

Prepared Remarks

**Orphan Foundation of America
OLIVER Awards Dinner**

by

**The Honorable Tom DeLay(R-TX)
House Majority Whip**

**J.W. Marriott Hotel
Washington, DC**

Monday, June 12, 2000

I am, of course, most grateful for this award. It is recognition not so much of my efforts, but of a growing concern that requires us to confront some very difficult questions.

My involvement with children's issues began after my wife, Christine, observed the terrible crisis afflicting so many of the programs designed to help children at risk. Often, these systems and the institutions governing them fail or are unable to provide even the most basic levels of meaningful assistance. Christine soon became active in a volunteer program—CASA or Court Appointed Special Advocates. Through this program, she was able to help an overburdened court system discover and represent children's best interests.

It was not too long before she was insisting that I do something about the problem as well. And believe me when I tell you that my work in this area has not been optional. Without a doubt, this award belongs much more to Christine, who couldn't be here with us tonight, than it does to me. I want to thank Christine being the real "Hammer" in the DeLay family.

I also want to congratulate our nation's First Lady on her award and for working to give voice to the needs of disadvantaged children. Many have remarked on the rather odd couple we make. But I do not think it's at all odd that Americans of different perspectives can come together to meet the solemn obligation our nation has to those who cannot help themselves. After all, that's what Americans do.

Now, I do not for a moment imagine that I will be hanging around the East Wing anytime soon; or, that the President and I will start spending our weekends reminiscing together about the good old days. We do, in fact, maintain profound and principled differences. But I am certain that we are both pursuing, in our own ways, the same goal: a stronger America that reaches out to every child.

Even as Christine and I have seen so much cruelty in the world of abused and neglected children, we remain determined and, yes, we remain hopeful. This optimism is sparked not by any special strength we may have. It is inspired by our experience with foster children like the wonderful young adults here with us tonight.

Despite terrible hardships, we have seen children like these young people achieve incredible successes. Time after time, you and children just like you have refused to allow the circumstances of your birth to dictate the future. Incandescent with courage, you have worked to achieve your full potential.

A few days ago, I had an opportunity to spend some wonderful time with you all, and I was enormously impressed by your insights and suggestions to improve the foster care system. Your passion and honesty about your circumstances and your desire to make a difference in the lives of others in foster care was an encouragement and an inspiration to me. You are all to be commended for your hard work in getting here. Your demonstrated intelligence, hard work, and determination will take you far. In fact, I think we may have a few future members of the Whip Team with us tonight.

As Christine and I have considered what distinguishes your success from the tragedies, at least one thing has become clear. A child's life is not made better by a program or a system. A child is never saved by an institution or an initiative. Children are rescued when an individual, when one caring person, recognizes the sanctity of every human life and commits to making that child realize his or her dignity and potential.

If we are ever going to alter the cycles of abuse and violence that threaten so many children, we will first have to rekindle a broad rediscovery of the intrinsic value of life. We will have to expand the human family to include, without exception or reservation, the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

Pope John Paul II writes, "There can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person's dignity and without respect for his or her rights. Nor can there be true peace unless life is defended and promoted."

Of course, we must complement this general defense of life with a clear, specific plan to helping children at risk right now. It is not enough to advocate an ideal. All of us must labor to make an immediate difference. And I should mention here my belief that making a difference must not be defined simply by the material condition of a child's life. I was struck by what one of you said to me during our lunch the other day. Speaking of your foster parents, you said "They didn't just feed and clothe me, they taught me to be a man."

The most destructive type of poverty is that which destroys the human spirit, the poverty of values.

It is that malnutrition of heart and mind that leaves many young people today without the foundation necessary to choose right from wrong, and without the knowledge of what it takes to become independent and responsible men and women.

So, even as we demand that the most basic needs of children are met, we cannot neglect to include among those needs the timeless lessons required to realize the full promise of citizenship.

Recently, Christine and I visited the Texas Baptist Children's Home in Round Rock, Texas. We are looking for ways to provide permanency and stability to adolescents who are in care and are unlikely to be adopted, and we have been looking at alternatives to foster care for these older teens.

We found the Texas Baptist Children's Home to be a remarkable place that offers at-risk teens a wonderful, values-based environment rich in compassion and stability. The Children's Home accepts no federal money for this program so it can do much more than serve as a shelter. It is – as its name suggests – a home. And like any healthy home, the people who run it understand that parenting means much more than supplying meals and beds.

I believe the Texas Baptist Children's Home is a model for progress; progress based not on the amount of money Washington spends, but on the quality of care delivered to children in need. Thinking this way will ensure that resources never become a substitute for results.

When we consider the extraordinary courage of these young people here with us tonight, our task – completely reforming the current system of child services – seems not so daunting after all. Let all of us use this occasion to rededicate ourselves to this mission. We can't forget that our ability to really help these kids depends on the men and women who take part. To succeed, we need to attract the very best to this great cause.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize one special person who is making a difference. She's a mother with two young children of her own. Nevertheless, Annalisa Assadi has recently volunteered hundreds of hours to reach out to kids in need. Annalisa, please stand. Thank you very much for all you are doing for these children and for our society. Now, I'd like to ask everyone else who has volunteered for the program to join Annalisa. Please stand. Thank you for all that you are doing.

For those of you who haven't volunteered yet, I encourage you to get involved. It would be hard to find a more gratifying feeling than the sense of fulfillment that one earns by helping a young person find the right path.

Let me end with this thought: Life is the most precious gift any of us ever receive. And preserving a life is the greatest gift any of us can ever give. If we abandon the preservation of each and every life – if we accept the condemnation of certain children to less than a full existence – then we endanger every life and every child.

Thank you again for this distinction, and congratulations again to the First Lady and all of you who are working toward our common goal. God bless you. Good night to you all."

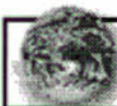
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Beyond the City

Hil, a Foe to Share Honor First Lady, Tex. pol aided foster care

By JOEL SIEGEL
Daily News Senior Political Correspondent

Hillary Rodham Clinton will share a dais tonight with a leader of the Anybody But Clinton crowd to jointly accept an award for their efforts to improve foster care — which Clinton says demonstrates she can play well with others, even enemies.

The First Lady will share the award in Washington with House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), one of her husband's fiercest critics and a leader of the impeachment movement.



Marquette AP
Rep. Tom DeLay will join Hillary Clinton to accept shared honor tonight.

"Now, if you can find anything good that Tom has ever said [about me], show it to me," Clinton told the Daily News recently.

"He was shocked when I invited him to the White House and worked with him. I have found that if you absorb these insults and attacks and keep going, you can get a lot done, and there is literally nothing they can say about me that will hurt my feelings."

The case highlights two of the biggest questions shadowing her Senate bid: How could she work in the Senate with Republicans who voted to remove her husband from office? What record does she have?

Enter the Vienna, Va.-based Orphan Foundation of America, which said it would honor Clinton and DeLay together — as odd a political couple as could be seen in Washington.

The hurdle facing Clinton is that she's most associated with the administration's biggest debacle: its botched 1994 effort to overhaul the health-care system.

Her efforts unleashed a public backlash that forced her to retreat into a more behind-the-scenes policy role. As a result, many of the accomplishments she's taking significant credit for are not often associated with her.

The foster care law measure provides health-care and other "transitional" services for the 25,000 children who "age out" of the foster-care system each year as they turn 18.

The credit she deserves depends on whom you ask.

A co-sponsor of the legislation, Rep. Ben Cardin (D-Md.), and officials of four child-advocacy organizations called her role vital.

They said she gave visibility to the "aging out" problem, worked to make it an administration priority, lobbied Congress and had aides hash out the enabling legislation with congressional staffers.

"People who are involved absolutely attribute this bill coming to fruition to her effort, her awareness, her pushing for it, her getting the President to include it in his budget," said Eileen McCaffrey, executive director of the Orphan Foundation.

A key moment, they said, occurred as the bill stalled in the Senate. The First Lady, they said, made sure DeLay was invited to a White House event. DeLay, a foster parent, had pushed the foster-care reforms through the House.

"Rep. DeLay came, and before the event, they had a chance to talk. They talked about how important the bill was, and each said they would do what they could to move it forward," recalled Nicole Rabner, then a top White House aide on domestic policy. "I was there."

Republicans have a different take.

DeLay's spokeswoman, Emily Miller, said, "I'm not aware of any role that Mrs. Clinton played."

Mike Murphy, the media strategist to Clinton's Senate opponent, Rep. Rick Lazio (R-Suffolk), said in a TV interview over the weekend, "Mrs. Clinton is trying to create a record for herself in the middle of the campaign."

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Hillary Clinton: A Leading Advocate for the Nation's Neediest Children

A Record of Accomplishment Adoption and Foster Care

As the Administration's most prominent advocate on foster care and adoption, Hillary Clinton has worked on behalf of the over 500,000 children who live in foster care, and has led this Administration's unprecedented record of promoting the well-being of children in foster care and providing them with permanent, loving homes. Hillary Clinton has promoted the adoption of children living in foster care, worked to break down racial and ethnic barriers to adoption, worked for passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and worked to provide additional resources to children aging out of the foster care system through the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. These two pieces of landmark legislation reformed our nation's child welfare system by putting considerations of children's health and safety first.

Background

Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997: The Adoption and Safe Families Act helps 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, which had the central goal of doubling the number of adoptions to 56,000 by the year 2002. Already, the total number of adoptions rose to 36,000 in 1998 from 28,000 in 1996, on track to meet Administration's goal. This 29 percent increase is the first significant increase in adoptions since the national foster care program was established nearly 20 years ago.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act 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 have financial incentives to increase adoptions. Children with special needs and ongoing medical needs are ensured health care coverage. Federal funds continue for programs that work to keep families together when it is appropriate and safe to do so.

Foster Care Independence Act: 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.

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 provides additional funding to the Independent Living program which offers older youth in foster care educational, vocational and employment training, daily living skills, substance abuse prevention, and connections to dedicated adults as mentors. The bill based on the Administration's plan, enables the program for the first time to include support for room and board, and provide states with the option to offer these young people Medicaid until their 21st birthday. In addition, the bill increases the asset limit and allows youths to have \$10,000 in savings and still be eligible for foster care payments, so that they can save for college, an apartment or other needs that are critical for successful independence. Finally, the bill establishes accountability for states in implementing their programs by requiring data collection and evaluation.

A RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION. With the signing of the new Foster Care Independence Act, the Administration adds to an unprecedented record of promoting the well-being of children and providing them with 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. In the last budget, the Administration secured 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, the President 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 Administration 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. This 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.

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO REFORMING FOSTER CARE AND
PROMOTING ADOPTION

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.