

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

SPEECHES

AND

COLUMNS

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Foster Care and Adoption

1995

- 6/19 Home for infants and children, D.C. - Mother Theresa's Home
- 11/08 Public Service Announcement – Video - DHHS PSA
- 11/13 National Adoption Month Event

1996

- 2/15 Video – PSA for The Adoption Exchange
- 5/10 Administration Efforts – DC White House - Mother's Day Adoption
- 8/20 Photo with Adoption Advocates and Families
- 8/23 Video – Children's Service Conference - Holt International
- 9/13 Adoption Meeting
- 10/29 Video - North American Council on Adoptable Children
- 11/13 Adoption Event
- 12/14 Radio Address with POTUS

1997

- 1/27 Appearance on Rosie O'Donnell Show
- 2/14 Adoption Event with POTUS
- 4/16 Administration Efforts – DC National Council for Adoption Dinner
- 6/26 W.K. Kellogg Families for Kids by 2002 Conference
- 11/19 Adoption Bill Signing with POTUS

1998

- 5/5 Adoption Video - National Adoption Center
- 9/11 Foster Care – DC Destination Future 98
- 11/5 Adoption Video - Council on Adoptable Children – New York
- 11/24 Adoption Event – White House - Secretary Shalala, Dave Thomas

1999

- 1/29 Foster Care event with Mrs. Gore
- 2/3 Dave Thomas Center – Columbus Ohio
- 2/5 Children Symposium – DC Video - Dave Thomas Adoption Center
- 9/24 Adoption Event - White House
- 12/14 Foster Care Event – Presidential Hall - OEOB

COLUMNS

- July 30, 1995
- October 29, 1995
- May 14, 1996
- December 17, 1996
- June 24, 1997
- September 9, 1997
- November 24, 1999
- November 18, 1997
- November 20, 1997
- September 23, 1998
- November 25, 1998
- February 3, 1999
- September 29, 1999

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
Foster Care and Adoption
1993-2000

1995

6/19 Home for infants and children, D.C. - Mother Theresa's Home
9/29 Adoption Meeting – White House
11/08 PSA - Adoption DHHS
11/13 National Adoption Month Event – White House

1996

2/15 PSA for The Adoption Exchange
5/10 Mother's Day Adoption Administration Efforts - White House
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11/13 Adoption Event – White House
12/14 Radio Address with POTUS

1997

1/27 Appearance on Rosie O'Donnell Show
2/14 Adoption Event with POTUS – White House
4/16 National Council for Adoption Dinner –Washington, DC
6/26 W.K. Kellogg Families for Kids by 2002 Conference
9/24 Adoption Meeting – White House
11/19 Adoption Bill Signing with POTUS – White House

1998

5/5 Video - National Adoption Center 15th Annual Gala
9/11 Foster Care –Destination Future '98 – Chevy Chase, Maryland
11/5 Video - Council on Adoptable Children – New York
11/24 Adoption Event – White House - Secretary Shalala, Dave Thomas

1999

1/29 Foster Care Event with Mrs. Gore – White House
2/5 Video – Children's Symposium at Dave Thomas Adoption Center – Ohio
9/24 Adoption Event - White House
12/14 Foster Care Event – Presidential Hall - OEOB

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Final 7/17/00

Katie McCormick Lelyveld



JUNE 19, 1995

WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 19, 1995

**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at
Mother Teresa's Home for Infant Children
Washington, D.C.**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you all. Thank you very much. And I too am so pleased that this day has come, and it has come with the support, and caring, and love and contributions of so many people. I want to begin by thanking His Eminence, Cardinal Hickey, Monsignor Duffy, Sister Sylvia, Mayor Barry, Congresswoman Norton, and all who have participated in bringing this day to fruition. I also want again to greet and thank Mother Teresa. We take great inspiration from your work and from your ceaseless pursuit of what you believe in.

Earlier I was speaking with Mother and she looked at me and said, "This is a gift of love but I've been told I cannot give the gift of peace because I don't give peace to anyone." And I told her that one of my favorite sayings from another woman whom I admired, Eleanor Roosevelt, when she too would be criticized for pursuing what she believed in, she would often say, "I consider my job to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." And so today we have one of those rare moments when the afflicted and the comfortable come together on behalf of the future.

I'm often asked what it is I would like to see happen above all else in our country and in our world and there are so many things to wish for, aren't there? So many things to pray for, so many things to work for. But certainly at the top of my answer would be a world in which all boys and girls are loved and cared for. First, by the families into which they are born, then into families-- if those families are not able to take care of them, and assume the responsibilities for raising them-- then by extended families and by really the family of us all who more and more we have to recognize are all interconnected. And then, finally, by the families that those boys and girls grow up in, whom they in turn invest with love and caring to create societies that value every single child as a gift to be nurtured.

We know we are a long way from that even in our own country, and some days I fear we are retreating from that vision instead of moving toward it. But we have to continue to work to build

those kinds of conditions for every child. That is why most of us, I believe, are here today because we do recognize our own blessings and we do believe that each of us has a responsibility, not only to our own children, but to all children.

When I visited the home run by the Missionaries of Charity in New Delhi, I was struck forcefully by the love that emanated from every corner of that building. Near it was a home that wouldn't pass inspection in any town in America. There were too many cribs with too many babies too close together. I am sure there were not enough toilets or enough space for what was being done there, by some kind of regulatory formula, but all I knew was that there was enormous love and care and concern being given to those children. You can sense it when you walk into buildings where children are cared for, can't you? You can feel the difference when you walk in the door of a child care center, school, or a hospital, or a shelter where children are cared for and you can know in the gut of your soul whether or not you would leave your own child there.

That is the test for every single facility that we have for any child in America. I call it the "Chelsea test." Some of you might call it the Jane or the Jack or the Mary or the Charles test. But that should be the test. So by that test this house passes with flying colors. You can already sense it is a place where not only those who come here get the care and love they need but it will have ripple effects throughout this neighborhood and community.

This has been about 16 months of hard work. As the Cardinal said, I first spoke with Mother Teresa about this after the National Prayer Breakfast and then we both agreed that each of us could work together to help promote better conditions for our children, that each of us could do what we believe our own purpose sets us to doing, and that we could, by working together, create this opportunity.

The truth is that this is just a beginning and it will grow and have meaning in people's lives as lives here are saved and changed and allowed to go forward. I'm particularly pleased that this house will serve as a place from which children will be adopted under the responsibility of Catholic Charities, and I would personally plead that everyone who knows of this house, everyone who knows of other places like it, will do all that can be done to promote adoption of the children here in our own country. We have more than 400,000 children languishing in foster care in America.

Many parents are discouraged from adopting because of the high profile cases that unfortunately demonstrate that on a rare occasion an adoptive family may not be able to keep the child whom they have adopted. Those are rare occurrences. They should

not be permitted to discourage Americans from adopting American babies and children. So please use this occasion to do all that you can to promote adoption, not only of the babies who will come here, but of all babies and children. They all deserve homes and families in America today.

I want to join in thanking Mayor Barry and the District government and especially Hampton Cross, who worked miracles. It is not easy under any circumstances to get the necessary permission to do this and I join in the Mayor's plea that the example of this house will serve as an example for the rest of the District government so that we can all begin to cut through red tape on behalf of human needs and services for our people.

I also want to commend Catholic Charities for forming a partnership with the Sisters on behalf of children in this district and I want to thank the lawyers who worked so hard donating their time. Many more hours than they ever thought when they agreed to do this to bring about all of the necessary changes that were required. I particularly want to thank Marna Tucker and Debbie Pollock for your countless hours of help on behalf of this effort. And I also want to say a personal word of thanks to Melanne Verveer on my staff for helping to coordinate this effort.

Let me end by saying that this home will be an extraordinary place for the children and mothers who come here. I know that it will serve as an example of what all of us can do if we're willing to work on behalf of one another and particularly on behalf of our children. I want to thank Mother Teresa for this gift of love and for the work that she and the Sisters are doing throughout our community here in America and around the world.

It is my hope that all of us will think in our own ways about what else each of us can do to ease the passage, to help soothe the troubles of people around us. There is so much need and as we rethink what government's responsibility is let's remember we are our government. In a democracy, there is no "us" and "them" and if we say we want government to do things other than what it has been doing in providing direct services to people, then we have to govern ourselves in such a way that we make up the difference. Otherwise we will live to see a society in which our dreams for all of our children, instead of becoming closer to a reality, recedes further and further away and that on this day is something none of us should want to see happen. Thank you all for being part of this.

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FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
30-SECOND PSA ON ADOPTION
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
NOVEMBER 8, 1995

Those of us lucky enough to have warm and loving families know just how important they are in helping us become healthy adults. But thousands of children in this country don't have a permanent home and that's what they need to reach their fullest potential. Many kids waiting to be adopted have special needs. They're older...or they want to stay with brother or sisters...or they have a disability.

I'm asking you to make room in your heart and home for these very special children. For more information -- please call the National Adoption Center at 1-800-TO-ADOPT.

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NOVEMBER 8, 1995

Deanna's poem and remarks are
included in this transcript.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the First Lady

For Immediate Release

November 13, 1995

REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH EVENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.

NOVEMBER 13, 1995

MRS. CLINTON: Good Afternoon. Thank you. Thank you. Please be seated and please be welcomed to the White House. This is a very special day for all of us. And there have been many very important events that have occurred here in the East Room of the White House, but I honestly don't believe there is any that is more important than what we are doing by celebrating National Adoption Month. And November is a particularly appropriate time to highlight the importance of adoption in this country.

It's hard to believe but Thanksgiving and the Holiday Season are a little more than a week away. And during this season we traditionally focus on family. And we recognize how much we need and depend on the love of our parents and spouses and children and other relatives. So for all of you who are gathered here to begin this celebration, that we hope will ignite a fire of enthusiasm throughout the country about adoption, I want to say thank you.

There are several members of Congress here and I am delighted that all of you could join us. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, a long time advocate of family and children services is here with us because all of us believe that there isn't anything more important than our families and that the families formed by adoption are special and deserve the support of all the rest of us. Because we want to emphasize that there's a need in our country to bring the richness and love and support and guidance and discipline and attention of family life to every one of America's waiting children.

As we go into the Holiday Season, I hope every American will recognize that there are tens of thousands of children waiting for the love of a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, to have grandparents and aunts and uncles, to have a dog or a cat like Socks. Tens of thousands of those children, every single day, are growing up without mothers or fathers to help teach them, to nurture them and to tell them that they are special. We know

they are, but they need someone in their family to tell them that.

Often when we think of adoption, we have a picture in our mind of infants being welcomed into a family. But adoption today involves children and teenagers of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances. In this room today are adoptive families and waiting children who demonstrate the range of adoptive experiences. Adoption has provided a new beginning for school-aged children, for adolescents, for children with physical and emotional and educational disabilities, children of different races and cultures, and brothers and sisters who want to remain together.

Let me give you a picture of the children in America who are waiting. Six out of ten of them are school-aged children. Four out of ten are white. Four out of ten are African-American. The rest, Hispanic, Native American and every other race and color that you can imagine. Two out of three have special needs. Each one of these children has the capacity to love, to bring new joy and energy into a family. Most of you who are here, the families that already know that, are living proof of how adoption can be successful and emotionally rewarding. But we need more of you.

I recently met with Shane Salter, a young man who grew up in foster care without ever being placed in a permanent family. He described what that meant to him. He talked about his continued longing for parents who would not only care for him but who could be grandparents to his own children. Adoption can change lives, not only of those in the immediate family, but through generations.

I know that adoption in America today can be frustrating and emotionally draining and expensive. A newspaper column I wrote about adoption this summer generated more responses than any other I've written. I meet people throughout the country who come up and say they have read my column and they're an adoptive parent. Or they have read my column and they're a foster parent. Or they read my column, and they were adopted. Prospective parents have written to tell me of the immense obstacles, the red tape, and the costs, particularly the legal costs, that have led them to despair of ever being able to adopt a child.

I want you to know that the President is committed to easing and encouraging the adoption process. And I recently convened a group of experts to discuss how to make the government a better partner, and more responsive to the needs of prospective parents and children. In particular, the administration is working hard to ease the adoption of minority and special-needs children. The President is committed to enforcing the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement

of a child solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin of a child or prospective adoptive parents.

The administration also championed -- and the first bill the President signed -- was the Family and Medical Leave Act which ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fearing the loss of their jobs. And the administration has launched a public education campaign about adoption. A campaign in which I am very honored to participate. These are just some of the many initiatives, both in the government and in the private sector, and in partnership between both the public and private sectors, that are designed to support the placement of children in loving homes.

But all of your efforts and all of the administration's efforts to strengthen our families and children could be jeopardized by actions in Congress. The government currently provides essential recruitment and training services for prospective adoptive parents. As well as subsidies to families who adopt special-needs children, those living with Cerebral Palsy, or HIV, or some other disability, since those children have large medical and educational expenses. Many of the children who are special-needs, when they are adopted into families, bring with them such large medical costs, that if Medicaid is cut back substantially, the medical insurance for many of those special-needs children will no longer be available after they are adopted. Which would be a great tragedy, because there are so many parents who just need a little bit of financial help with the costs. Need a little bit of subsidy but then do need continuing medical help to be able to open their lives to these children. So we must all who care about adoption know that putting our nation's economic house in order does not mean sweeping out compassion and caring for our neediest children and families, making it less likely they will ever have a house of their own.

We have to work together to improve our adoption system. In the Proclamation for National Adoption Month the President said that citizens from all communities and organizations from the public and private sectors must join together to renew our commitment to finding permanent homes for each one of America's children. Two of the private foundations doing this important work are the Ann E. Casey Foundation which is active in five states, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Families For Kids, active in ten states.

I wish we could re-double, re-triple our efforts. I believe that if we really put our minds to it, if we could recruit qualified volunteers out of our judicial system and our legal system and our social work system, to be assigned to each child who is waiting to be adopted. We could make it possible for thousands and thousands more children to be adopted by this time

next year. We have to put our minds to it but there is no more important task than trying to do everything in our power to ensure that every child has a family.

Perhaps no person has been a more effective advocate for children waiting to be adopted, than our next speaker. The founder of Wendy's, the star of T.V., Dave Thomas started speaking out on adoption in 1990 when he became the national spokesperson for the White House Initiative on Adoption. As an adopted child himself, he says he would not have become the successful father, husband and businessman he is today, had he not been able to grow up in a supportive family.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption seeks to make adoption more affordable, streamline the adoption process, and educate the public about the potential joys of adoption. Mr. Thomas believes that no child is unadoptable and every child deserves a home and a loving family. But he knows, as we all do, that we have to overcome some misconceptions about adoption. We have to make it very clear that the children who are waiting are children just like yours and mine and every other child who goes to school and plays in playgrounds. They are America's children. And we have to make it clear to America that they would benefit greatly from having one of these children in their lives.

Mr. Thomas has also been a leader in the campaign to encourage corporations to extend maternity benefits to adoptive parents. This is so important. We do a terrible job in our country of ensuring maternity benefits in nearly every instance in most of the businesses in our country. It's important for new parents to be able to spend time with that child. Think how important it is for a new child coming into a strange home, filled with anticipation to have some time where he is the center of that family's attention, and that at least one parent gets a chance to spend that time with the child.

Within Wendy's, adoption benefits are paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs. Available to employees who have been with the company for at least one year. All of us are very proud of Mr. Thomas' leadership and grateful to him for it.

Following him to the podium will be the Reverend Wayne Thompson, President of One Church-One Child. This is one of the great ideas in America. And I wish every church would join One Church-One Child. Because through One Church-One Child, we have seen literally hundreds of thousands of children being given homes who might otherwise not have been known to anyone. And the church serves as a back-up extended family for the members who adopt children. Through this work, thousands of African-American children have found loving homes and supportive church congregations.

You will also be hearing from the Marshall Family. The proud parents of two beautiful little girls, they have experienced so much love and happiness with their two daughters, that they have spent considerable time promoting adoption in their own community. In fact, they are the family featured in the posters supporting adoption that appear in Wendy's restaurants around the world.

And then finally, we will hear from a young woman who knows exactly what's at stake. Deanna is 13. She lived in a foster home for seven years before moving into a group home in Topeka, Kansas. Though she no longer lives with her two foster sisters, she is still close to them and she is still waiting. She is a cheerleader, an avid reader, and a budding poet -- and a lovely young woman based on my experience with her a few minutes ago.

So these people who will be speaking to you have the experience that we would like to see transmitted to every American. They know what it's like to form a family by choice. To be able to say, I choose you to be my son or daughter. And in return to know what it's like as a child to have the love and support that can only come from one's own family. So please join me in welcoming Mr. Dave Thomas."

Dave Thomas: "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I thank you Mrs. Clinton. I asked Mrs. Clinton about, something like about a year ago, if she would help. And she said, "I will." And that's the reason why we're here today so I just want everyone to know that Mrs. Clinton and the President are dedicated to adoption. So let's give them a big hand, because they did it.

Let me tell you why I'm interested in adoption. I was adopted as Mrs. Clinton said, and my mother, my foster mother died when I was about five years old. And I was born out of wedlock and I had nothing to do with it -- trust me. And I had nothing to do about being adopted, it wasn't my fault. But I was adopted and I had six, no not six, I had three more foster mothers and step-mothers and then I left when I was 15 years old. But I do know how important it is, a family. And all through my life I've always been envious of mothers and fathers. Because I've never seen my mother and father. And if you have never seen your mother and father and the nurturing, you know everyone deserves the love and nurturing, when you grow up. I never had it, and I've always been kind of jealous of it.

And my kids, I have five children, fourteen grandchildren, and I probably spoil them for that reason. Now whether that's good or bad, but it's one of the things that, I wasn't spoiled. But I know one thing, I did have a grandmother that did care for

me. She was my foster grandmother and I didn't find out until I was 13 years old that I was adopted, and I was really hurt. So I do know how important it is and I feel so sorry for these children today, in particular, parents who don't take care of their children. I mean I just think it's a crime. I think we need to have an education to educate these parents about responsibility. I don't know how you feel about it but I'm real strong on responsibility.

You know, in foster care, there is almost a half-million children in foster care right now. And there's about 100,000 waiting to be adopted. And when we started the foundation, we said, well, we need to have some goals. And our objective was to make adoption affordable and take the red tape out of adoption, and so that's what we've really been trying to do. And so the first thing we did, we put adoption benefits right with the maternity benefits. And I want everybody to understand it's kind of a no-brainer. If you have maternity benefits, add adoption benefits. And we've done that--

I'm even trying to get the federal government to do the same. Right Mrs. Clinton? Mrs. Clinton said she's going support me. Congressmen? -- Women? -- Senators? Don't forget now, because it's really important. But right now we have, in about thirty-five states, we have adoption benefits. And in cities and in corporations. We wrote all kinds of letters and it's really the right thing to do. We have not said how much, but just to help.

And we also have a bill in the Congress to a tax-credit. And I think it's something for -- adoption is expensive. And we need to help people to adopt as Mrs. Clinton said. And I hope this bill -- Debby -- is going to work out real well. I hope everybody supports it because it's really an important thing.

And then, I think that the next thing that we've been working on, is that we've tried something that we call a computer. Does everybody understand what computers are? And Jan Heffner is the Director of the Dave Thomas Foundation -- stand up Jan -- Jan has been working on this real, real hard.

You know what it is, it's really children with willing parents. Now the children need to be matched with willing parents. And what's happened is IBM, AT&T and Marriot have helped with some government agencies working to make this happen. And the first example case of adoption's waiting children on-line through the National Adoption Center, there was 100,000 inquiries. Am I right Jan? Over 100,000. So Internet is really something that we're really trying to work on.

We're trying to do everything we can to make it possible and remind people about adoption. Because, what happens, these kids are out there, and they go from foster home to foster home. I was in Chicago not too long ago and a little boy, six years old, was in sixteen foster homes. Can you imagine that? I mean that's not fair. So that's what we're really trying to do and if we can get the federal government -- that would really be a good example to put in for all the federal workers adoption benefits. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Clinton: "I do."

Dave Thomas: "So, I'd just like to say this, I'd like to just say this. I think this is really a great event. I think it's something that we need to work on. And the more awareness and the more we talk about it. And I just keep talking about, and some people like to listen to me and some don't. But I'm going to keep talking because that -- every boy and every girl deserves a loving family. So thank you, and god bless you."

Wayne Thompson: "Thank you Mrs. Clinton for the opportunity to be a part of this historic day, and for your help in raising the awareness of the need for adoptions in our nation. The importance of adoption of children throughout our country can never be overstated. For these children are fortunate enough to have loving, permanent homes, in which they have been nurtured and cared for. They're led into adulthood with the support of parents which every child is entitled to and every child requires."

The family values are embodied by those parents who choose to bring children into their families and experience the joys of parenthood. The mission of the National One Church-One Child is to challenge each and every African-American congregation to adopt one African-American child. We believe that this furthers our need in our community for taking responsibility for our children. Believe me, this plan works.

In our church, we have had over sixteen adoptions since my involvement in this worthwhile program. In fact, there's one little boy who thinks he's pastor. When he was adopted I noticed that -- I always go to the door to greet the members as they leave -- I noticed that my line was shorter than usual, and I became a little bit concerned. I looked around and saw him shaking hands. And he had been adopted by a single-parent, a young woman who was an accountant, so I went over to him and I said, 'Now listen, there are some ground rules in this church. I'm the pastor -- and I shake everybody's hands so if you want to shake hands, come stand by me.' Well the brightness of his eyes

told the whole story. That where he had had no friends, no extended family, no church home, he was rejoicing, because now he had a new family and new friends.

We've had enormous success in placing children in our community in much needed adoptive homes. Many families, however, cannot adopt children without the help of the federal guarantee of financial assistance for every child and especially for special-needs children. This includes the children with Downs Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy and HIV AIDS and crack-cocaine addictive. These children are important too. And children are important to god and so our mission is one that we feel that we must continue to fight until the battle has been won.

The average family could not accept the responsibility for these children without the federal guarantee of financial assistance that is currently provided. This guarantee enables these families to care for children who would otherwise languish in the foster care system. And we are aware that there are welfare reform proposals that are pending now in Congress that would eliminate this much needed guarantee. And so our aim, and our struggle continues as we sound the alarm throughout our communities and from our pulpits, that there are children who are needed to be adopted, but that the government needs to accept the partnership which we offer. We offer it willingly. We offer it gladly.

Two out of three children who are waiting for adoption in this country have special-needs, making this federal guarantee more essential than every before. In the history of One Church-One Child, since 1980, more than 90,000 children have found homes through our congregations across this nation.

We thank god for the vision of Father Clemence many years ago and we thank you, Mrs. Clinton, for the vision you've cast forth today, because with your support and the support of those who represent and make up our government, we know that the prayers of the righteous will be answered. And so we offer, in this partnership consortium, the prayers of many people who want children to have permanent loving homes. Many pastors who work in our programs have themselves, like me, become adoptive parents and so we know that we practice what we preach. And we know that the children are the ones who get the blessing.

Again, thank you for making this a special day for children across this nation. We know that they long and deserve permanent, loving homes. And so that the need for further guaranteed federal protection most come and we believe with the help of god it will come. Thank you."

Mrs. Marshall: "First of all, I'd like to thank Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Thomas and all others involved, for inviting my family to be a part of this special event for a very important issue.

First of all, I would like to say that if only everyone out there knew, how much joy and happiness Kayla and Terry have brought into me and my husband's life, everyone would be lined up at all adoption agencies everywhere to adopt a child.

My husband and I have been married for 12 years. After being married 9 years, we decided we wanted children. I went to the doctor and found out that I wasn't able to have children. I used to always watch a local spot on our local news program called, 'Wednesday's Child'. They highlight on children that are up for adoption and need homes. So we decided to call Franklin County Children's Services and see how we could go through the adoption process.

They invited us to an adoption party in April of 1992. We were there for about an hour and there were hundreds of kids there from the ages of new-born to 7 years of age. We were there and we played with kids, we made balloons, we jumped rope and then all of a sudden, a little girl comes in. She was late. She came in and she had her little friend's hand and I looked at my husband and I said, 'Look at those jaws, I just love her.' When I first saw her, we knew that she was the one.

She talked to us at lunch, she asked for our fruit that we didn't want. She wasn't shy at all. And so we knew that she was the one and we called the next day and said that we wanted to start our class immediately, we wanted to get her as soon as possible. After we adopted Terry, she wanted sisters and brothers and so we said, 'Hey, we're willing to go and adopt another.' So then, Kayla comes into our life and there's not a day that doesn't go by that she just makes us smile and laugh so much. And if we had room in our home we would adopt 1,000 kids, no matter what race, what religion, color. We just love kids, because children are our future.

I remember when one day we didn't have kids, back when we didn't have kids, we adopted 15 children, nieces, nephews, neighbors' kids, and we went to the Ice Capades. We took up a whole row. We came back to our one bedroom apartment, we threw a big pajama party for 15 children. So, I mean, if we had room, we would adopt more, but we don't have the room in our home but we do have the room in our hearts. And we would like to let the kids know that are waiting for families and homes to keep the faith and with a little bit of help, hope and prayer, you'll all have a family and a home some day. Thank you."

Deanna Moppin: "My name is Deanna Lee Moppin. I have been in SRS custody ever since I was five years old. I was removed from my birth home because of sexual abuse. I was then placed in a new home where I remained for seven years, but then we seemed to have some problems so I was removed from that home along with two other of the girls that were in there.

We were placed in a shelter in Topeka, Kansas where we remained for a few nights before moving on to the villages. In the villages, I have two foster parents and there are nine other kids living with me. The foster parents try to help us feel good about ourselves and they try to help us with our problems and they do the best to find us all good homes that we will happy in.

Some of the kids have nowhere to go, so they just have to keep putting one foot in front of the other and hope for the best while making goals for themselves until they reach their destination.

For most of them their destination is adoption. It is also one of mine. The reasons that I want to get adopted is usually if I want to go to the movies, I have to ask my house parents and they have to ask my village social worker who has to ask my social worker -- and then it has to come back the same way. That usually takes awhile. And if I want clothes, I have to ask my house parents who have to ask my village social worker who has to ask my social worker. There is also paper work that needs to be done and that usually takes up to about three weeks.

The other reasons that I want to be adopted is I would have a place that I could call home. I would have a room that I could call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back.

I wrote a poem about waiting for a home and I would like to share it with you now:

My nerves cringe with excitement as I must wait.
I don't know when it will happen, there is no date.

My one wish that I hope to come true.
Will you make my wish come true, will you?

I don't want to be here forever, I want a home.
Please get me out of this system and out of this dome.

Does anyone want me; it feels like three whole years.
I am still waiting for you, I'm so close to tears.

I want to live happy with my spirit so free.
Only you can make it happen; when will it be?

The papers are here, you have finally heard.
I'd fly to you now if I were a bird.

One question left; Do we make a pair?
Are you somebody who will really care?

I hope you're the one for other choices have come.
I'll go through them all for my choice should not be dumb.

I've always been hoping for this day to arrive.
Without a good family I could not survive.

My nerves boil with excitement I no longer wait.
I know when it will happen and I do know the date.

Mrs. Clinton: "I want to thank everyone who's here and all of the participants. I want to invite all of you into the State Dining Room where there will be a reception and some cookies and things for all of the children who have demonstrated extraordinary patience this afternoon. I just want to end with something that really, I think, echoes what everyone said. The primary responsibility for children lies with the parents and parents have the highest obligation to their own children and should do everything in their power to take care of those children. But sometimes for a lot of reasons that go back to the beginning of human history, that responsibility is not accepted. And then all the rest of us, I think, have the responsibility. We are a part of every child's family whether we acknowledge it or not. And so in any way that we can, we should try to accept that responsibility and give the love and attention that every child who was born deserves to have. And so that's what we hope the result of this National Adoption Month campaign will lead to -- more and more Americans accepting responsibility for all our children. Thank you very much."

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the First Lady

For Immediate Release

November 13, 1995

**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH EVENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

MRS. CLINTON: Good Afternoon. Thank you. Thank you. Please be seated and please be welcomed to the White House. This is a very special day for all of us. And there have been many very important events that have occurred here in the East Room of the White House, but I honestly don't believe there is any that is more important than what we are doing by celebrating National Adoption Month. And November is a particularly appropriate time to highlight the importance of adoption in this country.

It's hard to believe but Thanksgiving and the Holiday Season are a little more than a week away. And during this season we traditionally focus on family. And we recognize how much we need and depend on the love of our parents and spouses and children and other relatives. So for all of you who are gathered here to begin this celebration, that we hope will ignite a fire of enthusiasm throughout the country about adoption, I want to say thank you.

There are several members of Congress here and I am delighted that all of you could join us. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, a long time advocate of family and children services is here with us because all of us believe that there isn't anything more important than our families and that the families formed by adoption are special and deserve the support of all the rest of us. Because we want to emphasize that there's a need in our country to bring the richness and love and support and guidance and discipline and attention of family life to every one of America's waiting children.

As we go into the Holiday Season, I hope every American will recognize that there are tens of thousands of children waiting for the love of a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, to have grandparents and aunts and uncles, to have a dog or a cat like Socks. Tens of thousands of those children, every single day, are growing up without mothers or fathers to help teach them, to nurture them and to tell them that they are special. We know

they are, but they need someone in their family to tell them that.

Often when we think of adoption, we have a picture in our mind of infants being welcomed into a family. But adoption today involves children and teenagers of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances. In this room today are adoptive families and waiting children who demonstrate the range of adoptive experiences. Adoption has provided a new beginning for school-aged children, for adolescents, for children with physical and emotional and educational disabilities, children of different races and cultures, and brothers and sisters who want to remain together.

Let me give you a picture of the children in America who are waiting. Six out of ten of them are school-aged children. Four out of ten are white. Four out of ten are African-American. The rest, Hispanic, Native American and every other race and color that you can imagine. Two out of three have special needs. Each one of these children has the capacity to love, to bring new joy and energy into a family. Most of you who are here, the families that already know that, are living proof of how adoption can be successful and emotionally rewarding. But we need more of you.

I recently met with Shane Salter, a young man who grew up in foster care without ever being placed in a permanent family. He described what that meant to him. He talked about his continued longing for parents who would not only care for him but who could be grandparents to his own children. Adoption can change lives, not only of those in the immediate family, but through generations.

I know that adoption in America today can be frustrating and emotionally draining and expensive. A newspaper column I wrote about adoption this summer generated more responses than any other I've written. I meet people throughout the country who come up and say they have read my column and they're an adoptive parent. Or they have read my column and they're a foster parent. Or they read my column, and they were adopted. Prospective parents have written to tell me of the immense obstacles, the red tape, and the costs, particularly the legal costs, that have led them to despair of ever being able to adopt a child.

I want you to know that the President is committed to easing and encouraging the adoption process. And I recently convened a group of experts to discuss how to make the government a better partner, and more responsive to the needs of prospective parents and children. In particular, the administration is working hard to ease the adoption of minority and special-needs children. The President is committed to enforcing the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement

of a child solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin of a child or prospective adoptive parents.

The administration also championed -- and the first bill the President signed -- was the Family and Medical Leave Act which ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fearing the loss of their jobs. And the administration has launched a public education campaign about adoption. A campaign in which I am very honored to participate. These are just some of the many initiatives, both in the government and in the private sector, and in partnership between both the public and private sectors, that are designed to support the placement of children in loving homes.

But all of your efforts and all of the administration's efforts to strengthen our families and children could be jeopardized by actions in Congress. The government currently provides essential recruitment and training services for prospective adoptive parents. As well as subsidies to families who adopt special-needs children, those living with Cerebral Palsy, or HIV, or some other disability, since those children have large medical and educational expenses. Many of the children who are special-needs, when they are adopted into families, bring with them such large medical costs, that if Medicaid is cut back substantially, the medical insurance for many of those special-needs children will no longer be available after they are adopted. Which would be a great tragedy, because there are so many parents who just need a little bit of financial help with the costs. Need a little bit of subsidy but then do need continuing medical help to be able to open their lives to these children. So we must all who care about adoption know that putting our nation's economic house in order does not mean sweeping out compassion and caring for our neediest children and families, making it less likely they will ever have a house of their own.

We have to work together to improve our adoption system. In the Proclamation for National Adoption Month the President said that citizens from all communities and organizations from the public and private sectors must join together to renew our commitment to finding permanent homes for each one of America's children. Two of the private foundations doing this important work are the Ann E. Casey Foundation which is active in five states, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Families For Kids, active in ten states.

I wish we could re-double, re-triple our efforts. I believe that if we really put our minds to it, if we could recruit qualified volunteers out of our judicial system and our legal system and our social work system, to be assigned to each child who is waiting to be adopted. We could make it possible for thousands and thousands more children to be adopted by this time

next year. We have to put our minds to it but there is no more important task than trying to do everything in our power to ensure that every child has a family.

Perhaps no person has been a more effective advocate for children waiting to be adopted, than our next speaker. The founder of Wendy's, the star of T.V., Dave Thomas started speaking out on adoption in 1990 when he became the national spokesperson for the White House Initiative on Adoption. As an adopted child himself, he says he would not have become the successful father, husband and businessman he is today, had he not been able to grow up in a supportive family.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption seeks to make adoption more affordable, streamline the adoption process, and educate the public about the potential joys of adoption. Mr. Thomas believes that no child is unadoptable and every child deserves a home and a loving family. But he knows, as we all do, that we have to overcome some misconceptions about adoption. We have to make it very clear that the children who are waiting are children just like yours and mine and every other child who goes to school and plays in playgrounds. They are America's children. And we have to make it clear to America that they would benefit greatly from having one of these children in their lives.

Mr. Thomas has also been a leader in the campaign to encourage corporations to extend maternity benefits to adoptive parents. This is so important. We do a terrible job in our country of ensuring maternity benefits in nearly every instance in most of the businesses in our country. It's important for new parents to be able to spend time with that child. Think how important it is for a new child coming into a strange home, filled with anticipation to have some time where he is the center of that family's attention, and that at least one parent gets a chance to spend that time with the child.

Within Wendy's, adoption benefits are paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs. Available to employees who have been with the company for at least one year. All of us are very proud of Mr. Thomas' leadership and grateful to him for it.

Following him to the podium will be the Reverend Wayne Thompson, President of One Church-One Child. This is one of the great ideas in America. And I wish every church would join One Church-One Child. Because through One Church-One Child, we have seen literally hundreds of thousands of children being given homes who might otherwise not have been known to anyone. And the church serves as a back-up extended family for the members who adopt children. Through this work, thousands of African-American children have found loving homes and supportive church congregations.

You will also be hearing from the Marshall Family. The proud parents of two beautiful little girls, they have experienced so much love and happiness with their two daughters, that they have spent considerable time promoting adoption in their own community. In fact, they are the family featured in the posters supporting adoption that appear in Wendy's restaurants around the world.

And then finally, we will hear from a young woman who knows exactly what's at stake. Deanna is 13. She lived in a foster home for seven years before moving into a group home in Topeka, Kansas. Though she no longer lives with her two foster sisters, she is still close to them and she is still waiting. She is a cheerleader, an avid reader, and a budding poet -- and a lovely young woman based on my experience with her a few minutes ago.

So these people who will be speaking to you have the experience that we would like to see transmitted to every American. They know what it's like to form a family by choice. To be able to say, I choose you to be my son or daughter. And in return to know what it's like as a child to have the love and support that can only come from one's own family. So please join me in welcoming Mr. Dave Thomas."

Dave Thomas: "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I thank you Mrs. Clinton. I asked Mrs. Clinton about, something like about a year ago, if she would help. And she said, "I will." And that's the reason why we're here today so I just want everyone to know that Mrs. Clinton and the President are dedicated to adoption. So let's give them a big hand, because they did it.

Let me tell you why I'm interested in adoption. I was adopted as Mrs. Clinton said, and my mother, my foster mother died when I was about five years old. And I was born out of wedlock and I had nothing to do with it -- trust me. And I had nothing to do about being adopted, it wasn't my fault. But I was adopted and I had six, no not six, I had three more foster mothers and step-mothers and then I left when I was 15 years old. But I do know how important it is, a family. And all through my life I've always been envious of mothers and fathers. Because I've never seen my mother and father. And if you have never seen your mother and father and the nurturing, you know everyone deserves the love and nurturing, when you grow up. I never had it, and I've always been kind of jealous of it.

And my kids, I have five children, fourteen grandchildren, and I probably spoil them for that reason. Now whether that's good or bad, but it's one of the things that, I wasn't spoiled. But I know one thing, I did have a grandmother that did care for

me. She was my foster grandmother and I didn't find out until I was 13 years old that I was adopted, and I was really hurt. So I do know how important it is and I feel so sorry for these children today, in particular, parents who don't take care of their children. I mean I just think it's a crime. I think we need to have an education to educate these parents about responsibility. I don't know how you feel about it but I'm real strong on responsibility.

You know, in foster care, there is almost a half-million children in foster care right now. And there's about 100,000 waiting to be adopted. And when we started the foundation, we said, well, we need to have some goals. And our objective was to make adoption affordable and take the red tape out of adoption, and so that's what we've really been trying to do. And so the first thing we did, we put adoption benefits right with the maternity benefits. And I want everybody to understand it's kind of a no-brainer. If you have maternity benefits, add adoption benefits. And we've done that--

I'm even trying to get the federal government to do the same. Right Mrs. Clinton? Mrs. Clinton said she's going support me. Congressmen? -- Women? -- Senators? Don't forget now, because it's really important. But right now we have, in about thirty-five states, we have adoption benefits. And in cities and in corporations. We wrote all kinds of letters and it's really the right thing to do. We have not said how much, but just to help.

And we also have a bill in the Congress to a tax-credit. And I think it's something for -- adoption is expensive. And we need to help people to adopt as Mrs. Clinton said. And I hope this bill -- Debby -- is going to work out real well. I hope everybody supports it because it's really an important thing.

And then, I think that the next thing that we've been working on, is that we've tried something that we call a computer. Does everybody understand what computers are? And Jan Heffner is the Director of the Dave Thomas Foundation -- stand up Jan -- Jan has been working on this real, real hard.

You know what it is, it's really children with willing parents. Now the children need to be matched with willing parents. And what's happened is IBM, AT&T and Marriot have helped with some government agencies working to make this happen. And the first example case of adoption's waiting children on-line through the National Adoption Center, there was 100,000 inquiries. Am I right Jan? Over 100,000. So Internet is really something that we're really trying to work on.

We're trying to do everything we can to make it possible and remind people about adoption. Because, what happens, these kids are out there, and they go from foster home to foster home. I was in Chicago not too long ago and a little boy, six years old, was in sixteen foster homes. Can you imagine that? I mean that's not fair. So that's what we're really trying to do and if we can get the federal government -- that would really be a good example to put in for all the federal workers adoption benefits. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Clinton: "I do."

Dave Thomas: "So, I'd just like to say this, I'd like to just say this. I think this is really a great event. I think it's something that we need to work on. And the more awareness and the more we talk about it. And I just keep talking about, and some people like to listen to me and some don't. But I'm going to keep talking because that -- every boy and every girl deserves a loving family. So thank you, and god bless you."

Wayne Thompson: "Thank you Mrs. Clinton for the opportunity to be a part of this historic day, and for your help in raising the awareness of the need for adoptions in our nation. The importance of adoption of children throughout our country can never be overstated. For these children are fortunate enough to have loving, permanent homes, in which they have been nurtured and cared for. They're led into adulthood with the support of parents which every child is entitled to and every child requires."

The family values are embodied by those parents who choose to bring children into their families and experience the joys of parenthood. The mission of the National One Church-One Child is to challenge each and every African-American congregation to adopt one African-American child. We believe that this furthers our need in our community for taking responsibility for our children. Believe me, this plan works.

In our church, we have had over sixteen adoptions since my involvement in this worthwhile program. In fact, there's one little boy who thinks he's pastor. When he was adopted I noticed that -- I always go to the door to greet the members as they leave -- I noticed that my line was shorter than usual, and I became a little bit concerned. I looked around and saw him shaking hands. And he had been adopted by a single-parent, a young woman who was an accountant, so I went over to him and I said, 'Now listen, there are some ground rules in this church. I'm the pastor -- and I shake everybody's hands so if you want to shake hands, come stand by me.' Well the brightness of his eyes

told the whole story. That where he had had no friends, no extended family, no church home, he was rejoicing, because now he had a new family and new friends.

We've had enormous success in placing children in our community in much needed adoptive homes. Many families, however, cannot adopt children without the help of the federal guarantee of financial assistance for every child and especially for special-needs children. This includes the children with Downs Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy and HIV AIDS and crack-cocaine addictive. These children are important too. And children are important to god and so our mission is one that we feel that we must continue to fight until the battle has been won.

The average family could not accept the responsibility for these children without the federal guarantee of financial assistance that is currently provided. This guarantee enables these families to care for children who would otherwise languish in the foster care system. And we are aware that there are welfare reform proposals that are pending now in Congress that would eliminate this much needed guarantee. And so our aim, and our struggle continues as we sound the alarm throughout our communities and from our pulpits, that there are children who are needed to be adopted, but that the government needs to accept the partnership which we offer. We offer it willingly. We offer it gladly.

Two out of three children who are waiting for adoption in this country have special-needs, making this federal guarantee more essential than every before. In the history of One Church-One Child, since 1980, more than 90,000 children have found homes through our congregations across this nation.

We thank god for the vision of Father Clemence many years ago and we thank you, Mrs. Clinton, for the vision you've cast forth today, because with your support and the support of those who represent and make up our government, we know that the prayers of the righteous will be answered. And so we offer, in this partnership consortium, the prayers of many people who want children to have permanent loving homes. Many pastors who work in our programs have themselves, like me, become adoptive parents and so we know that we practice what we preach. And we know that the children are the ones who get the blessing.

Again, thank you for making this a special day for children across this nation. We know that they long and deserve permanent, loving homes. And so that the need for further guaranteed federal protection most come and we believe with the help of god it will come. Thank you."

Mrs. Marshall: "First of all, I'd like to thank Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Thomas and all others involved, for inviting my family to be a part of this special event for a very important issue.

First of all, I would like to say that if only everyone out there knew, how much joy and happiness Kayla and Terry have brought into me and my husband's life, everyone would be lined up at all adoption agencies everywhere to adopt a child.

My husband and I have been married for 12 years. After being married 9 years, we decided we wanted children. I went to the doctor and found out that I wasn't able to have children. I used to always watch a local spot on our local news program called, 'Wednesday's Child'. They highlight on children that are up for adoption and need homes. So we decided to call Franklin County Children's Services and see how we could go through the adoption process.

They invited us to an adoption party in April of 1992. We were there for about an hour and there were hundreds of kids there from the ages of new-born to 7 years of age. We were there and we played with kids, we made balloons, we jumped rope and then all of a sudden, a little girl comes in. She was late. She came in and she had her little friend's hand and I looked at my husband and I said, 'Look at those jaws, I just love her.' When I first saw her, we knew that she was the one.

She talked to us at lunch, she asked for our fruit that we didn't want. She wasn't shy at all. And so we knew that she was the one and we called the next day and said that we wanted to start our class immediately, we wanted to get her as soon as possible. After we adopted Terry, she wanted sisters and brothers and so we said, 'Hey, we're willing to go and adopt another.' So then, Kayla comes into our life and there's not a day that doesn't go by that she just makes us smile and laugh so much. And if we had room in our home we would adopt 1,000 kids, no matter what race, what religion, color. We just love kids, because children are our future.

I remember when one day we didn't have kids, back when we didn't have kids, we adopted 15 children, nieces, nephews, neighbors' kids, and we went to the Ice Capades. We took up a whole row. We came back to our one bedroom apartment, we threw a big pajama party for 15 children. So, I mean, if we had room, we would adopt more, but we don't have the room in our home but we do have the room in our hearts. And we would like to let the kids know that are waiting for families and homes to keep the faith and with a little bit of help, hope and prayer, you'll all have a family and a home some day. Thank you."

Deanna Moppin: "My name is Deanna Lee Moppin. I have been in SRS custody ever since I was five years old. I was removed from my birth home because of sexual abuse. I was then placed in a new home where I remained for seven years, but then we seemed to have some problems so I was removed from that home along with two other of the girls that were in there.

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Does anyone want me; it feels like three whole years.
I am still waiting for you, I'm so close to tears.

I want to live happy with my spirit so free.
Only you can make it happen; when will it be?

The papers are here, you have finally heard.
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Mrs. Clinton: "I want to thank everyone who's here and all of the participants. I want to invite all of you into the State Dining Room where there will be a reception and some cookies and things for all of the children who have demonstrated extraordinary patience this afternoon. I just want to end with something that really, I think, echoes what everyone said. The primary responsibility for children lies with the parents and parents have the highest obligation to their own children and should do everything in their power to take care of those children. But sometimes for a lot of reasons that go back to the beginning of human history, that responsibility is not accepted. And then all the rest of us, I think, have the responsibility. We are a part of every child's family whether we acknowledge it or not. And so in any way that we can, we should try to accept that responsibility and give the love and attention that every child who was born deserves to have. And so that's what we hope the result of this National Adoption Month campaign will lead to -- more and more Americans accepting responsibility for all our children. Thank you very much."

TALKING IT OVER

BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RELEASE: WEEKEND, OCTOBER 28-29, 1995

When I first began writing this column more than three months ago, I hoped to occasionally use this space to respond to the many people who write to me.

So far, I have received more heartwarming and thought-provoking letters than I can count. I also have received a few angry letters whose contents cannot be published in a family newspaper.

I've heard from a class of second- and third-graders in Kansas who are concerned about pollution, a man from Illinois who is campaigning against tobacco use, and a retiree in Florida worried about the high cost of health care.

A boy from Texas wanted to know what Socks eats (dried cat food) and a 10-year-old in Minnesota asked how many rooms are in the White House (132).

I wish I could respond to all of these letters in this column. Instead, I can only answer a few.

Many readers wrote in response to my column in July about our nation's complicated system of adoption and the thousands of needy children who are waiting for permanent, loving homes. Not surprisingly, I heard from lots of people who said they were eager to adopt children but had become overwhelmed by the long wait, red tape and high cost involved.

A Florida woman, frustrated by a lack of communication among adoption agencies and government social workers, summed up the feelings of many prospective adoptive parents: "I know there is a little girl in this country somewhere waiting for my home."

One couple from Oregon, trying to adopt through a county agency, was told that it might take several years before a child was available. Their alternative, to adopt through a private agency, could cost \$16,000 or more.

Because these problems are so widespread -- and because so many children continue to languish in foster care -- I recently got together a group of experts, adoption advocates and concerned parents to help people learn more about adoption and to make the process simpler and more efficient for waiting parents. There is no reason so many loving parents cannot be united with children desperate for their care and attention.

I also have received mailbags of letters about my trip to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September. Some people were

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON 10/28-29/95

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concerned about my participation, and many others were enthusiastic about it. A few expressed their outrage over infanticide and coerced abortions in China, problems that people became more aware of because the conference was held there. Others wondered if the conference would really make a difference in improving women's rights around the world.

I believe the conference was an important and historic first step in giving women the tools they need to lead productive lives. More than 180 nations agreed for the first time that women are integral to the economic, political and social life of every country and that global peace and prosperity depend on the well-being of women.

However, the conference in Beijing will only be a lasting success if governments, institutions and each of us in our own lives work to ensure that women are full and equal partners in society. Here at home, for example, the President has created a special White House Council on Women that will enable government agencies to work together and reach out to private organizations to fulfill the goals of the women's conference.

Health issues were on the minds of many readers. I heard from scores of Gulf War veterans and their families, who were concerned about the government's response to illnesses commonly referred to as Gulf War Syndrome. I hope those families, many of whom have suffered greatly, know that the President has established an advisory committee to investigate Gulf War veterans' illnesses.

Perhaps the most gratifying health-related letter I received came from Miriam Murtha, a Virginia woman who got a mammogram as a result of our breast cancer awareness campaign that began earlier this year. Her screening found two malignant tumors before they could spread to other parts of her body. "I will be having regular checkups from now on," she wrote.

Children also wrote to me with suggestions and questions. Many wondered if I could raise their allowances, lower the voting age or send them free tickets to Washington. (Sorry, I can't.)

And quite a few offered their own editorial comments. "I think there should be no more drugs. I don't want any more guns and no more pollution," wrote Brandon Jackson, a second-grader from Kansas.

To Brandon and everyone else who wrote to me over these last few months, thanks for talking things over with me.

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**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
TALKING POINTS FOR MOTHER'S DAY ADOPTION EVENT
THE ROOSEVELT ROOM
MAY 10, 1996**

- Welcome to the White House. I'm so glad you could join me today in honor of Mother's Day to talk about the joys and challenges of adoption.
- Mother's Day is a wonderful time to remember that each of you have given the most important gift an adult can give to a child -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home. And I know they have given you all of the rewards and richness that come with raising children.
- Often when we think of adoption, we have a picture in our mind of infants being welcomed into a family. But adoption today involves children and teenagers of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances. Adoption has provided a new beginning for school-aged children, for adolescents, for children with physical and emotional disabilities, for children of different races and cultures, and for brothers and sisters who want to stay together. As I look around the room, I see families that represent the range of adoptive experiences. You are living proof that adoption can be successful and emotionally rewarding. We need more of you.
- Far too many children are waiting for permanent homes. Almost half of these children have been waiting more than two years. More than half have special medical, developmental, behavioral or psychological needs. They are minority children, older children and siblings.
- In November, we celebrated National Adoption Month at the White House by highlighting the waiting children and the importance finding them permanent homes through adoption. These children deserve what your children have. That's why the President and I are committed to encouraging and easing the adoption process.
- The Administration has worked hard to promote adoption, especially for children with special needs. We championed the Family and Medical Leave Act -- which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or their health insurance. We launched a public education campaign about adoption. We strongly supported and remain committed to enforcing vigorously the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act to end discrimination based on race or ethnicity in adoptions. We have increased by 60 percent the number of children with special needs who have been adopted with Federal adoption assistance. We have voiced our strong support for a bill in Congress right now that would give a tax credit to families wanting to adopt. And we have created an honor roll of private companies who have pledged to make adoption easier for workers and their families by paying adoption benefits, offering leave time after adoption, or other programs.

- But we need to do more. We should redouble our efforts. We should make it possible for thousands and thousands more children to be adopted by Mother's Day next year. Because there is no more important task than trying to do everything in our power to ensure that every child has a family.
- [OPEN DISCUSSION.]

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Talking It Over

By Hillary Rodham Clinton

Let's Make Adoption Easier, Less Costly

The first time I met Mother Teresa was not in an urban slum or a remote village in India but in the fancy ballroom of a Washington hotel. It was February, 1994, and she had just delivered a speech against abortion at the National Prayer Breakfast. When she finished her remarks, she pulled me aside for a chat.

She told me about her homes for orphaned children in New Delhi and Calcutta and asked for my help in setting up a similar home for abandoned and neglected babies in Washington. I agreed to work on the project. Although we differ on some issues, we found common ground on adoption. So we sat and talked about how to find homes for the hundreds of thousands of American children who need loving families.

A year later, my daughter and I visited Mother Teresa's home for children in New Delhi. There were too many cribs and too few toilets, and there was too little space. There was no way the place could ever pass inspection in any American city. But there were also dozens of beautiful babies, mostly girls, being fed, clothed, sheltered and loved until they could be adopted.

These images stayed with me when I returned home. I was even more determined to help Mother Teresa bring to Washington the compassion I had witnessed in India. But you cannot imagine how much red tape was getting in my way. Ironically, many regulations designed to protect children often overlook what kids need most: love and attention.

Finally, on a sweltering day this past June, the Mother Teresa Home for Children opened in an affluent residential neighborhood of the nation's capital. It is a two-story Tudor house with a swimming pool in the back yard, donated by a remarkably generous person who chose to remain anonymous. At the dedication ceremony, Mother Teresa walked me through brightly painted rooms filled with cribs, bassinets and stuffed animals.

Although it will accommodate only eight children, this home is a crucial step in awakening Americans to the crisis of adoption.

We should worry less about how many cribs can be placed in a room and more about how many children can be placed with loving families. And instead of yelling at one another about abortion, we should spend our energy making adoptions easier. If that were to happen, there would be far fewer abortions and far more children in happy homes.

Today, there are about 450,000 children in the United States who need permanent families. There are tens of thousands of parents seeking to adopt. Yet every day, complex regulations, outdated assumptions and wrong-headed laws stand in the way of bringing these parents and children together.

For some Americans, such as a woman who wrote to me recently, cost is the biggest barrier. She and her husband, both musicians, spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy six years ago. When her cousin's daughter recently became pregnant at age 18 and could not afford to keep the child, the same couple volunteered to adopt again. As simple as this case should have been—the parents and baby were members of the same extended family and all parties agreed to the adoption—it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paper work.

For others, there is a fear factor. A 40-year-old newscaster I met recently in New Mexico was interested in adopting but was discouraged by highly publicized cases such as Baby Richard's, in which birth parents seek to reclaim custody of adopted children.

Decisions to give up children for adoption should be difficult to overturn; the decision to return the child to the biological parents or to uphold the adoption should be made as quickly as possible. No child should be left in limbo.

The process also is made more difficult because of a historical bias against interracial adoptions, which can mean endless waiting until children are matched with parents of the same race.

Today, there are far more minority children needing homes than are being placed for adoption. To prevent these children from languishing in foster care, new guidelines are now in place that will prohibit federally funded agencies from using race as a factor in placing children.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we did something dramatic about adoption? Why not set a goal of placing 100,000 children each year for the next five years? To do this, we would have to make adoption easier and enlist volunteer lawyers and judges to speed up the legal process. And we should also follow Mother Teresa's model, in which considerations such as money, regulations and skin color do not outweigh the more important gift of love.

Hillary Rodham Clinton's column appears every Sunday in

September 13, 1996

Dear :

Thank you for joining me at the White House to discuss ways to promote adoption and break down barriers. I was heartened by our constructive discussion and by the thoughtful suggestions of concrete steps all sectors of society can take to place more children in permanent homes.

We all recognize that children in limbo often come from communities in distress, and we must address the failing infrastructures and other serious problems that contribute to the burgeoning child welfare system. But at the same time, we agree that we must work aggressively on short-term solutions. A year in the life of a two year old is half of his life, and we can not ask that child to wait for loving parents and a stable home until his community is rebuilt.

I hope that our meeting will be only the beginning of an ongoing dialogue. I have enclosed a draft summary of the ideas we shared. Please let us know if this document accurately reflects your suggestions, add any new thoughts you wish, and help us to prioritize the challenges and proposals reflected in the document. Feel free to send any written comments to Nicole Rabner in Room 100 of the Old Executive Office Building, The White House, Washington, D.C. 20502, or call her at 202/456-6266.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

Hillary Rodham Clinton

SEPTEMBER 13, 1996

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
VIDEO REMARKS FOR
THE NACAC NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH CELEBRATION
OCTOBER 29, 1996

I am pleased to join all of you observing National Adoption Month -- a time to celebrate adoption as a way to build families and to raise public awareness about the tens of thousands of children across our nation who today wait in the foster care system for homes of their own.

In proclaiming November National Adoption Month, the President said, "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." My husband is committed to facilitating adoption, encouraging parents to adopt and using government as an active partner to meet this critical challenge.

I want to congratulate the North American Council on Adoptable Children for your ambitious Adoption Month Awareness campaign on behalf of waiting children. And I particularly want to thank the children who are here today to share their hopes and dreams of finding permanent homes. You and the thousands of children you represent remind us of the urgency of our mission.

Last year, I invited children from around the country to join me at the White House to celebrate National Adoption Month. I especially remember Deanna [dee-ann-ah], a young woman living in foster care in Kansas, who talked about her yearning to be adopted. I don't think there has ever been a more eloquent speaker in the East Room of the White House than Deanna. Seven months later, I met Deanna again in Kansas City; with her was her newly adoptive mother. Deanna was transformed, beaming as she told me about her new home, new contact lenses and, finally, her new-found sense of security.

I hope and pray that all waiting children will experience the joy and fulfillment I saw in Deanna's eyes and heard in her words. But it will take all of us -- from the individual family to the business sector to the faith community to our schools to the government -- working together to make it happen.

This Holiday season, as we all reflect on the importance of family in our own lives, I hope we will also think about adoption -- about the rewards of joining children in need with adults who want the responsibility and the joys of parenthood.

Thank you for doing your part in this campaign.

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OCTOBER 29, 1996

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

DECEMBER 14, 1996

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 again.

THE PRESIDENT: How many foster homes have you lived with?

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT CHILD DEVELOPMENT EVENT

Georgetown Medical Center
Washington, D.C.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. I am so pleased to see all of you here and I'm delighted to be back at Georgetown Medical Center, where I have visited before, because I think that the work that is being done here and the announcement today is among the most important efforts that are going on right now in our Capital City, because if we were able to make it clear to every parent in Washington, D.C. and beyond that reading to one's child between birth and three is one of the most important jobs that a parent can do, I think we would all see remarkable progress being made in school readiness, in school performance, in relationships between parents and children.

I want to thank Dr. Rennart (phonetic) for his remarks and for his leadership as the Professor and Chair of the Department of Pediatrics. I want to ask Dr. Battle to convey to the Academy of Pediatrics our deep appreciation because of their support of this effort and so many other good works that the Academy does on behalf of children. I also want to acknowledge a few other people who are in the audience.

I want to acknowledge my friend, Leo Donovan, the President of Georgetown who has been very supportive of efforts concerning education and literacy not only here at the university, but around Washington.

I also want to thank Jules Stoddard, who is representing the Association of Book Sellers for Children and is the owner of the Cheshire Cat Bookstore in Washington, D.C., one of the nation's oldest children's bookstores.

In my book, It Takes a Village, I mention the Association's program called "The Most Important Twenty Minutes of Your Day -- Read With a Child." I think for many people that was originally thought to refer to older children -- children in kindergarten or even grade school. What we are trying to do and what the Association for Book Sellers is attempting to do is to convey clearly the message that we want reading to children to start at birth, but particularly during those first three years of life.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Steven Herb (phonetic) and Susan Roman, president and executive director respectively of the Association for Library Services to Children, a division of the American Library Association. I also mentioned their national demonstration program in my book, "Born To Read," and actually contributed some of the book proceeds recently to that, because this three-year national demonstration project, which builds partnerships between libraries and health care providers such as Dr. Rennart and Dr. Battle, is helping low-income parents and others with poor literacy skills to understand the importance of reading to their children.

And finally, I want to thank Dr. Tina Cheng and Dr. Andra Kuzi (phonetic) who are part of "Reach Out and Read" here in Washington. This is a program that inspired me greatly when I first

MORE

heard about it, and I know Dr. Kuzi has just this week received a \$3,000 grant to buy books to start "Reach Out and Read" at Washington Children's Medical Center. This is a program that really exemplifies what we are talking about here today.

We know, and as Dr. Battle said, that most parents come into contact with a pediatrician -- they may not take their child to a library, they may not take that child to a preschool program until the child is over three, but they will in all likelihood come into contact with a health care provider. If that doctor or nurse who is administering the well-baby checkup or the vaccination will prescribe reading, and then take it a step further -- not merely prescribe reading, but hand that parent and child a book, we know that in most cases the parents will try to follow through on the doctor's prescription.

So that is what we are kicking off here, and so many groups have come together to be part of this.

I'm also pleased to be here today and to be in the company of a very special guest. Yesterday the President honored some of America's finest artists, writers, and thinkers with the National Medal of Arts and the Charles Frankel Prizes. One of them, Maurice Sendak, rearranged his busy schedule so that he could stay one more day and meet with some of Washington's youngest citizens, which we will do after this presentation.

As many of you know who have read to your children, as my husband and I have, Maurice Sendak is one of our country's most beloved authors and illustrators of children's books. His stories and characters have captured and stimulated the imaginations of generations of children and, as my husband said yesterday, imaginations of countless parents as well.

When Chelsea was little, Bill and I would take turns reading "Where The Wild Things Are," and many of Mr. Sendak's other stories as well. Soon she was able to read along with us, and before long, she was able to read that story to others on her own. Like many parents, we owe Mr. Sendak a debt of gratitude for helping us to spur our daughter's imagination and reading skills. And later some of the children here at the Medical Center will have a chance to hear him do it in person.

I'm also grateful to his publisher, Harper Collins, for donating 75 of his books to the Medical Center, and I would hope other publishers of children's books would join hands with the pediatricians around our country to do the same.

I want to emphasize just a few points that Dr. Rennart and Dr. Battle made, because I noticed some quizzical looks in the eyes of some of the people who are here covering this event. We have known for a long time that reading to children is a nice thing to do. It is a way to create a quiet time between an adult and a child. We have even known that, because of recent research, reading in those early years does lay the groundwork for vocabulary and later reading success. What we have not known until recently -- and because of advances in neurobiology and other medical sciences, we now do know -- is that talking with one's child in those first three years and reading to that child actually helps make the brain grow.

Now, I want to emphasize that because it sounds almost hard to believe. But we now understand that as Dr. Rennart was explaining, that the connections between brain cells and the opportunities for the brain to do more complex work are enhanced because of time spent talking with and reading to very young children.

Now, there are many people, and we all know them, who think that children really don't learn much until they can learn to talk. Well, in fact, the work that is being done in the brain of a child from birth to three is so profoundly significant that if we do not recognize its importance, then we will not have helped that child develop to his or her fullest potential. The earlier we expose our children to hearing stories and listening to adults talk, the better off they are.

And I want to add that the evidence so far shows the television is not substitute. The words that have come across the television screen do not have the same effect on creating that growth in a child's awareness that reading to a child and talking to a child, person to person, does. So you cannot make up for this by putting the child in front of the television set and expect that child to have the same opportunities that reading and talking provide.

We feel so strongly about this that it is one of the reasons the President is accelerating the administration's efforts to strengthen early education and raise awareness about the importance of developing children's brains in the first years of life. There will be a number of programs in these next few months that we hope will bring to broader public attention what scientists now know about brain development.

Many parents, I think, will be very surprised when they see some of the television specials, some of the magazine specials that will be coming out in the next several months, because for me as well as for many others of my generation, this is all new.

The President is challenging Americans to become involved in helping children to read on their own by third grade. But in order for that to be successful we not only need to mentor and help our children and our teachers in schools, we need to help parents know that they are a child's first teacher.

Over the years I have met many parents who told me they never really talked to their babies because they didn't think that it made any difference. I remember the first time this happened, and I recounted in my book when I was making conversation with a group of women with some toddlers. And I said, you must be having a great time reading and talking to your babies. And they looked at me with such quizzical looks because they said, why would we do that, they can't talk back. So from that point, I have made it my mission, when I see young parents with babies to ask them if they're talking and reading, and to try to stimulate that as something they want to do.

Sometimes parents say back to me that they don't read very well themselves. And my response to that is, your baby won't know any different. Hold the book, turn the pages, make the story up, and try to get your own literacy skills to improve as well. But you can hardly embarrass a one-year-old when you're reading nearly anything to that child.

So I hope that we're going to be able to get this message out. There are few things that I believe could make a more dramatic difference over the next 10 years in this country than to persuade parents of all educational and economic levels to take this mission of reading to and talking with their young babies seriously.

I hope that all who are part of this effort today will be joining with the President and others of us to spread this message very broadly. As many of you know, I have been doing some work here in the District and meeting with people who are involved in the District's affairs. There are many things that we need to do here in our Capital City, but I would put reaching out to parents and educating parents and prescribing reading as this prescription does

do at the very top of the list as to what if we did and stayed with that effort over a number of years could make a significant difference in this city and in every city around our country.

(Applause.) Thank you all for being part of this new effort.

Now we get to go read "Where The Wild Things Are." So thank you all.

Q Might you have time for a quick question, Mrs. Clinton?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure.

Q I noticed and I just would ask you, you have stressed a very important and worthwhile theme. Is there anything else you can tell us about what you might be doing for the District of Columbia in this regard, or anything you might wish to add at this point in time?

MRS. CLINTON: Not right at this time. But I think that in the next few weeks some of the administration's plans and commitments will be unveiled and we hope that there will be, as I sense there is -- and I appreciate your close attention to this over the years, because you've been very significant in bringing attention to what's going on here in the District -- I think there will be a series of efforts at partnership, to bring people together around the District's problems. And as I have said on other occasions, there is no quick fix, there is no magic wand, there is no individual who can change and fix a lot of the problems that the District has been suffering with over the years. But I believe that a concerted, carefully planned effort that enlists people of good faith from around the country -- not only just the District, because I believe strongly that this is our Nation's Capital, every American has a stake in the success of the people who live here in the District -- but I believe that kind of effort is going to take place. And if we are patient and persistent I think we will see results.

And I think you can only point to other cities around our country that were written off in the '70s and the '80s. I was recently in Cleveland and I can remember the kinds of things that were said about Cleveland not so very long ago. And going there is such an uplifting experience now because the business community, the religious community, the community leadership, individuals from every walk of life joined together to really rebuild that city. And not just in the visible way that we see with new construction, but really at the grass-roots level in reaching out to people.

So I'm very optimistic, although I'm realistic as well, I think.

Thank you all.

Q This is our "Born To Read" diaper bag. We don't get to give diaper bags to the First Lady -- (laughter.) And a little T-shirt maybe Socks could wear.

MRS. CLINTON: That is so cute. Thank you. Nobody thinks I'm trying it on. (Laughter.) Thank you very much.

END

FEBRUARY 14, 1997

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.)

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Q Mr. President, both sides of the American Airlines dispute seem to keep putting the ball into your court. How do you feel about being put into that position? Both sides of the dispute seem to keep putting the ball into your court.

Q Well, Mr. President, let me put it this way --

THE PRESIDENT: They need to go back to work. They've got a few more hours of work to do.

Q Let me put it this way -- what's the up side and the down side of your acting one way or the other?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm going to have a meeting on this later this afternoon to get an update, and then I think I should make myself available for questions after I see where we are in a couple hours.

END

1:07 P.M. EST

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION DINNER
WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 16, 1997**

Talking Points

- Thank you very much, Lou (Davidson). I want to thank the National Council for Adoption for this very kind "Bully Pulpit" award. But most of all I want to thank you -- the members of the council -- for your consistent, energetic and strong leadership on behalf of adoptive families and the thousands of children in our country and around the world who urgently need safe, loving and permanent homes.
- Let me also congratulate tonight's honorees for their commitment to encouraging and facilitating adoption in our country. Every child deserves the chance to grow up with the love of a permanent family and we should never let anything get in the way of efforts to make sure it happens. I thank you for working together on this issue.
- As a long-time advocate for adoption, I've found much hope in the recent efforts on the part of so many, including most of you in this audience, to reform our foster care and strengthen our adoption systems. The President has worked with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to make it illegal to deny or delay an adoption simply because the adoptive parents and children were not of the same race. And he's very proud of the new \$5,000 tax credit that will help families defray the costs of adoption.
- As you know, this winter, the President asked Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala to find effective ways to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, and to meet a national goal of doubling the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002. The Adoption 2002 report is the result of that research. It is based on extensive interviews, surveys, and consultations with placement agencies, adoption and child welfare advocates, and social workers nationwide. And I am 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.
- As I travel around the country, I've met many grassroots adoption activists who've told me what a very real difference all of these efforts have made in their communities.
- And I assure you that the Administration will continue to work to ensure that no child ever has to grow up in our foster care system. We will make sure that steps to secure permanent, safe, and loving homes for children -- whether they are with their biological families or others -- begin as soon as a child enters foster care, not after 4 days or 5 months or 6 years of shuttling from placement to placement. And we will work with

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partners from all across the community -- businesses, foundations, the media -- to raise public awareness and to encourage more families to experience the joys of adoption.

- Tomorrow, the President and I will host a Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning. As science is telling us, the first three years of life are crucial to a child's intellectual, neurological and emotional development. Children who have adults to talk to them, to read to them, and to make them feel secure and loved throughout their earliest years will thrive. Those growing up without these influences are less likely to live up to their God-given potentials. That is why our task is so urgent, why we need to find permanent homes for our children as soon as we can.
- But at the same time, let us remember that it is never too late for a child to join an adoptive family. As many of you can attest, adoption at any stage of a child's life can truly be life-changing -- and life-saving.
- So let us continue to work together to bring the love of permanent families to all our children.

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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

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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,

DRAFT

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION
FAMILIES FOR KIDS BY 2002 CONFERENCE
WASHINGTON, DC
JUNE 26, 1997**

[Acknowledgments]

It is a pleasure to be in the company of so many men and women who have contributed their talents and energies to the critical issue of adoption. Over the years, the Kellogg Foundation has made an unparalleled commitment to improving our foster care and adoption systems, and I am particularly grateful for the Foundation's participation in a discussion I held at the White House last summer about this subject.

Let me thank all of you involved with Kellogg and *Families for Kids* for your leadership in drawing attention to the plight of hundreds of thousands of children across our country who are needlessly languishing in foster care -- and for serving as models of what can be done to improve the child welfare system and bring more hope and security to children so desperately in need of both.

Not only are you heroes to countless children who have benefited from your efforts, you are breaking new ground for elected officials and policy makers -- in Washington and elsewhere - - who have much to learn from your example.

This conference could not be more timely. After years of partisan bickering, we are finally forging a bipartisan consensus on Capitol Hill that could correct some of the most glaring flaws in the foster care and adoption process. Today we are within reach of bringing some common sense and compassion to an overburdened, understaffed and outdated foster care system.

Those of you who have worked on children's welfare issues -- as I have for the last 25 years -- have heard no shortage of stories about children who are shuttled from one foster home to another during their formative years.

I will never forget a case I handled about 15 years ago in Arkansas. I represented a couple who wanted to adopt a four-year-old boy who had been in their foster care for three years. The boy had been badly neglected as a baby by his biological mother, who suffered from many psychological problems. When he was less than a year old, she turned him over to the local social

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service agency so she could follow a boyfriend to another state. At that point, the baby showed all the symptoms of severe mistreatment: he had gained little weight, he was unresponsive and he shied away from human contact.

But in his foster family, he began to thrive. And his foster parents fell in love with him. Even though they had signed the customary state contract prohibiting them from adopting him, they wanted to make him a permanent member of their family.

The state adoption agency refused their request. So the boy was going to be taken from the security of the family he knew and turned over to strangers on some adoption list. Meanwhile, the boy's birth mother filed suit to get him back, claiming she had overcome her problems.

I argued on behalf of the boy's foster parents that the best interests of the child should take precedence over both the birth mother's claims of her biological rights and the state's claims to its contractual agreement. I asked the judge to allow testimony from a child psychologist about the boy's progress in his foster family and about the possible consequences to his physical, intellectual and emotional development if he was separated from them. The judge, who had children and grandchildren of his own, didn't think he had much to learn from these witnesses, but he allowed them nonetheless. In the end, the psychologist's testimony weighed heavily in the judge's determination to allow the foster parents to adopt the boy.

Just as often, however, the child's best interests do not take precedence. And this sad reality is repeated throughout our nation. Antiquated rules and rigid presumptions continue to deny countless children the lasting family connections that can influence whether a child does well in school, stays away from drugs, and goes on to become a responsible, law-abiding adult.

Only recently have we begun to view issues regarding the health and safety of children in foster care through a clear lens -- instead of a fog of distortions and political rhetoric over what constitutes real "family values."

Clearly, no one wants children to be in situations where they are subjected to abuse, torture, starvation or neglect. In 1973, when I was just entering the world of children's advocacy and the law, I wrote an article about children's rights in family situations -- particularly those that pose a threat to their health and safety. Not that long ago, some critics suggested that by supporting a child's right to a loving family, I favored giving government more power to break up biological families and giving children the right to bring trivial disputes with their parents -- like curfews or who takes out the garbage -- to court.

Thankfully, those erroneous interpretations have given way to a clearer consensus about which children should be placed back with their biological parents -- and which should not.

We are beginning to recognize that some parents simply are not capable of taking care of

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.

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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

SEPTEMBER 11, 1998

**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.

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
VIDEOTAPED REMARKS TO
THE COUNCIL ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN'S
ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY
NEW YORK, NY
NOVEMBER 5, 1998**

Good evening. I want to thank you for honoring me with this award. I only wish I could be there in person to congratulate everyone associated with the Council on Adoptable Children for your 25 years of leadership on behalf of New York's most vulnerable children. From shortening the adoption process to matching over 2,000 special needs children with families, you have helped find stable and loving homes for the children of this great city.

Those of us who care about strengthening our nation's foster care system and improving adoptions have a lot to celebrate right now. Under the President's leadership, we passed the Family and Medical Leave Act, which gives time off to parents who adopt a child. We provided a tax credit for families who adopt. We've worked to eliminate discrimination and delays based on race and ethnicity.

And almost exactly one year ago, the President signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act -- a landmark piece of legislation that was the result of the hard work and dedication of so many of you. On that day, the President helped to fulfill his promise to make the child welfare system work better for the children it serves. To always put their health and safety first. To move children more quickly into safe and permanent homes. And to double the number of children adopted or permanently placed by the year 2002.

But, realizing these goals will take the sustained commitment not only of federal, state, and local governments, but of private partners as well. And no one understands that better than the Council on Adoptable Children. With your continuing vision and dedication, we can help make sure that all children grow up with parents who love them...and a safe, permanent place to call home.

Thank you again for this award and honor. I hope you have a wonderful evening.

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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 fostercare 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 your -- 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 fostercare 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.

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
VIDEOTAPED REMARKS TO
THE COUNCIL ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN'S
ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY
NEW YORK, NY
NOVEMBER 5, 1998**

Good evening. I want to thank you for honoring me with this award. I only wish I could be there in person to congratulate everyone associated with the Council on Adoptable Children for your 25 years of leadership on behalf of New York's most vulnerable children. From shortening the adoption process to matching over 2,000 special needs children with families, you have helped find stable and loving homes for the children of this great city.

Those of us who care about strengthening our nation's foster care system and improving adoptions have a lot to celebrate right now. Under the President's leadership, we passed the Family and Medical Leave Act, which gives time off to parents who adopt a child. We provided a tax credit for families who adopt. We've worked to eliminate discrimination and delays based on race and ethnicity.

And almost exactly one year ago, the President signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act -- a landmark piece of legislation that was the result of the hard work and dedication of so many of you. On that day, the President helped to fulfill his promise to make the child welfare system work better for the children it serves. To always put their health and safety first. To move children more quickly into safe and permanent homes. And to double the number of children adopted or permanently placed by the year 2002.

But, realizing these goals will take the sustained commitment not only of federal, state, and local governments, but of private partners as well. And no one understands that better than the Council on Adoptable Children. With your continuing vision and dedication, we can help make sure that all children grow up with parents who love them...and a safe, permanent place to call home.

Thank you again for this award and honor. I hope you have a wonderful evening.

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton National Adoption Month Event

The White House - East Room
November 24, 1998

Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, thank you so much and welcome to the East Room of the White House. We are delighted to host this event.

A few weeks ago, I received an invitation to attend a wonderful celebration at the D.C. Superior Court House, where a number of adoptions would be made final. I was so pleased to be invited to this event, but I thought to myself maybe there is a way that we could celebrate these adoptions -- that really represent all of the adoptions in our country -- during National Adoption Month, which is November, here in the White House. So we asked Chief Judge Eugene Hamilton if we could host it at the White House, and I was delighted when he said yes. And I want to thank the Chief Judge and I want to thank all the judges of the D.C. Superior Court for their commitment to adoption and the work that they have done, and I welcome all of them here.

So today in this room there are 30 children from Washington, D.C., who woke up this morning as foster children and will go to bed tonight as permanent members of families. I want to thank these 24 families for allowing us to share in their celebration. And I want to thank this year's Adoption 2002 winners, who were just introduced by Secretary Shalala, and all of the advocates and experts and policy makers and parents who are here, who work night and day to make these kinds of happy endings possible.

Secretary Shalala told us about what children think about love, and all of us are grateful for her leadership in making sure that they do have love in their lives, as well as good health and other kinds of supports. I'm also pleased to welcome Governor and Mrs. Edgar, Senator Levin, Senator Landrieu, Congressman Oberstar, Mayor Barry, and other distinguished guests. We are fortunate to have some special speakers as part of today's program.

Dave Thomas and Mayor Elect Williams are real experts in adoption. Not only because of the jobs they have and will have, but because of the fact that they were adopted themselves. You have already heard from Dave Thomas, who has reached out to the business community to demonstrate his corporation's commitment to adoption, and I hope that more companies will take up his challenge to include adoption benefits in the benefits they offer employees. He wants to ensure that all foster children have the same chance he did. We'll hear from Chief Judge Hamilton, who has adopted four children himself. What's more, in 20 years he and his wife Virginia have been foster parents for more than 40 children. We'll hear from Mayor-Elect of our nation's capitol, Tony Williams. At the age of 3 he was living in foster care and had not spoken a word. Now, Mayor-Elect, some of us who have heard you speak can not hardly believe that, but there were plans afoot by the state to institutionalize him. After the D.C. primary he said that when his parents adopted him they gave him a second chance, and now the city has adopted him as well. We'll hear from Charday Mays. Charday's mother says she likes swimming, singing in the choir, and -- like most pre-teens -- talking on the telephone. She and her brother Steven are two of the 30 children who will, as of today, have a new permanent family.

Now, probably everyone in this room could have a similar story to tell, and I hope you do tell them. I hope you tell them to as many people as you possibly can to increase awareness, and acceptance, and enthusiasm about adoption.

You know, my husband just came from a traditional Thanksgiving pardon of a turkey. Now some of you may not be aware of this tradition, but each year starting with President Truman, one lucky turkey is picked out as the chosen one. So instead of being stuffed,

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dressed, and on your plate next to sweet potatoes, this turkey will go on living and being a symbol of the important power of the President of the United States.

And you know, each of us have many different traditions in our families about Thanksgiving. The food that we eat might somewhat vary from region to region, or ethnic group to ethnic group. The battles we have over the T.V. remote control between football and parades, and everything else that's on. But there is one tradition that runs through Thanksgiving, and that is family.

You know when you are a part of a family you are supposed to be able to know that there will be a seat waiting for you in good times and bad times. And then in both times the table will be filled with people who care about you. That is what all children want and deserve. And when Bill and I started working on behalf of adoption when he first came to the White House, we were struck by how many wonderful children of all ages there are waiting to have that opportunity to be a part of a family. We asked a young boy, who was with us at an adoption event a few years ago in the Oval Office, where he lived, he answered, "All over," which of course means nowhere. So when it comes to our children, the American family has a lot to be thankful for this holiday season. Children are better off because of the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows parents to take time off to adopt a child. They're better off because we are ending discrimination in adoption based on race or ethnicity. They're better off because of tax breaks which make it easier for families to adopt children, especially children with special needs. They're better off because the Congress put politics aside, put children first, and came across party lines to pass the landmark Adoption and Safe Families Act. And when the President signed that bill a year ago, he helped fulfill a promise that he had made to try to put the health and safety of our children first and to move children more quickly into safe and permanent homes -- to reach our goal of doubling the number of children adopted by the year 2002.

This celebration brings us one step further down that road. We are seeing families who have opened both their homes and their hearts to children who need both. Some parents today are keeping brothers and sisters together by adopting them all. Some are adopting their own foster children. Others are welcoming children with special needs into their families. Many are adopting across racial lines, but they are giving children what every child needs -- a place to call home.

But we can't sit on our laurels and celebrate the progress because we have a hundred thousand children in our country who are eligible for adoption in our foster care system, but are still waiting. We have to work harder to implement our new laws effectively, to help our courts as they make the difficult heart-wrenching decisions about children as quickly as possible. We have to support families, communities, states, and social workers in the only surefire way to stop child abuse and neglect, and that is to prevent it before it happens. I hope we remember that for every one of the wonderful children being adopted today there are one hundred more like them in the D.C. foster care system. And I know we can do better. We have to turn our nation's Capitol into a model of how to care for our most vulnerable children. For there is no greater test of a city, of a country, of businesses, for parents, for communities, for religious organizations, advocates, or anyone else than how we treat those most vulnerable children in our midst.

It is now my great honor to turn the program over to Chief Judge Eugene Hamilton. As I mentioned earlier, he brings to the courtroom every day, not only 28 years of judicial experience on the D.C. Superior Court, but a lifetime of personal experience as a foster parent and adoptive parent. He understands better than most of us the challenges that face every child and every adult who come into contact with the child-welfare system, and what all of us must do to meet those challenges. Please join me in welcoming Chief Judge Hamilton.



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FOSTER CARE TRANSITIONING EVENT REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

The White House
East Room
January 29, 1999

(First part of speech was cut off. The following remarks are similar to her speech as delivered, but may not be exact. Please do not quote from this section.)

I am delighted to welcome all of you to the White House. I want to say a special word of thanks to Senator Jeffords who has worked tirelessly to give all children safe places to go after school and something in life to say "yes" to.

I also want to thank Secretary Shalala for that introduction and for her extraordinary leadership on behalf of all children, especially those too often forgotten. She reminded us of how far we've come in reforming our child welfare system. And we should all be proud of those accomplishments. But today we are also gathered to talk about an issue that hasn't received the attention it deserves.

We know that we must do better by the nearly 20,000 young people who, every year, are forced to leave foster care and make it on their own. So today, I have come here to announce that the President's budget will help ensure that the end of foster care will no longer mean the end of caring for the young people it serves.

None of this would have been possible without the people in this room.

It wouldn't have been possible without my friend Tipper Gore, whose compassion and commitment have placed a national spotlight on mental illness and homelessness. Again, it wouldn't have been possible without Secretary Shalala and her staff at the Department of Health and Human Services.

It wouldn't have been possible without Terry Harrak, John Gutierrez and the other young people who walked in with Tipper and me just now. The courageous voices they have raised have educated the nation about this issue and inspired us all.

And it wouldn't have been possible without all of you who have been their biggest champions. I especially want to thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Child Welfare League of America, and the Casey Family Program for their deep commitment and for helping to pull this event together.

As I look across this room, it is wonderful to see researchers, advocates, and community providers from all over the country. I don't think we've ever been privileged to host at the White House a group of people who have fought harder or longer to lift up the lives of former foster children. And all of us owe you a debt of gratitude for that.

In some ways, my own experiences with this issue started when I was a little girl. I'd ask my mother, as all children do, what it was like for her to grow up. She was never in formal foster care. But she told me about how her teen parents couldn't take care of her after she was born. How they sent her to live with her grandparents. And how, when that didn't work out, she moved in with a family and took care of their children in exchange for room and board.

My mother has often told me how grateful she is to the woman she moved in with. Because she was able to see what a real family is like. She watched what happens inside a home

January 29, 1999

when children have someone to praise them when they succeed and pick them up when they fall. Someone who cares what happens to them day after day. Someone to simply love them.

Most of us remember looking forward to celebrating our 18th birthdays -- and not just because of the party. It meant we could vote. It meant we could go away to college or get a job. It meant we were becoming adults. But it didn't mean we were on our own.

But, if you ask the young people here -- or others who have aged out of foster care -- many will tell you that their 18th birthday was the start of a very tough road alone. We know young people who age out of foster care are more likely to drop out of school, land in a homeless shelter, be unemployed, come down with health problems, or have trouble getting health care.

And we know that these young people often carry with them traumatic experience of abuse and neglect, experiences of being shuffled from home to home.

More powerful than any statistic, I hope that every single elected official and every single American hears the stories of the young people here today and their peers across the country. Because there are no more powerful advocates or educators.

I hope they hear the voices of the young people here from cities such as Tucson, San Francisco and Alexandria. They carry with them stories of being homeless while trying to finish school. They come here with gratitude for all of those who reached down to lift them up. And now many are helping others to do the same.

Whenever someone wants to know why we must do more for young people aging out of foster care, I hope they'll hear the voices of Alfred Perez -- who is here -- and others active in the California Youth Connection, an extraordinary group of young men and women I had the privilege to visit with just over a year ago in Berkeley.

It was right before Thanksgiving. And, one by one, they described what it was like to leave the foster care system. One 19-year-old confessed that it was her first Thanksgiving by herself -- and she didn't have anyone to call to ask how to bake a turkey. And a young man in college talked about what how it feels when the dorms close down, when other students pack up to go home for the holidays and you have absolutely no where to go.

(The following remarks represent Mrs. Clinton's speech as delivered.)

I hope that everyone who wonders why we need to do more for young people leaving foster care will hear the voices of people like Joy Warren, who is here with us today. Joy is in her first year at Yale Law School, my alma mater. Unlike most of the other students there, she spent her childhood in foster care, and she has been entirely on her own since age 18. For seven years, she has lived without the support that permanent families provide...and all the while, she managed to receive a college degree, work as an advocate to improve foster care, and begin law school.

I met Joy in September at a conference called Destination Future, in which current and former foster children and homeless youth came together to talk about and learn about life skills and what they could do to help others overcome the obstacles they face every day. I've just received the report from the Conference, and it contains important messages for all of us. We need more awareness about this issue. Young people aging out of foster care need medical insurance. They need training and education. And that can only happen if we make greater investments in their lives.

Now, we know that there are countless people working in states, counties, and communities to meet those challenges -- many in this room are working to do just that.

There are programs in Texas and Florida, for example, that provide college tuition to state schools for young people in foster care who are accepted. In Los Angeles County, entry-level jobs are set aside for young people aging out of the foster care system. And like other Independent Living Programs, New York's is helping young people aging out of foster care with school, jobs, housing and the other tools that they need. One of those young people, Analeah Charles, is here with us today.

We should take these success stories and make sure they are replicated throughout our country. That's why I am so pleased to announce that the President's budget over the next five years will include \$280 million to help former foster children make the transition to independence -- and make the most of their lives.

We will be increasing funding for the Independent Living Program by 50 percent -- and giving foster children more help finishing high school, getting a job, and finding a place to live.

Now in many states and communities, the rule about aging out of foster care is whether you turn 18 or graduate from high school -- whichever happens first. So there are many children who are out of foster care even though they have not yet finished high school.

We will also be offering \$50 million in new competitive grants so that the states can continue to provide economic support to former foster children living through their transition.

We want to help more community-based programs that are giving homeless youth places to live and skills to build their futures. And I am pleased to announce that we are increasing funding for the Transitional Living Program by 33 percent.

And finally, the President's budget says that young people who age out of foster care should be eligible for Medicaid until they are 21. For too many young people, foster care means insurance -- and when they leave, they lose their Medicaid coverage.

In this country, I believe no person should be in the ranks of the uninsured -- but I certainly think no young person should be uninsured.

Now when we do all of this -- which I hope we certainly will in a bipartisan way, bringing new leaders of both political parties and our Congress together, and with the support of all of you throughout our nation who are advocates and workers in the field of foster care -- we will have a lot to celebrate. But the main reason I believe we will achieve what I hope we can with the President's leadership will be because of the courageous young people who are with us today who represent thousands and thousands of other young people across our country.

It will be because of young people such as Terry Harrak. When she turned 18, she was a senior in high school. But she soon found herself without foster care, without a job, without a place to call home. Night after night, she slept over at teachers' and friends' homes, she slept in metro terminals, she slept in hospital emergency rooms. Day after day, she would wake up and continue going to school. And she graduated.

Now I think that the story Terry has to tell us should be heard by everyone. She is now a participant in the Living Independently for Tomorrow Program in Alexandria, Virginia. She has a place to live, a job and community college to attend, and people to guide and support her. She is here with us today. It is my great honor to introduce Terry Harrak.

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
VIDEOTAPED REMARKS TO
THE INAUGURAL SYMPOSIUM
DAVE THOMAS CENTER FOR ADOPTION LAW
CAPITAL UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL
COLUMBUS, OHIO
FEBRUARY 5, 1999**

FEBRUARY 5, 1999

Good morning. I wish I could be with you as you begin this important symposium on adoption. Each of you -- whether you have done groundbreaking research, worked to support our court system, or advocated on behalf of children in foster care -- bring an important voice to today's discussion of how to remove barriers to adoption. I'd like to thank the Dave Thomas Center for Adoption Law and Capital University Law School for sponsoring this convening. And, I'd like to salute my friend, Dave Thomas. No one -- no one -- has done more to advance the cause of adoption in America. Your vision, your leadership, your commitment, your drive, and your generous spirit serve as an inspiration to all of us.

Those of us who care about strengthening our nation's foster care system and improving adoptions have much to be proud of. Under my husband's leadership, we passed the Family and Medical Leave Act, which gives time off to parents who adopt a child. We provided a tax credit for families who adopt. We've worked to eliminate discrimination and delays based on race and ethnicity. And just over one year ago, the President signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act -- a landmark piece of legislation that was the result of the hard work and dedication of so many of you. That law holds out the promise that we can reduce foster care drift and secure permanent placements for children across our country.

But, of course, realizing the goals of this legislation -- and achieving the President's goal of doubling the number of adoptions by the year 2002 -- will take the sustained commitment not only of federal, state and local governments, but of private partners as well. Together, we must make sure that lawyers and judges and human service workers are recruited and trained to work on cases involving vulnerable children with skill, care, respect, and commitment. And, we must engage all sectors of society -- including employers, lawyers, and concerned citizens -- to do what they can to promote adoption in their communities.

That's why I am so delighted that you are gathered today. I am grateful to all of you for your commitment to adoptable children, to their prospective adoptive parents, and to the important legal issues that will bring them together to form loving families. I wish you a productive and rewarding conference.

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

REMARKS ON ADOPTION

THE WHITE HOUSE

SEPTEMBER 24, 1999

SEPTEMBER 24, 1999

Acknowledgments: Olivia Golden, Pat Montoya, HHS; Members of Congress, the Brown, Manis, and Keane [KEEN] families, Carol Williams, former Children's Bureau Director and champion of adoption (t); adoption advocates; and one very special champion of foster children – 8-year old Mackenzie Snyder, who after hearing how so many foster children cannot afford to use anything but garbage bags for luggage, decided to collect suitcases for them. So far she has collected 1,000.

This summer, I saw a photograph that reminded me why the work we are doing to promote adoption in America is so vitally important.

It was a picture of a young woman in a green silk evening gown, high heels and a lace shawl. You could just see the anticipation and delight in her eyes.

It was a picture of 17-year old Deanna Collins -- taken by her adoptive parents on the night of her high school prom. Looking at that picture, it was difficult to believe that that smiling, confident young woman was the same girl I had welcomed to the White House just four years before. Back then, she was thirteen and had already spent eight years in foster care.

With her shoulders slumped, her eyes downcast, she told the audience gathered for National Adoption Month about her dreams of living in a place she could call home, a room she could call her own, a family she could love.

Not long after her visit, Deanna's dream came true. And it has been my privilege to watch this young person's life transformed by her adoption. With the love of her parents, with the confidence that comes from knowing that she will always have a place to go home to no matter what else happens in life, Deanna is thriving. She is a senior in high school now, and plans to major in social work in college.

Every time I need inspiration for our fight to strengthen and increase adoption in America, I think of Deanna. I think of Washington's Mayor Tony Williams, who told us at another Adoption Month commemoration last year how at age 3, 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 that you gave your son his "second chance." And I think of the thousands of foster children in America who are still waiting and hoping for the same chance Deanna and Mayor Williams had to grow and blossom in a loving family.

For more than 25 years, as an advocate and an attorney, I have worked to address the challenges of foster care and adoption in America. I have represented prospective parents in court, helping them navigate the bureaucratic mazes of adoption. I have listened to their frustrations with the red tape that too often kept them from sharing their lives with the children who so badly need their love. I have met foster children who have spent their 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, who, when asked where he lived, answered, "All over Fairfax County."

In many ways, giving more of our children the chance to know the love and support of a family has become a personal crusade. I have held meetings, roundtables, and annual celebrations of National Adoption Month here at the White House. I have worked with advocates, and business leaders such as Wendy's founder Dave Thomas, who as an adopted child himself, has dedicated so much of his time and personal resources to promoting adoption among his employees and across America. With each meeting, I became more and more convinced that the time was long overdue to reform our foster care system. Our children are simply spending too many years – the average is just under three – in foster care.

We need to identify and eliminate the obstacles that keep them there. We need to change our foster care system so that the speedy placement of children in loving, safe, *permanent* homes become its one, simple, driving mission.

Because of the commitment of so many of you in this room, we have made much progress toward that goal. We 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 to care for their children without fear of losing their jobs and health insurance.

We 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 made adoption more affordable, putting in place tax credits for new adoptive families. We are taking steps to use the Internet to help match waiting children with loving homes.

And most important, together we crafted legislation to dramatically reduce the amount of a time a child spends in foster care. We 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 offered states financial incentives to move more children out of foster care and into permanent homes; and gave them the flexibility to try new strategies to accomplish that goal. And we set a national goal of doubling the number of children adopted annually – from 28,000 to 56,000 by the year 2002. And though there were moments when it looked like it wouldn't pass, we fought hard to make the Adoption and Safe Families Act law in 1997. In a few moments the President will offer new evidence of our continued success.

But we still have much 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 had “aged out” of foster care. They told me about the struggles they had – about being forced out of their foster homes on their eighteenth birthdays, about living in homeless shelters 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 anyone of these children. One of the remarkable young women I met is now at Yale Law School. That is 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. The House, under the bipartisan leadership of Rep. Nancy Johnson and Rep. Ben Cardin, (who are here with us today), has passed a bill that would allow former foster children to remain on Medicaid until age 21, and give them the extra help they need to finish high school, find work and a place to live. Now I call on the Senate to take action on a companion bill sponsored by Sen. Chafee and Rockefeller. There is no reason we can't pass this bill this year.

The progress we celebrate today would not have been possible without so many of you in this room – adoption advocates, social workers, state and local leaders, but most of all our adoptive parents. I will never forget the boy I met three years ago at a Mother's Day roundtable for mothers and their adopted children. At the end of the discussion, we went around the room, asking the children if they had anything else to say. The final boy to speak looked up at the woman sitting next him, and said quietly, "I just want to thank my mother."

With that one simple adoring look and those few words, he summarized what we all had been trying to say all afternoon. So to our parents, we thank you for making that leap of faith, for opening your homes and your hearts, for seeing that spark of possibility and love in every child.

Now it is my privilege to introduce Dawn Keane, who with her husband Steven and son Sean, have just finalized their adoptions of Sarah and Brian.

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.)

* * * * *

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

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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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

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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

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.

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.

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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.

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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.

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