

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

SPEECHES

AND

COLUMNS

BOOK #2

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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
8/20 Photo with Adoption Advocates and Families
8/23 Video – Children's Service Conference - Holt International
9/13 Adoption Meeting – White House
10/29 Video - North American Council on Adoptable Children
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

COLUMNS

July 30, 1995
October 29, 1995
May 14, 1996
December 17, 1996
June 24, 1997
September 9, 1997

November 18, 1997

November 20, 1997

September 23, 1998

November 25, 1998

February 3, 1999

September 29, 1999

November 24, 1999

Final 7/17/00

Katie McCormick Lelyveld

TALKING IT OVER

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RELEASE: WEEKEND, JULY 29-30, 1995

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, D.C. 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 backyard, donated by a remarkably generous person who chose to remain anonymous. At the dedication ceremony, Mother Teresa — happy, enthusiastic and all business — took me on a tour. Grabbing my hand and leading me up the stairs, she walked me through brightly painted rooms filled with cribs, bassinets and stuffed animals.

Although it will accommodate only eight children at a time, 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 each other 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.

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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, like 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. He is, she said, "the joy of our life." When her cousin's daughter recently became pregnant at age 18 and could not afford to keep the child, this 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 paperwork.

For others, there is a fear factor. Like many Americans, a 40-year-old newscaster I met recently in New Mexico was interested in adopting but was discouraged by highly publicized cases like Baby Richard's. However rare they are, cases in which birth parents seek to reclaim custody of adopted children undermine people's faith in the adoption system.

Decisions to give up children for adoption should be difficult to overturn, especially in the cases of children who become attached to their adoptive families during their formative years, like Baby Richard. 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 whole 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.

In a perfect world, most of us would choose parents who shared our cultural and racial identities. But our world is not perfect. 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 like money, regulations and skin color do not outweigh the more important gift of love that adoptive parents want to offer.

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OCTOBER 29 1995

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

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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TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The woman visited her new daughter in the hospital every day, reaching into the incubator to stroke her foot. The receiving blanket seemed heavier than the baby, who was being fed by a tube in her stomach.

The woman is not the baby's birth mother, but she is her mother in every way that matters.

She and her husband already had a 3-year-old adopted son when they heard about a premature 1-pound baby girl whose birth parents could not take care of her. The couple decided to adopt the tiny baby. Her start was rocky, but now the child is a healthy 3-year-old.

"She was just like a little flower that blossomed," the mother says. "She is a burst of energy."

Now, the couple, who are African-American, are in the process of adopting a 12-year-old girl who was abused. They also are encouraging more African-American families to open their homes to children in need.

Last summer, I wrote about this important issue. I'm writing about it again because so many children's lives would be better if they could only find a home. Today, 21,000 children are ready and waiting for families to nurture and care for them. Tens of thousands of others will be eligible for adoption in the coming months and years.

Not all these children are healthy, white babies. Many are physically and developmentally disabled. Many are minorities. Many suffer from emotional traumas wrought by abuse, neglect and unstable living arrangements. And many are teenagers who already have been shuffled from home to home.

Fortunately, some steps have been taken in recent years to make adoption easier. The Family and Medical Leave Act, which became law three years ago, ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fear of losing their jobs. The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement of a child solely on the basis of the adoptive parents' race, color or national origin. Over the past three years, adoption subsidies have helped an increasing number of families cope with the costs of adopting and raising children with special needs.

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The President is supporting legislation in Congress that will give tax credits to families that adopt. The House, for example, just approved a bill that would give adoptive families a \$5,000 tax credit. The Senate, meanwhile, is considering a \$7,500 credit for families who adopt children with special needs. This may not be enough to cover medical and emotional health care costs for special-needs kids, or even education, but it's a step in the right direction.

Not only is adoption good for children, it saves taxpayers a lot of money. As one woman said at a recent adoption discussion at the White House her family has saved the state and the federal government in excess of \$1 million by adopting several special-needs children.

In addition to government, the private sector also has a role to play. Wendy's, the hamburger chain founded by adoption advocate Dave Thomas (who himself was adopted), gives workers paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs.

Margaret Fitzgerald, who participated in our gathering, said her employer, AT&T, gave her six weeks of unpaid leave when she and her husband adopted a son four years ago. The company also reimbursed her legal fees.

But the most important thing of all is for more people to reach out and give every child, regardless of age, disability, race or ethnic origin, the chance to be part of a loving family.

Just ask Julie Stinger, a teacher with five adopted children -- four biracial and one white -- several of whom had health problems. She told us how, as a white woman, she had to fight to adopt her first two black children, even though the birth parents agreed to the adoption and she had cared for them as a foster parent for 18 months. "I fought tooth and nail," she said.

Later, she had similar trouble when she wanted to adopt her fifth child, who is white. Authorities were concerned about placing a white boy with four non-white brothers and sisters.

"Even though we went through some traumas in the adoptions, I would do it again, I would do it 10 times over," she said. "Adopting a child is the most gratifying thing that ever happened to me."

After Julie recounted her story, I asked her oldest son, Joey, if he had anything to add. He nodded.

"I just want to thank my mother," he said.

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May 14, 1996

TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Last week in the Oval Office, 7-year-old Adam looked uncomfortable. He stared down at the floor, at the ceiling, anywhere but at the President, who had asked him a question. Adam, who is living in foster care, had come to watch the President deliver his weekly radio address about the new steps his administration is taking to streamline and encourage adoption.

After the radio address and a discussion with adoptive families, Bill invited Adam to sit behind his desk and to explore the nooks and crannies of the Oval Office. Within minutes, Adam came out of his shell. He was full of smiles and questions as he made himself comfortable in the huge leather chair and inspected Bill's coin and badge collection.

I found it difficult to believe that this beaming and vivacious child had no permanent place to call home. Adam is just one of the thousands of children in communities across our country -- children with tremendous capacities to love and bring new joy and energy into a home -- who are still waiting for the love of a mother, a father and a family. These children live with few constants but painful memories of neglect or abuse, growing case files and the hope that someday they will join loving, permanent families.

My husband and I have considered adopting ourselves, but as Bill said in a recent interview: "If ... we were going to adopt a little baby at our age, if we stayed healthy, we could raise the child, but I think it is very important for people to bond with an infant, and it would require massive amounts of time that I don't know whether we could guarantee the child at this moment. If you took an older child that would have a bigger, more difficult adjustment period and would think it was a little weird living in the White House, then that also would require a lot of time. So, I'm doubtful that we could do it right here."

We are, however, both committed to doing whatever we can to help move our country's waiting children out of the limbo of foster care. Earlier this year, the President signed a \$5,000 tax credit to help families adopt children. In 1994, the administration and Congress put an end to racial preferences for adoption, making it illegal to deny or delay any child a loving home simply because the adoptive parents are of a different race. And at the radio address last week, as adoptive families and waiting children watched, the President announced more encouraging news for the tens of thousands

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of children in our country's foster-care system and the families who could someday offer them love and permanent homes.

Bill issued a new directive that calls upon his administration to take definite steps to double the number of children who are placed in permanent homes, from 27,000 a year today to 54,000 a year by 2002. By early next year, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala will report to the President on how the federal government can help states set and meet new adoption targets. She will study how local, state and federal authorities can best work together to encourage adoption in all communities, and she'll make recommendations about the laws and regulations that need to be changed or added to ensure children don't get trapped in foster care.

The President has also asked the secretaries of Treasury, Labor, Commerce and Health and Human Services to launch an all-out effort to heighten public awareness about adoption and recognize those in the private sector who are committing themselves to this important cause. There are already many businesses, television stations, foundations and citizens who are working hard to spread the word about waiting children and to support parents who want to adopt. The National Adoption Center and Children Awaiting Parents maintain a web site called "Faces of Adoption" (www.inetcom.net/adopt/photo.html) with 280 photos of brothers and sisters who need to be adopted together and children between the ages of 7 and 16 who are waiting to be adopted. It also offers comprehensive information on adoption, from support-group lists to legislative news and strategies for financial assistance.

During this holiday season, as we make time to be with our families and recognize how much we love and rely on our parents, spouses, children and other relatives, let us all work together to find loving homes for the boys and girls who need them.

Write to Hillary Rodham Clinton at 71154,1271, and include the First Lady's name in your subject line and a U.S. postal address. Mrs. Clinton welcomes readers' comments, but the volume of mail prevents her from answering each letter personally.

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TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The reality of foster care was brought home to Bill and me when we met a teenage boy at the White House this winter. Bill asked him where he was from. "Fairfax County," the boy said. When Bill asked where in the county, the boy shrugged and answered, "All over."

Unfortunately, thousands of children in our foster care system today have similar stories to tell. Because of the complex regulations, outdated assumptions, and understaffed and overwhelmed agencies of our child welfare system, too many children spend their formative years shuttling from one foster home to another. Today, even children lucky enough to find adoptive families will have waited an average of three years or more in a series of temporary homes.

But that can change. The Senate and the House of Representatives are both considering bills that will take important steps toward making sure that no child languishes in foster care.

Currently, a child's case can drag on for years in the foster care system as authorities make repeated attempts to reunite a child with his or her biological parents. Often, these parents, for a variety of reasons, are unable to change the behavior that caused them to lose their child in the first place. If either bill becomes law, "reasonable efforts" to return a child to his or her family would not be required in extreme cases such as torture, abandonment, or physical or sexual abuse. Court hearings to determine the placement of a child would be required within 12 months -- instead of the current 18 months -- of his or her arrival in the foster care system. To make clear their purpose, these hearings would be renamed "permanency planning hearings."

As a children's advocate and lawyer who has represented parents and children in their struggles with the foster care system for more than 25 years, I believe these steps are long overdue. In 1973, I wrote an article about children's rights under the law, specifically their rights in family situations that pose serious threats to their health and safety. Even a few years ago, some considered this view controversial. Critics suggested that by supporting a child's right to a loving family, I advocated giving government more power to break up biological families and giving children the right to bring trivial disputes with their parents -- such as bedtime or who takes out the garbage -- to court.

Thankfully, that erroneous interpretation of my views has given way to a new bipartisan consensus around the idea that protecting our children from harm and working to provide them with permanent, loving families -- even when that may entail separating

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them from their biological parents -- should be a priority of our child welfare system. Finally, we are recognizing that there are parents who will never be able to care for their children. And, in order to secure a foster child's well-being and stable development, we as a society have the responsibility to decide as quickly as possible whether a child can return home safely.

Many of the provisions in the House and Senate bills reflect recommendations made in Adoption 2002, a report prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services in response to the President's directive to identify the barriers to adoption and double the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002.

Over the years, my husband has dedicated a great deal of time and energy to improving foster care and promoting adoption. As a result of the Administration's efforts, it is now illegal to deny or delay an adoption simply because the prospective parents and child are not of the same race. And last year, the President signed into law a \$5,000 tax credit to help families adopt children.

Federal leadership is crucial, but it will take the commitment of people from all corners of our country to bring about the sweeping change our child welfare system requires. This week, I'll be speaking at a national conference on adoption and child welfare reform sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The conference will bring together business and religious leaders, policy-makers, elected officials, judges, child advocates, and foster and adoptive families to discuss strategies to reduce the number of waiting children and limit the time a child spends in foster care to no more than one year.

The Kellogg Foundation has been working to reform child welfare systems in 11 states and localities. Last year alone, the foundation helped find permanent families for 7,000 children. This was possible because the foundation worked with churches and mounted aggressive media campaigns to recruit prospective adoptive families. And it helped child welfare agencies reform case work procedures, consolidate records and modernize data collection methods so that no child becomes lost in the system.

Now we must build on their work. With thousands of children leading transient lives in foster care, we cannot afford any more delays. We need to encourage Congress to pass the best adoption bill possible. Thousands of innocent children are counting on us.

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June 24, 1997

TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In the short span of a week, the world lost two remarkable people: Princess Diana and Mother Teresa. Though separated by a multitude of differences, these two women were united by their desire to help others. As I flew to London to attend Diana's funeral, I thought of the pictures I had seen of the two of them together. Like so many others, I was left to wonder what we were going to do to keep the spirit of service they embodied alive.

Long before I ever met Mother Teresa, I knew of her work and mission to bring love and comfort to the poor and afflicted in India and around the world.

Still, nothing I had heard or read about her prepared me for the diminutive, determined and joyful woman I met at the National Prayer Breakfast in February 1994. Bill and I greeted her before the program started, and when she asked if she could see us privately afterward, we quickly agreed.

Standing on a step so she could see over the podium, Mother Teresa mesmerized an audience packed into the largest ballroom in Washington. She spoke without notes, calling on all of us to care for the poor and defenseless in society and making a plea against abortion.

After her speech, Bill and I sat together with Mother Teresa on folding chairs in the work space behind the curtain at the back of the stage. She took my hand in both of hers and told me she had been praying for me and my husband and for the work we were trying to do, especially in trying to provide health care to the poor. We also discussed abortion. Though we disagreed respectfully about birth control and whether abortion should be legal, we agreed that adoption should be promoted. We talked about doing more to make adoption a realistic option for pregnant women who do not want to keep their children -- and to make adoption easier for qualified adults who want to provide a child with a permanent, loving home.

Then, Mother Teresa asked me to help her open a shelter in Washington, D.C., for infants and young children awaiting adoption or placement with foster families. I said I would, though I had no idea how. I did, however, have the feeling that keeping my promise to Mother Teresa would involve a fair amount of hard work.

To find a way through the complicated legal and regulatory issues that surround opening such a home in the District of Columbia, I set up a coalition of community leaders and government representatives. The process took a year and a half. Over

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that time, I had the joy of corresponding with Mother Teresa. Letters would arrive, written in her own hand, telling me where she had been and what she had been doing and asking, of course, how we were coming with the house for children -- "the gift of love" she called it. At the top of each letter was an inscription: "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren. You did it to me."

I saw that Scriptural lesson in action when Chelsea and I traveled to India the following year. In New Delhi, we visited a home for children run by the Missionaries of Charity -- the order Mother Teresa founded in 1950. The building we walked through was crowded with cribs holding babies. As I examined the surroundings, I thought about the struggle I was having back in Washington trying to fulfill my promise to open a home for babies there. There is no way the New Delhi home could have passed muster with the regulators in D.C., but the crowded rooms contained something no regulation could ever provide: enormous love for children who had been left to fend for themselves.

The next time I saw Mother Teresa was back in Washington for the long-awaited opening of the Mother Teresa Home for Infant Children on June 19, 1995. Before the ceremony, Mother Teresa and I toured the home with the Sisters who would staff it. We were delighted by the sunny rooms filled with bassinets, changing tables and rockers. Before we went outside to cut the ribbon, she said to me: "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." What she meant, I believe, is that her work compelled her to "disturb the peace," to upset the complacency of the comfortable to help the poor.

From the moment she received a calling from God "to serve Him among the poorest of the poor" to the moment she passed away at 87, Mother Teresa gave selfless service, love and, yes, peace to countless others. It is in honor of her memory and her work that I will travel to Calcutta on behalf of the President to attend her funeral on Saturday. It is only fitting that people of different faiths from all over the world will come together to express their sorrow at her loss -- and to be reminded, once again, that feeding a child, healing a wound and caring for the dying ultimately help repair the human spirit.

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September 9, 1997

TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bill and I get a lot of letters. Some ask me for advice on hairstyles. Others ask him for golf tips. But the best letters are always from kids. I'll never forget the letter he got from a young boy in Iowa. It said, "Dear Mr. President, My name is Rollie. 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."

Thanks to a new law Bill signed this week, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, more children like Rollie will have their hopes fulfilled. This law holds out the promise that all children in our foster care system will have a chance to find what every child deserves -- loving parents and a safe, permanent home.

Right now, there are half a million children in foster care. For most of them, foster care is a safe haven on the road to a permanent home. Too many, however, make countless detours along the way, shuffling from family to family, without much hope that they'll ever find parents to love and take care of them.

This new law will come to their aid. It is the direct result of the President's commitment to improving the lives of all children. And it will help meet his goal of doubling by the year 2002 the number of kids who are adopted or placed in permanent homes each year.

Here's what this legislation will do:

-- With this law, the health and safety of children will always be the first priority. The best chance children have in this life is with parents who love them -- and we must always do our best to give them that. But we cannot ever leave children in unsafe homes. Under this law, states will no longer be required to try to keep children with parents who tortured, abandoned or chronically abused a child. When this happens, a child will be on a fast track to a safe, permanent home. Furthermore, states will conduct criminal background checks of prospective foster and adoptive parents.

-- With this new law, foster care will become what it was always meant to be -- a temporary refuge en route to a permanent home -- not a place to grow up. For kids in foster care, hearings determining their future will be sped up by at least six months. For children who have been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months, states must move forward to terminate parental rights except in narrowly specified circumstances. For children who cannot be safely returned to their families, states must do all they can to find a permanent place to call home. And states now will receive financial incentives to

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increase the number of foster care children who are adopted each year -- especially those with special needs.

This new law removes another barrier -- it gets rid of the obstacles that keep families from adopting children across state and county lines. It also tells children with special needs: You will continue to have health insurance under Medicaid or the new State Child Health Insurance Program. And it tells parents that our government will work harder to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

-- With this new law, we are going to demand accountability by basing state performance on the only yardstick that matters: results. The Department of Health and Human Services will develop an annual report card to show how states are measuring up -- including the number of adoptions they've completed and the amount of time children are staying in foster care.

Regardless of age, religion or race, all the children I've met over the years have had one important thing in common: All of them needed parents in their lives. Someone to pick them up when they've fallen. Someone to teach them right from wrong. Someone to tuck them into bed at night. Someone simply to love them.

It is for this reason that, for more than 25 years, I've done my best to call attention to children in foster care and to see to it these children are not lost in the system and that those who cannot ever go home are freed for adoption.

The landmark bill my husband signed will go a long way toward making sure this happens. It's a historic opportunity -- one that couldn't have happened without extraordinary bipartisan work from members of Congress in both houses.

But this new law will not solve all that ails our child welfare system. Businesses can make it easier for their employees to adopt a child. Religious leaders can help spread the word about the joys of adoption. Parents thinking about adoption can expand their search to reach out to kids in foster care.

That's what Bernell and Della Neal did -- again and again and again. This week, the government honored them with a 1997 Adoption 2002 Excellence Award. These parents have adopted 11 children, many with severe physical and emotional needs. Though the Neals have faced tough challenges, they have shown that nothing is impossible. Their family motto is "There's always room for one more."

Because of this new law, that will be the motto for other families as well.

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November 18, 1997

NOVEMBER 20 1997

DRAFT

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

COLUMN FOR NOVEMBER 20, 1997

There is no greater tragedy for any family than when parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children. And there is no greater challenge for society than to decide what to do with children in these circumstances.

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NOVEMBER 20 1997

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FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

COLUMN FOR NOVEMBER 20, 1997

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That's what this new law does. And what better gift can we give this Thanksgiving week than the hope for tens of thousands of children in foster care that they, too, may soon know the joy of spending the holiday season with a family that cares for them and loves them.

This new law gives states greater flexibility in assessing when and whether parents are able to meet their responsibilities to their children. States will no longer be required to reunify families who have come apart due to "aggravated circumstances", like torture, abandonment or sexual abuse. At the same time, the law will redouble efforts to keep families together by helping families overcome problems that can lead to family instability.

The new law will give states financial incentives to increase the number of adoptions by assuring prospective adoptive parents that children with special needs will retain their health care coverage. It also will require states to come to quicker resolution about permanent plans for foster children. And the new law will provide funding for the education and training of judges who must decide the fate of children in the foster care system.

This legislation surely will ease the pain and confusion that so often marks foster care cases. For too long, in courtrooms across America, children have been caught in a legal tug of war in which their own rights must compete with the noble, but sometimes unrealistic, ideal of family reunification.

I remember once representing a foster family in Arkansas that wanted to adopt a four-year old boy who had been in their care for three years. The boy had been abandoned by a mother who suffered from psychological problems and he showed all the symptoms of severe mistreatment; he had gained little weight, was unresponsive and shied away from human contact.

But in his foster family he began to thrive. Still, when his foster parents tried to adopt him, the state adoption agency refused. Instead, state officials began to consider returning him to his birth mother, who had filed suit to get him back.

It seemed clear that keeping the little boy with his foster parents was in his best interest. What was not clear was whether his health and safety was the priority that counted most in a court of law.

Thankfully, the judge allowed the foster parents to adopt the boy, giving him the opportunity that all children need and deserve: to grow up in a safe, loving, and stable family.

Not all of us are parents, but all of us have been children. We all know the importance of having a caring permanent family - either because we have been fortunate enough to have had the experience or because we are painfully aware of what we have missed.

I know that laws are not the answer to all of our nation's problems. A loving home and responsible parents are not things that can be legislated. But laws can help protect our most vulnerable children and smooth their paths to stable homes with mothers and fathers who want to take them in.

TALKING IT OVER

BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RELEASE: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1998, AND THEREAFTER

I met the most extraordinary young woman last week. Joy Warren had just begun her first week at Yale Law School. But what's remarkable is that Joy grew up in foster care, and like more than 20,000 foster-care children each year, she "aged out" of the system when she turned 18.

This means Joy has been entirely on her own, without the traditional support system so many families provide, for the past seven years -- years in which she managed to receive a college degree, work as an advocate to improve foster care and begin law school.

Children who grow up in foster care face many of the same challenges as other children and have many of the same needs. But they also have special challenges that demand special attention -- and too often they just don't get it.

One 13-year-old foster child told me what she wants most: "I want a place that I can call home; a room that I can call my room; a family that I can love and would love me back." Is this too much to ask?

Although my own mother was never in formal foster care, her teen parents were unable to care for her when she was born. They sent her to live with her grandparents, but when that didn't work out, she went to live in the home of a family where she helped take care of the children for room and board.

My mother has often told me how grateful she is to the woman with whom she lived because she got to see what a real family was like. She watched what happens inside a home where parents and children go through all they should go through as a family. And she wanted to pass that opportunity on.

When I was growing up, she invited young women from a group home to come and work for us, spending time with our family, much as my mother had done so many years before.

I'm proud that this Administration has cared enough to improve and reform our nation's foster-care system, including passing the Family and Medical Leave Act, which gives time off for parents to adopt a child. Tax credits are now available for families who adopt, and foster care and adoption have been freed from discrimination and delays based on race, culture and ethnicity.

I was especially proud when, last year, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, a historic step toward improving the lives of children in

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foster care. The aim of this bill is to place this country's 500,000 foster-care children in safe, stable, loving and permanent homes. And it will help us meet our national goal of doubling the nation's annual adoption rate.

But, as important as this bill is, it doesn't address all the needs of the children who "age out" of the system each year and who, like Joy Warren, have to make the tough transition to living on their own.

Last year, at a roundtable in Berkeley, Calif., I spent an afternoon listening to young people describe the challenges of leaving the foster-care system. A disproportionate number are homeless and have trouble finishing school, finding jobs and receiving adequate health care. And, often, they don't get the life skills they need to survive in today's world.

There are many programs that work, several of which exist as a result of the advocacy and leadership of former foster kids like Joy. One national conference, Destination Future, where I met Joy last week, brings together older foster children and homeless young people to teach them life skills and advocacy techniques. Programs in Texas and Florida provide college-tuition assistance for young people in foster care. In Los Angeles County, set-aside entry-level jobs are available for young people aging out of foster care. Massachusetts has a teen parent transitional living program. And the California Youth Connection has become a national model of how to bring young foster teens together to form a network of support and advocacy.

One of the most critical challenges remaining is to make sure that children who age out of foster care gain access to health care. It is outrageous that these young people should find themselves among the uninsured. Some states are addressing this issue, but there is still far to go.

We must also strengthen the Federal Independent Living Program, which provides 85,000 young people critical assistance in their transition to independent living, helps them earn their high school diplomas and offers access to vocational training.

Federal legislation and state programs have put us on the right track. But we must do better. Now is the time to make sure that the 20,000 young people who each year become too old to remain in foster care receive the help they need to become independent and productive members of society.

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TALKING IT OVER

BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RELEASE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1998, AND THEREAFTER

This week, I witnessed a miracle -- actually 30 miracles. On Tuesday, here at the White House, I met 30 children who woke up in the morning as foster children but went to bed that night as members of permanent, loving families.

I met 12-year-old Charday Mays. She and her brother, Steven, who is 11, have lived in many different foster homes. But on Tuesday, both children were adopted by Edward and Rochelle Mays. Charday says, "This Thanksgiving, Steven and I have so much to be thankful for. We are now officially part of a family. That makes me very, very happy."

Ellen Wells had tears in her eyes as she described how it felt to finally adopt 8-year-old Jessica. When she moved in with Ellen, Jessica had just turned 7 -- and had lived in seven foster homes. That first day, Jessica sat down at the table and asked, "So, after this house, where do I have to go?" Ellen was dumbstruck. She says, "I understood that I was forever. Jessica did not." On Tuesday, as Jessica happily munched cookies with the other children, her eyes told the story. Now, she knows that Ellen is her mother -- forever.

Jessica, Charday and Steven were at the White House as part of Washington, D.C.'s 12th annual Adoption Day, a day when the city's Superior Court judges invite a number of families to finalize their adoptions together in celebration of National Adoption Month and as an inspiration to others to consider adopting. I was pleased to host this year's event at the White House.

In addition to the new families, we were joined by Washington, D.C.'s Mayor-elect, Anthony Williams, and Dave Thomas, founder of the Wendy's restaurant chain, both of whom were adopted. Williams was 3 when his mother took him in. Foster-care officials warned her that, because he had not yet spoken his first word, he would be trouble and never amount to anything. Today, he says with a grin, "I was some trouble, but I did amount to something."

Thomas, adopted at 6 weeks, is one of this country's leading adoption advocates. This week, he challenged corporate America to extend maternity benefits to adoptive parents.

Judge Eugene Hamilton presided over the ceremony. He and his wife, Virginia, have cared for 40 foster children in their home over the past 20 years, adopting two of them. He noted, "I hope the commitment we see here today will inspire many others to come forward."

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The President, who shares this hope, has set a national goal to double the number of adoptions and permanent placements in this country by the year 2002. A year ago, in order to move toward that goal, he signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which reformed our nation's child welfare system, making it clear that the health and safety of children come first.

The Act shortened the time it takes to make permanent placement decisions for children, guaranteed health insurance coverage for special-needs children, created new financial incentives for states to increase adoptions and funded services to keep families together when appropriate.

In addition, the President provided parents the opportunity to take time off to adopt a child by signing the Family and Medical Leave Act. And he has worked to end discrimination and delays based on race and ethnicity and created tax breaks to make it easier for families to adopt.

But although adoptions in this country have increased in the last year, there are still too many children who don't have permanent and safe families. Our job is not done.

For each of the 30 wonderful children who were adopted on Tuesday, there are 100 more just like them still in D.C.'s foster-care system. Nationwide, there are 100,000 children waiting to be adopted.

So, this week, the President asked Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to devise a plan for a national, Internet-based registry of eligible foster children. Simply telling their stories and showing their pictures can go far in placing children in permanent homes. According to one advocate, this "is the single most important thing we can do to find homes for kids."

Every child deserves a safe and permanent family. At Thanksgiving, every child deserves to know that there is a seat waiting at the table -- in good times and in bad. And every child deserves to know that the table will be filled not only with food but also with laughter and with love.

I know that this Thanksgiving will be special for Charday, Jessica, Steven and every one of the other 27 children I met this week. As I celebrate the holiday with my family, I will pray that next Thanksgiving every other child who needs a permanent and loving family will have one.

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

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TALKING IT OVER

BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RELEASE: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1999, AND THEREAFTER

News that the President's budget for the year 2000 is 2,592 pages long is enough to make most people's eyes glaze over. No matter how complicated it may appear, though, it provides a critical blueprint for the future, laying out his priorities for the country in the starkest of terms -- numbers that add up to a balanced budget.

Six years ago, when my husband took office, analysts projected a \$404 billion deficit for fiscal year 2000. Instead, thanks to fiscal responsibility, strategic investments, the hard work of millions of Americans and the President's leadership, we now anticipate a \$79 billion surplus.

What you will read and hear about in the President's budget are the big items -- saving Social Security, guaranteeing the soundness of Medicare, shoring up our nation's defenses, improving our children's schools and reducing the national debt.

But there are other, smaller items that may never make it to the pages of your newspapers but could significantly improve the lives of countless Americans. Here are four examples that I care deeply about and highlighted at White House events this week:

Foster Care: Last November, I wrote a column about the plight of the nearly 20,000 youngsters who each year become too old for foster care. Terry Harrak was compelled to leave foster care when she turned 18, at the beginning of her senior year. With no job and no place to go, Terry became homeless and was forced to finish high school while staying with friends and teachers, in subway terminals and even in hospital emergency rooms. Now, thanks to a local program that helps the homeless, she has a job and is attending community college.

Terry's one of the lucky ones, but no foster child should have to become homeless to obtain help. In his budget, the President proposed funds to help foster youth like Terry by offering them financial support while they develop the skills they need to move into the work force and making sure they have adequate health care until they're 21.

Asthma: Last year, I also wrote about the alarming increase in childhood asthma. Many people don't understand how debilitating this disease can be and that it now affects 6 million American children, double the number 15 years ago. The President's budget includes the largest ever federal

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investment to fight childhood asthma -- through research, disease management education and a new public-information campaign.

Children's Hospitals: I know from my own experience that children's hospitals train 25 percent of this country's pediatricians and nearly half of all pediatric specialists. But unlike teaching hospitals that train doctors who treat adults, they receive very little in the way of federal medical education support. The President's budget would provide funds for children's hospitals to ensure that the physicians they train can meet the special health needs of our nation's children.

Mentoring: Most of us can think back to one or two adults who encouraged, supported and championed us as we were growing up. When I was young, the youth minister at my church opened doors to me and my friends by arranging worship and service opportunities with disadvantaged teens in Chicago, exposing us to art and poetry, and taking us to hear Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak.

I am especially pleased that the President's budget contains two items that support mentoring: the new GEAR UP program, which is aimed at disadvantaged students as they prepare for college, and at-risk youth programs including tutoring, job training, and drug and alcohol prevention.

You may have noticed that I keep referring to the "President's budget." Many people, I have found, assume that when the President announces his budget, the money will be forthcoming. But this is only the beginning of a long and sometimes difficult process.

What happens is this: Once the President has announced his plan, he sends it to Congress, where lawmakers must approve and allocate funds for everything from the FBI and the Peace Corps to highway construction and space exploration.

During this process, various Congressional committees and subcommittees hold hearings. Working with members of the administration, Congress then accepts some of the President's proposals, rejects others and changes still others. Agreement should be reached by Oct. 1, when the new fiscal year begins, although last year, the President couldn't sign the final budget until Oct. 24.

Over the course of the next eight months, you will hear a lot about various budget proposals -- proposals that have the potential to change the lives of millions of American citizens. Let's hope that when Oct. 1 rolls around, the President's plans for the big things like Social Security and Medicare will have passed but also that you'll also see funding so young people like Terry Harrak will never again sleep in subway stations, children will no longer suffer the life-threatening symptoms of asthma, hospitals will train more and better pediatric specialists, and every child will have a champion.

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TALKING IT OVER

BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RELEASE: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1999, AND THEREAFTER

For more than 25 years, as an advocate and an attorney, I have worked to address the challenges of foster care and adoption. I've represented foster children and their prospective parents in court, and I've sought changes in laws that discourage adoptions. I've listened to social workers, judges, police officers and parents frustrated by the red tape that so often keeps them from sharing their lives with the children who badly need their love. And I've listened to the children themselves -- children who have spent the precious years of their childhoods feeling alone and unloved, moving from home to home. Since my husband was elected, we have worked together to devise a strategy to reform the foster care system in this country. Giving every child the chance to live in a stable and secure environment -- to have a permanent and loving home -- has been at the heart of our efforts. The first bill my husband signed into law was the Family and Medical Leave Act, which helps new parents, including adoptive parents, carve out the time they need to care for their new children. The President also signed and strengthened the Multiethnic Placement Act, which put an end to racial discrimination in adoption.

We have made adoptions more affordable, putting in place tax credits for new adoptive families. And we're taking steps to use the Internet more effectively to help match waiting children with loving homes. In 1996, we set an ambitious national goal -- to double the number of children adopted annually, from 28,000 to 56,000, by the year 2002. In order to meet this goal, we worked with members of Congress to pass bipartisan legislation that dramatically reduced the amount of time children spend in foster care. Under this bill, for example, no child waits longer than 12 months -- down from 18 months -- before a court considers permanent placement. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 also removed barriers to adoption, and for the first time, provided financial incentives to encourage states to increase the number of children adopted each year. Last week, we were pleased to receive a report from the Department of Health and Human Services indicating that our strategy -- and these laws -- are working. For the first time since the foster care program was created 20 years ago, the number of adoptions from the system has risen dramatically. In fact, since 1996, the total number of adoptions has risen 29 percent. Last week, the President awarded adoption incentive bonuses, totaling \$20 million, to 35 states -- including Illinois, where placements more than doubled -- for their exceptional achievement. But there's more we need to do. Under current law, foster children who turn 18 are forced to leave the system, without the support they might need to make the transition to independence. With broad bipartisan support, the House of Representatives has passed a bill that would allow these young people to remain on Medicaid until the age of 21, and give them extra help in finishing high school, going to college, and finding work and a place to live. It's time for the Senate to pass a companion bill for the President to sign. Every time I need inspiration for our fight to strengthen and increase adoption in America, I think of Deanna Collins. Four years ago, with her eyes downcast and her shoulders slumped forward, Deanna stood at a podium in the East Room of the White House. In a quiet voice, she told the audience about her dream 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 as adoption has transformed her life. With

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the love of her parents and the confidence that comes from knowing she will always have a place to call home, she is thriving. A senior in high school, she plans to go to college next year and major in social work. I think of Sue and Hector Badeau, who have adopted 22 children. I think of Virginia Williams who, many years ago, opened her heart and her home to a 3-year-old boy who had been declared unadoptable and was institutionalized by his state. Today, that boy is the mayor of Washington, D.C., Anthony Williams. Finally, I think of Dawn Keane, who with her husband, Steve, adopted two children last May. Last week at the White House, she said, "Families who have adopted know that these children are special gifts from God, and that they enrich our lives in more ways than we could ever have imagined. I know that there are more than 100,000 children in the country still waiting to find families. Our hope is that all of these children can become someone's special gift." That is my hope as well. To find out more about Hillary Rodham Clinton and read her past columns, visit the Creators Syndicate web page at www.creators.com. COPYRIGHT 1999 CREATORS SYNDICATE,

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NOVEMBER 24, 1999

TALKING IT OVER

BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RELEASE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1999, AND THEREAFTER

This week, all across the country, millions of Americans will take a moment to count their blessings. When I sit down to our Thanksgiving meal on Thursday, I know I will bow my head in gratitude for family and friends -- with special thanks for the children who have enriched my life in ways I can't even count. I have spent most of my working life -- nearly 30 years now -- striving to protect and improve the well being of this country's children. That's why I was so pleased with last week's resolution of the budget impasse. Although long in coming, the final agreement is a clear victory for the American people -- and for America's children. But Congress failed to enact important initiatives, leaving much hard work still to be done.

Because my husband refused to turn his back on his commitment to improving America's public schools, the budget puts education first -- by funding the next installment in his plan to hire 100,000 new teachers, reducing class size in the early grades, and more than doubling the funding for after-school programs. In addition, the agreement offers help to states and school districts to turn around their worst-performing schools, while permitting families to opt out of failing programs. It provides over \$600 million for school-based drug- and violence-prevention programs. And it increases funding for the President's GEAR UP initiative, a program designed to help nearly 500,000 disadvantaged seventh-graders begin to prepare for college.

While House Republicans tried to deny additional children access to Head Start, the final plan endorses the President's proposal to add 44,000 slots to this proven preschool program, moving us closer to our goal of giving 1 million youngsters a critical "head start" on learning, and a solid foundation for success in elementary school.

Charter schools offer the opportunity for communities to craft innovative and high-quality educational programs to meet very specific needs. When my husband was elected, there was only one charter school in the country. Today, there are more than 1,700, providing parents in 30 states a wide range of choices within the public school system. Thanks to the budget bill, next year alone, school districts will receive start-up funds to create 650 new charter schools.

The budget looks out for children in other ways as well. There are funds to provide older foster children the support they need to make the difficult transition from foster care to independent living. Children's hospitals across the country will receive much-needed funding to support the training of pediatricians and pediatric specialists. And with the passage of the bill, our children will not only enjoy better schools, they will live in safer neighborhoods -- neighborhoods with more police on the streets, and the resources to strengthen local law-enforcement efforts.

Thanks to the President and the Vice President, the planet we leave our children tomorrow will be healthier than it is today. After beating back dozens of anti-environmental riders to the bill, including several that would have benefited special interests at the expense of public lands, Democrats won significant environmental gains, including new resources to combat water pollution, protect wildlife, address global warming, and preserve precious land across the country.

Finally, as a result of the President's resolve to veto irresponsible tax cuts, the nation is on a course to pay off its debt by the year 2015 -- the first time since Andrew Jackson was President. Despite these achievements, all of which will significantly improve the lives of our children, members of Congress left town with many important issues unresolved. In the face of recent shootings that should have served to reinforce the need to protect America's families from gun violence, our lawmakers failed to enact common-sense gun laws to require background checks on weapons sold at gun shows and child safety locks on handguns. They also failed to ban the importation of large capacity ammunition clips, or bar violent juveniles from owning guns.

They failed to pass a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights that would have taken medical decisions out of the hands of accountants and put them back in the hands of doctors, where they belong. Ignoring the clear wishes of the American people, they left town without agreeing on meaningful campaign finance reform, a plan to strengthen Social Security and Medicare, or comprehensive tobacco legislation to reduce youth smoking. Furthermore, they failed to pass a straightforward increase in the minimum wage, funding to help states and school districts build and modernize 6,000 schools nationwide, or assistance to low-income working families who need affordable and high-quality child care.

As we bow our heads this Thanksgiving, let us remember not just the children sitting around our own dinner tables, but less fortunate children as well. Let's be grateful for the hard work members of this administration and Congress did to fashion a budget agreement that works for children. But let us not forget that there is still a lot of hard work to be done. Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

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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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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.

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ERIC'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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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.

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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.

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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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