mental retardation. He has a lot of problems with -- he came out, it was hard to find him a

home. Anyway, finally, I accepted, I said I would take him.

But there were some race issues at the time, but they wouldn't let me have him right away. It took about -- it was about five or six months. They contacted me back and they couldn't get another family to take him so they accepted us. But I was kind of upset at the time because we were ready to give him a loving home and it didn't happen -- because of one caseworker, it didn't happen as fast as it should have. But we finally got him.

MRS. CLINTON: Great.

MR. INGLESE: And we finalized with him in November, November 15th of this year.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that's wonderful -- in time for Thanksgiving. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: You have -- how many kids do you have now?

MR. INGLESE: I have three biological children, two adopted, and I've had 23 foster children.

MRS. CLINTON: That's great.

And what about your story?

MRS. BRYANT: My name is Frances Bryant. This is my husband, Michael Bryant. And we also saw Trey on the television program. We were watching the news one night, and normally I don't actually watch this particular channel, and for some reason I was just glued to this news. And I had never seen a commercial with children on it asking for a home. And then I saw Trey and he was on there and just touched my heart so much. And I wrote down the number and it was 1-800-KIDS hotline -- and I got up right after it went off and I told my husband about it. I said, you wouldn't believe what I just saw on TV. You know, I had never seen a child asking for a home.

There was no way that I could refuse this. I mean, it just touched my heart so. And we called the very next day and found out the information, and we went through the process and it only took about two months and we got Trey in our home. And what the amazing thing is that I realized how many children are out there waiting to be adopted. And I encourage anyone who can open up their heart and their home to a child -- it's a wonderful, rewarding experience. And I'm also going to do it again.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we have some children here who are waiting for homes, and maybe you could introduce yourself. Which ones -- who wants to go first? Anybody want to say anything?

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

DANIEL: My name is Daniel, and I've been waiting for a family for quite a long time. And hopefully, in a short amount of time I will probably get what I'm looking for in a family. My brother has already been adopted, and hopefully I'll get adopted by his family at one point of time. And if not, I'll still be able to get in contact with him.

THE PRESIDENT: How old are you?

DANIEL: Thirteen.

THE PRESIDENT: How old is your brother?

DANIEL: Seventeen.

MRS. CLINTON: How long have you been in foster care?

DANIEL: About two, three years.

MRS. CLINTON: Two or three years?

DANIEL: I'm not sure, but --

THE PRESIDENT: Where's your home? Where do you live?

DANIEL: Where do I live now? Alexandria.

THE PRESIDENT: Anybody else want to talk?

MRS. CLINTON: What's your name? I'm glad you're here this morning.

One of the goals that we have with trying to do this and, as you say, talk more about education of people about adoption, and something the Secretary and the President and all of us are committed to, is so that more people know what your experience has been like. And anytime you raise a child, it is not all easy. We know that. I mean, there are going to be ups and downs no matter what. But I think that your stories about the emotional feeling that you had when you met your children is something that if we can get more people to see, we'll have more response. Do you agree with that, too?

MS. GRAY: Absolutely. I saw Michael the first time, he was four weeks old, and, as you say, I knew that this is my little boy. I was all pumped up thinking, oh, I'm going to adopt a little girl because I know about girls -- then I saw this little boy and it was all over.

But it has been an enormous blessing for me and for my family. He's just an incredible, an incredible gift. And I just wish that more and more people could have that experience. There is such a mythology about adoption, and if we could just get the word out and just get people to go and see and talk to these beautiful children, we could find them all homes, and have stable, loving parents who care about them and will raise them as strong citizens. And it's the greatest thing I've ever done in my whole entire life.

MRS. CLINTON: That's what we're going to try to do. And you all are experts because you've been through the system. What are some of the changes that we need to make in the system that each of you has dealt with so that we can perhaps encourage more people to be involved? Any thoughts about that?

MS. BORIE: Just the length of time that it takes. In my situation, I'm thankful that it took longer only because I would not have had them otherwise. But it breaks my heart to know that -- these are my children and to know that they were separated from each other for that long. It's heart-wrenching. And I may not have been their parent at that time, but having them now, in my heart I was their parent all that time. And to think that they had to go without each other, as a parent, it's just very sad. And it shouldn't have taken that long.

MRS. CLINTON: How long did it take?

MRS. BORIE: They were in care for about five years. Our experience -- happened more quickly than usual. It was very speedy,

thankfully. But to know that they were apart for that long was unnecessary.

MS. GRAY: I'd like to see us do a lot more with companies. I'm sure that -- I'm speaking on behalf my company because it's very supportive getting started, Phoenix Insurance. And anybody who wants to talk to me about it, please call because I want to help other companies do the same thing. If we could just get companies to tell their employees about these kinds of opportunities -- to do more through their newsletters and to say we're offering a benefit -- that would be great.

MRS. CLINTON: And the new legislation that the President signed to give people the \$5,000 tax credit -- that's something we need to make sure people know about, too, because you obviously don't do these things because of that, but there are expenses associated with taking a child into your home, especially a child with medical problems. Have you found that?

MR. INGLESE: Well, I'm lucky as far as my problems because Michael's medication alone comes to about \$800 a month and I could never afford that on my own. But I have a Pennsylvania Medical Access Card which covers his medical, and he needs many operations that he's been in even before I got him and he still -- he just got an operation, I think it was last month. They cover everything, totally. All his needs are met and paid for by the state. And I think it would be, like, impossible for me to adopt him if the state didn't pay for his needs and medical care because it's a tremendous amount and it's a tremendous expense.

Also what I want to say to others who are thinking about adopting, I think it's -- from what I find with some of the children, that they gave the parents too many years, they keep the children in foster care too many years. Jason was first in foster care from an infant. And he didn't get put up for adoption until he was 13 years old. It went so many years back and forth that he went back to the birth family and then taken away and back and forth. And Michael was also five years. His mother abandoned him at birth. He was put in foster care right from the hospital when he was born. And he's been in through foster homes in the five years before I adopted him.

I think it should be a lesser amount of time a child -- don't give the parents that long to try to get their children back. I think a year should be good enough. If a parent don't clean up their act within the year, then that child should be put in a loving home where he will get all the love that his natural parents can't give him.

MRS. CLINTON: How do you feel about that, Jason? Do you have an opinion about that?

JASON: Yes. Basically, I agree on the same. It shouldn't take that much time because with a child, of course, he's going to think that it should because he's going to want to go back with his biological parents, but to sit here and think about it, I would have liked it that way than to keep going back, keep taken away, keep going back -- for it to keep happening like that.

MR. INGLESE: Each time a new foster home. The other foster homes, they fill up. So he was like in, I think, about 12 or 13 foster homes and it was new one each time. He couldn't even go back to the same foster home where he knew the people. So he had to go through that struggle of trying to fit in with new family all over again and over and over and over again.

THE PRESIDENT: How many foster homes have you lived with?

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Remarks at Destination Future '98
4-H Club
September 11, 1998

Thank you. Thank you Joy and thank you all for inviting me to be here. I am very happy and delighted to be here with Joy and Erica on the stage, and all of you who are using your experience and energy on behalf of yourselves and other young people in the foster care system and those who have transitioned out of it, looking for ways to use your experience to make all of our systems, and the lives that they affect, better.

I want to thank Carol Williams for her leadership and her stalwart advocacy on behalf of children and youth. I have had the pleasure of working with Carol over a number of years now and many of the changes that we try to make on behalf of a better improved foster care and adoption system are because of her dedication.

I want to thank Jim Walker and all of you who are associated with the National Resource Center for caring about this extraordinarily important group of people in our country. I want to thank Donna Hughes for the National Network which I think is one of the best ways we can keep the issues of foster care, adoption and our systems that affect young people on the front burner.

As Joy mentioned, I was privileged to meet with a group of young people who were active in the California Youth Connection. And I was so impressed. My staff, my friends, my husband and my daughter know that I have talked about that meeting many times since then. I was impressed by the intelligence, the thoughtfulness and honesty of those young people who were still in the foster care system and those who have aged out of it.

And I came away from that meeting even more committed to do whatever I can do to try and make sure that your voices are heard. Because there isn't any doubt in my mind that after having been involved with foster care for more than twenty eight or nine years now, that there are any voices that are more important than yours.

And I have a feeling that this is the right time for those voices to be heard. That the issues that you will discuss this weekend will not just be left here when you go back to your states and communities but they will serve as a blueprint for what else we need to be doing here in Washington and in state capitals with organizations like the Resource Center and in networks around our country.

I thought a lot about why I have been so committed to and concerned about foster care for so many years. And I think it is for a number of reasons. I knew growing up that my mother had not been in formal foster care, but she had found it impossible to remain with her parents who were both teenagers when she was born many years ago. She was sent to live with a set of her grandparents, and that did not work out, so she went to work in the home of a family where she worked for room and board and a place to live, helping to take care of the children of that family. And that is how she got through high school.

When she ended high school, she had nowhere to go, and she didn't feel that she had a family that she could go to. When I was growing up, we often had the help of young women who were on the brink of aging out the foster care system -- not from any foster home with a family, but from what we would now call a group home. So, three or four of these young women would come and work with my mother as she had been worked with when she was a young woman.

My mother has often told me how grateful she is to the woman with whom she lived because she got to see a real family. She got to watch what happens inside a home where parents and children went through all they should go through in a family, because she never had that. And she wanted to give that opportunity to other young women as well.

When I was in law school, I now refer to it as Joy's law school -- Yale Law School -- I began working with legal services in New Haven, Connecticut. And the cases that came my way were cases involving foster children. Difficult cases of trying to decide if children should remain with that child's biological parents, to be put into foster care to be adopted out of foster care or sent to group homes -- all of the issues you have struggled with first hand.

And I saw through the cases that I handled, in the children and adults I represented, how difficult it was to make the decision that was best for the children. And often it wasn't a matter of people being mean spirited or malicious, it was just that they

were very difficult decision.

And so for all of those years since then, I have tried to keep my attention on the foster care system. But I don't think that any one of us who have worked in it all these years really had the benefit of an organized way of hearing from the people who truly had the most to say about it -- those of you who had seen that system in a very personal way.

I wanted to come today to do several things. To ask you to be as honest and as helpful as you possibly can this weekend and throughout the year. To make sure that every decision-maker in every community, state and at the national level, knows what you know. And we will do what we can to amplify your voices so that your knowledge carries as far as possible.

Secondly, I think it is time for those of you who are on the front-line with this expertise to become our partners in improving and reporting these systems. As Carol Williams said, you have made progress, and I am very grateful for that progress. The administration, particularly the President, has brought to the forefront issues of foster care and adoption that had never been there before.

We have had events in the Oval Office at the White House where foster children, foster parents, social workers and advocates gathered to get the message out to our countries about how many children are in foster care and what their -- what their needs are.

We have passed laws like the Family and Medical Leave Law which encourages and gives time off to parents who adopt a child. We've provided a tax credit and an even higher tax credit to families who adopt children with medical or other problems. We have worked very hard to make foster care and adoption free from discrimination based on race, culture and ethnicity.

And last year, there was a historic step taken on behalf of foster care and adoption when, after a lot of hard work by many people, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. That Act is aimed at improving the foster care and adoption system and particularly improving the decision-making process, so that a decision can be made in a more orderly, effective and a timely manner, as to whether a child can return home, whether a child should be and can be placed for

adoption and then be placed as quickly as possible to create permanent solutions.

When the President signed that bill he said that we have laid the building blocks of what children should have as their basic fundamental rights -- a decent safe home, an honorable, orderly, positive upbringing -- a chance to live out their dreams and their God-given capacities.

So there has been progress. But I am not here to tell you that we have made anywhere near the progress we need to or we have to. Certainly what was done in the bill that was signed last year will help us move toward our national goal of doubling our national adoption rate. We want the laws to be friendly to people who are in the process of adopting, and we have put into place some safeguards and changes that we hope will make that possible.

For example, the bill shortens the time that a state has to place kids in permanent homes. It strengthens supports to help keep families together when that is possible, and when it is not, to make the decision to move on.

Most importantly, the legislation makes the health and safety of children the first priority. There are over 100,000 young children in our foster care system. That is way too many. We have to be more creative and more determined to do whatever we can to bring those numbers down, because we know there are many unmet needs of those children who are in our foster care system. But one of those needs that has not gotten the attention it deserves is what happens when you age out the system. And that is what I heard a lot about when I met with the group of young people in California last year.

About 65,000 young people like yourselves will age out the system in the next three years. What can we do better to help you to help them? I heard a lot of advice last year and we are attempting to act on that. We want to address the important needs that young people face when their eighteenth birthday arrives.

That is why I am pleased today to announce a series of grants -- more than \$1 million devoted to making state and local programs that serve young people to work better for the young people they serve. These grants from the Department of Health and Human Services are aimed at giving nine states more assistance in strengthening how they deal with young people.

We want to do a better job in independent living. We want to do a better job in making sure you have the services you need as you transition out and afterward.

We know very well, and I have heard from numbers of young people who are on the brink or who have already aged out of the system, that you face extraordinary challenges.

Many foster youth face homelessness or difficulty finishing high school or enrolling in college or finding a job. And great difficulty in meeting health care needs, which means that you have nowhere to turn and will be uninsured, and are not getting those skills you require to live independently.

Now we know there are programs around the country that are working, and we want to hear honestly from you what works and what doesn't work. I learned for example, that because of advocacy of foster youth around our country programs in Texas and Florida promote college tuition assistance to young people in foster care. In Los Angeles County, set-aside entry level jobs are available for those who are aging out of foster care. Massachusetts has a teen parent transitional living program to help young mothers who are aging out of foster care with parenting and transitional living assistance.

And the California Youth Connection is becoming a national model of how to bring young teens and older young people together to form a network of support and advocacy. We are finally seeing some movement on behalf of older foster youth and those that have transitioned out. So this is a perfect time for you to be meeting to give us advice and to organize yourselves so that you can be sure to have an impact on the policies that are set.

We must strengthen the Federal Independent Living Program which provides 85,000 young people with critical help on their transition to independence. It helps young people like yourselves get a high school diploma and access to vocational training. It helps you learn the daily living schools that we all need like budgeting and finding a place to live.

But we have to review this program and evaluate its effectiveness and we need your help. Now some adults have a hard time admitting that being an adult doesn't mean that we have all the answers. We know we don't. We certainly can't pretend

in front of you that we do. We want you to help us find the best possible answer to the issues and challenges we face.

I believe that the American people need to know more about our foster care system and particularly those who are aging out of it. Most Americans don't know. But if they do know, we have found that they are responsive. More than three quarters of citizens polled about foster care strongly supported services that assist teens that are making that transition, and even said that they would be willing to pay more taxes to provide job placement, college tuition assistance and housing. -

But if we don't get the information out to them, and your stories aren't told and your experiences aren't shared, then people won't know. And I want to emphasize something that Joy mentioned when she introduced me. I imagine that many of you who have been in foster care spend a considerable amount of time trying to avoid telling people that -- trying to pretend it wasn't so. And it may seem perhaps a little odd to be asked to share your experiences now, to talk about what you learned and what you saw or what could be better. But we have no better resources than each of you.

I remember very well the big event in the East Room of the White House a few years ago. I invited various states to come with children who were in the foster care system who were waiting for adoption. And I wanted Americans to know that there were a lot of good, smart, saavy, sweet young people who were in our foster care system who would be an asset to any family.

One young woman from Kansas came with a poem she had written. And she stood up and she talked about her experience of being taken away from her family because of abuse, and how she was abandoned. From the time I was in the White House, she was thirteen and had been in five or six foster homes and because of various situations she was living in a group home.

She stood up to read her poem. She said she really didn't want a lot. She said "I want a place that I can call home. A place that I can call my own. A family I can love that loves me back." Somebody heard that poem and decided to adopt her.

I want every American to hear those words and be heard. Just as I listened to the stories of my mother and saw how determined she was that the family she had would never have the problems that she faced. I think there is a lot of people in



America who want to hear about your brilliance and hope and grit and determination. And I for one, whenever I can, will make sure those lessons and your voices get heard.

Thank you all very much.



THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 19, 1997

PRESIDENT CLINTON SIGNS
THE ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILIES ACT OF 1997

November 19, 1997

Today, President Clinton signs into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, to help thousands of children waiting in foster care move more quickly into safe and permanent homes. This overwhelmingly bipartisan legislation was based in large part on the recommendations of the Administration's Adoption 2002 report. The report takes its name from one of the President's central goals which is, at a minimum, to double the number of adoptions to 54,000 by the year 2002.

The Act makes sweeping changes in federal law on adoption and foster care enacted in 1980. The new law makes clear that the health and safety of children must be the paramount concerns of state child welfare services. It sets swifter time frames for making permanent placement decisions and terminating parental rights for children. For the first time, states will have financial incentives to increase adoptions. Children with special needs and ongoing medical needs are ensured health care coverage. Federal funds will continue for programs that work to keep families together when it is appropriate and safe to do so.

Ensuring that Children are Safe

Clarifies Reasonable Efforts: As the President proposed, the new law ensures that children's health and safety are the primary concerns of the public child welfare system. It clarifies that there are instances when states are not required to make reasonable efforts to keep children with their parents, such as when a parent has been convicted of murdering another child or a child has been abandoned, tortured, or chronically abused.

Doubling the Number of Children
Adopted or Permanently Placed by 2002

Creates Financial Incentives: The new law contains the President's plan to offer a financial bonus to states that increase the number of children who are adopted from the public foster care system. These incentives will help to double the number of children adopted. For every additional child adopted, a state will receive \$4,000, with an additional \$2,000 paid for each child with special needs. The Act authorizes \$20 million for each of 5 years (FY 1999 to FY 2003) for the bonuses, though eventually the bonuses will be offset by savings in foster care expenses.

Establishes Tighter Time Limits: Children who cannot safely return to their own families often wait far too long in foster care -- typically over 3 years, and many times even longer. Under the new law, permanency hearings will now be held no later than 12 months after a child enters foster care, 6 months earlier than under previous law, and states must initiate termination of parental rights proceedings, except in specified circumstances, for any child who has been in foster care

for 15 of the previous 22 months.

Breaking Down Barriers, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and Achieving Accountability

Eliminating Obstacles: The new law prohibits delaying or denying adoptions across state or county lines, thereby breaking geographic barriers to adoption.

Providing Supportive Services: The new law ensures that children with special needs keep health insurance coverage when they are adopted, either through Medicaid or through the new children's health program. In addition, the new law reauthorizes the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program, renamed Promoting Safe and Stable Families, which provides services to strengthen families before crises occur and to ensure safe, stable homes for children who return to their families.

Emphasizing Results for Children: The new law authorizes HHS, in consultation with states, to develop new measures to track and rate state performance efforts in providing child welfare services to ensure successful results for children.

Recognizing Success: Prior to the bill signing today, HHS recognized 13 awardees for significant achievement in helping both adopted children and those waiting for adoption. Among the awardees are families, foundations, members of the media, and states that have improved the management of child welfare programs.

THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION RECORD ON ADOPTION

November 19, 1997

"I am pleased that the Senate and the House of Representatives have passed historic, bipartisan legislation to promote adoption and improve our nation's child welfare system, giving our nation's most vulnerable children what every child deserves -- a safe and permanent home."
-- Statement by President Clinton, November 13, 1997

The Clinton Administration has previously taken several important steps to encourage and increase adoptions and to support the families who choose to open their hearts and their homes to these children. Since taking office in 1993, the President has championed programs that find and assist adoptive families, and has committed his Administration to breaking down barriers, including high adoption costs and complex regulations. These steps include:

MAKING ADOPTION AFFORDABLE FOR FAMILIES. Last year, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, which provides a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This provision has alleviated a significant barrier to adoption, helping middle class families for whom adoption may have been prohibitively expensive and making it easier for families to adopt children with special needs. Since President Clinton took office, the number of children with special needs who have been adopted with federal adoption assistance has risen by 60 percent. This year, in signing the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, President Clinton ensured more support for families who adopt children with the \$500 Per-Child Tax Credit.

GIVING STATES FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPORT. To test innovative strategies to improve child welfare systems, the Clinton Administration has granted child welfare waivers to California, Delaware, Indiana, Illinois, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio and Oregon, giving the states more flexibility in tailoring services to meet the needs of children and families. Up to two more states will receive approval for waivers under previous authority. Under the new Adoption and Safe Families Act, HHS will grant up to 10 waivers per year to states. In addition, this Administration has provided states with enhanced technical support and helped improve court operations. In September, HHS awarded 40 demonstration grants totalling \$7.9 million, to states, local agencies, courts, private organizations, and others committed to promoting adoption for innovative programs to increase adoptions and reduce the number of children in foster care. To prevent children from entering foster care in the first place, in 1993, the Clinton Administration secured federal funding for the Family Preservation and Family Support Program to help states, local governments and service providers develop effective programs to serve children and families at risk.

BREAKING DOWN RACIAL AND ETHNIC BARRIERS TO ADOPTION. The Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, also ensures that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity by strengthening the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994.

PROVIDING SUPPORTS FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND ADOPTION. In 1993, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance. In addition, the welfare reform bill that the President signed into law maintains the guarantee of child protection and adoption, and does not reduce funds for child welfare, child abuse, foster care and adoption services.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS. Through speeches, writings, events and public service announcements, the President and First Lady have promoted the importance and benefits of adoption.