

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

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

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

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her

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.

Today, nearly half a million children are in foster care, separated from their parents because of abuse or neglect. For most of these children, foster care is a temporary safe haven until they can return home. But for others, it's a bleak waiting game that can go on for years. Shuffled from family to family, they have little hope of being reunited with their birth parents or finding permanent placement with adoptive parents who will care for them and love them.

While there is no quick fix for the foster care crisis, and no fool-proof formula for deciding every foster care case, our nation took a giant step this week in improving the prospects for children in need of permanent homes. At a ceremony in the ^{East Room} ~~Rose Garden~~, the President signed legislation that, for the first time, will put the interest of children first when it comes to adoption and foster care. [NOTE: needs more emotion here, something personal would help.]

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 ^{Parents} ~~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.

11/18/97

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FROM: USOFFICE LUIU

FAX NO. 1 + 380 0322933555

18-11-97 08:48 P.04

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.

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Nicole R. Rabner

11/19/97 03:58:29 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Jennifer L. Klein/OPD/EOP

cc:

Subject: 1997-11-19 adoption bill signing

----- Forwarded by Nicole R. Rabner/WHO/EOP on 11/19/97 04:01 PM -----



SUNTUM M @ A1

11/19/97 02:37:00 PM

Record Type: Record

To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message

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Subject: 1997-11-19 adoption bill signing

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 19, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND FIRST LADY
AT ADOPTION BILL SIGNING

The East
Room

1:53 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you and welcome to the East Room.
Please be seated. We are delighted to have all of you join us today

for this very important event and one that many of you in this room have worked for and looked for for many years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We know it makes a difference for children to have permanent loving homes. It's not only research that tells us this; we know it by our intuition, by our own experience and we have all seen it firsthand. It was here in this room two years ago that a

young woman named Deanna -- a child waiting to be adopted in foster care stood up and read a poem about what she wanted in life, and it wasn't real complicated. It is what all of us want. I'm happy that because of that event here in the East Room, she was able to meet a family who did adopt her. And I saw her last year at an event in Kansas City and almost didn't recognize her -- from a shy, withdrawn 13-year-old, she had blossomed into a cheerful, outgoing, confident teenager with a brilliant smile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Secretary Shalala, I thank you and your staff for your remarkable work on this. And I thank the members of the White House staff, all the members of Congress who are present here. And especially I thank Senators Rockefeller and Chafee and Congressmen Camp and Kennelly for their work and for what they said here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With these measures we help families stay together where reunification is possible and help find safe homes for children much more quickly when it is not. We've come together in an extraordinary

example of bipartisan cooperation to meet the urgent needs of children at risk. We put our differences aside, and put our children first.

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

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

Now, as we approach Thanksgiving, when families all across our country come together to give thanks for their blessings, I would like to encourage more families to consider opening their homes and their hearts to children who need loving homes. You may

**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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I think this should
cover it for the
remarks, although you
might want to get the
annual proclamations,
which I don't have.

— Nixon

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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.

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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.

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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.)

"ADOPTION IS A NEW BEGINNING "

East Room of the White House
November 13, 1995
1 p.m.

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. And 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 numerous 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. This would be a great tragedy, because there are so many parents who just need a little bit of financial help with the costs. They need a little bit of a subsidy, and they need continuing medical help to be able to open their lives to these children. 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 home of their own.

We have to work together to improve our adoption system. In the Proclamation for National Adoption Month, the President said, "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 their child. Think how important it is for a new child coming into a strange home, filled with anticipation to have some time where he or she is the center of that family's attention, and that at least one parent gets a chance to spend 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."

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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 who 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 there are almost one half-million children in foster care right now. And there are 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? -- Congresswomen? -- 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 for 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 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? 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 every boy and every girl deserves a loving family. So thank you, and God bless you."

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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 Clements 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."

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Mrs. Marshall: "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 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 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 newborn 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 came 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 and 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."

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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 girls that were 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 be 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.

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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 their 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."

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

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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file adoption

**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

tody decisions must be made. Regardless of individual feelings, everyone involved in the process, especially a parent, has an obligation to temper the pain children will inevitably experience.

Anyone who has raised children knows how attached they are to the security of routine. Long after divorce, they usually harbor hopes that their parents will reconcile. The anxieties that come with divorce require that parents do whatever they can to avoid creating additional uncertainty. Parents need to remember that little things often matter most—maintaining mealtimes, helping with homework, telling bedtime stories, taking weekend excursions, praying together. Children's needs must come first.

In deference to their children's feelings of shock, abandonment, and insecurity, adults have to control their own feelings, whether they are relieved and pleased at leaving a marriage, or angry and resentful at being left. This requires a degree of awareness and self-control that can be hard to muster in the midst of so traumatic an event.

Simple acts of decency and civility may be most important: Refusing to criticize the other parent to a child. Providing a decent level of child support, because your child deserves to be taken care of financially, regardless of your feelings about your former spouse. Honoring the times you promise to spend with your child. Using that time to become involved with your child's life, whether by attending sports events, volunteering at school, or simply sitting together talking. Making the effort to celebrate birthdays and holidays and attend school performances. Sparing your child adult disagreements.

As a lawyer, I handled my share of divorce cases and

tried my hardest to keep the parties out of court by working to help them solve their disagreements. Time and again I saw otherwise rational adults, twisted by revenge, jealousy, or greed, attempting to use their children as bargaining chips. Watching one parent browbeat the other over child support or property division by threatening to fight for custody or withhold visitation, I often wished I could call in King Solomon to arbitrate.

That wise king, faced with two women who both claimed to be the mother of a child, ordered that the child be cut in two, so each could receive half the body. The woman who cried out that Solomon should give the child to the other, rather than kill him, revealed herself as the real mother by placing the child's welfare above the contest over his custody. How I wish that all modern-day parents, divorce lawyers, and judges would put so high a priority on determining a child's best interests.

There are signs of hope, however. Some courts now require that divorcing parents attend classes to learn about the potential effects of divorce on their children. They are given training in ways of keeping their children out of marital conflict, opening up lines of communication, and arranging for parenting to continue in a loving and supportive manner.

I admire the way the Parent Education Program in Columbus, Ohio, treats divorce as a public health issue, "because it constitutes a major life stress for 40 percent of American children and can put many of these children at risk for long-lasting difficulties that can derail their development." Twenty-three states have already established voluntary child custody mediation programs, and four more require mediation through statewide programs.

In Michigan, the Friend of the Court system investigates and makes recommendations on custody, visitation, and support in all domestic relations matters, including divorce. The total population of Michigan is only about 4 percent of the nation's, yet that one state repeatedly collects more child support than any other—10 percent of the nation's total in 1993. At the same time, the state strictly enforces visitation rights, in line with its philosophy of treating "the non-custodial parents as more than simply a billfold."

It is incumbent on the village—friends, teachers, mediators, counselors, and ministers, among others—to advocate for children during and after divorce, especially when parents cannot or will not be there for them. Adults beyond the immediate family reached out to my mother, giving her enough support to make it through a difficult childhood. Similarly, the Louisiana teenager who wrote to me found a male role model in a friend of the family.

A long-term study of children in Hawaii examined why some children from poor and broken homes were resilient in the face of adversity while others were not. The study found that resilience depended on many factors, key among them the dependability of the adults in the child's life and the social supports available to the family.

Although children's relationships with parents, particularly their mothers, were found to be especially important, relationships with siblings, grandparents, other adult caregivers, teachers, ministers, and neighbors were significant too. The study reported that positive changes in behavior and attitudes were possible even after early childhood, "if the older child or adolescent encounters

new experiences and people who give meaning to one's life, and a reason for commitment and caring."

Anyone can provide that reason for commitment and caring, as long as he or she is stable and devoted to the best interests of the child. When a parent needs help, individuals in the village can pull a child into their embrace and provide guidance and support, informally or through organizations like Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Boy and Girl Scouts.

In the terrible times when no adequate parenting is available and the village itself must act in place of parents, it accepts those responsibilities in all our names through the authority we vest in government. That means our city, county, and state social welfare services are not only the province of their employees. They intervene in families to protect children on our behalf. And by any fair assessment of our foster care and adoption system, we are not doing a good job taking care of our children.

Approximately 450,000 children are in our foster care system at any given time, and close to 100,000 of them will not be reunited with their families. Too many children are in limbo for far too long. There are not enough qualified foster parents to go around, and those who are available are frequently discouraged from forming warm attachments with children whose futures are still uncertain. Caseworkers are overwhelmed by the numbers of children for whom they are responsible and by the severity of the emotional and physical damage many have suffered.

Loving adults are eager to offer permanent homes to many of these children. But the American adoption process can be a nightmare of complex regulations,

outdated assumptions, and institutional inertia. Public adoptions can take years, and private adoptions may be too costly for many to afford. One woman wrote to tell me how she and her husband, both musicians, had spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy who is "the joy of our life." When her cousin's teenage daughter recently became pregnant and could not afford to keep her child, the same couple volunteered to adopt again. As simple as this case should have been—the parents and baby being members of the same extended family and all parties agreeing to the adoption—it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paperwork.

For others, there is the shadow of fear cast by uncommon but highly publicized cases in which birth parents sue to reverse an adoption. A forty-year-old newscaster I met in New Mexico wanted to adopt but was discouraged by notorious cases like that of Baby Richard, in which a child lived happily with his adoptive parents until his birth father won custody of him a few years later. However rare they are, such cases undermine people's faith in our adoption system and encourage them to look to other countries for children, while so many of our own country's children go without proper care or love. At an event in the East Room of the White House promoting National Adoption Month, thirteen-year-old Deanna Moppin spoke eloquently about the longings of these children: "I would have a place that I would call home. I would have a room that I would call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back."

Adoption in America is also made more difficult because of a historical bias against interracial adoptions,

which can mean interminable waiting until children are matched with parents of the same race. Although many adopting parents would prefer to bring up children who share their own cultural and racial identity, many others do not have a preference and would gladly take a child of a different background. Today, despite heroic efforts by groups like One Church, One Child, there are far more minority children needing homes than there are same-race homes for them. To prevent these children from languishing in foster care, my husband signed legislation and ordered that new guidelines be put in place to prohibit federally funded agencies from using race as the sole deciding factor in placing children.

The village can take it further. We could set a goal of reducing our foster care and adoption rolls by 100,000 children each year for the next five years by moving children either back home or into adoptive families, whichever is in their best interests. We could be willing to terminate parental rights more quickly whenever physical or sexual abuse is involved. We could recruit qualified citizens to share with overworked social workers, lawyers, and judges the burden of moving children's cases through the courts. We could make decisions by birth parents to give up children for adoption more difficult to overturn, especially when a child has already become strongly attached to an adoptive family. We could ensure that government continues to cover some of the costs associated with adoption. We could enlist more businesses to follow the leadership of Wendy's president Dave Thomas, who has been vocal about businesses subsidizing adoption costs as well. In these and other ways, we can see to it that considerations like regulations, money,

skin color, and even parental rights and adult prerogatives take a back seat to the love and security children so deeply need.

Discussions of modern families often miss the point. Although the nuclear family, consisting of an adult mother and father and the children to whom they are biologically related, has proved to be the most durable and effective means of meeting children's needs over time, it is not the only form that has worked in the past or the present. I know many successful adults, like my mother and my husband, who were raised in families that did not fit the conventional mold. Others I know thrived in the care of biological and adoptive surrogates, and even in foster care or institutions. What a family looks like to outsiders is not as important as whether adults know what children need to develop positively, and work to fulfill their responsibilities to each other and to their children.

In addition, however, every society requires a critical mass of families that fit the traditional ideal, both to meet the needs of most children and to serve as a model for other adults who are raising children in difficult settings. We are at risk of losing that critical mass in America today. Parenting has never been easy, but today, when most adults consciously choose to become mothers and fathers, we owe an even higher degree of love and respect to the children we bring into this world.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the families we grew up in, we get a second chance at domestic happiness when we create a family of our own. Bill and I have watched with joy as Roger and his wife, Molly, and my brother Tony and his wife, Nicole, have joined us in parenthood. We've been impressed with the willingness

our brothers have shown to participate in the daily tasks of child care, and particularly with Roger, who learned by negative example the importance of a father's influence on a son's life. Every parent makes mistakes, sometimes serious ones. But if we find mediating influences along the way, as Roger found in his mother, brother, extended family, and wife, we can learn even from the painful lessons our upbringing has to teach us.

Those of us who work hard enough—and are lucky enough—to create a flourishing family life have a bounty of joy and security to share with others less fortunate. By extending our good fortune, we create a village that acknowledges children as our first allegiance and strives to ensure that every child has at least one champion.

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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."

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HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON 10/28-29/95**Page 2**

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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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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.

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."

outdated assumptions, and institutional inertia. Public adoptions can take years, and private adoptions may be too costly for many to afford. One woman wrote to tell me how she and her husband, both musicians, had spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy who is "the joy of our life." When her cousin's teenage daughter recently became pregnant and could not afford to keep her child, the same couple volunteered to adopt again. As simple as this case should have been—the parents and baby being members of the same extended family and all parties agreeing to the adoption—it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paperwork.

For others, there is the shadow of fear cast by uncommon but highly publicized cases in which birth parents sue to reverse an adoption. A forty-year-old newscaster I met in New Mexico wanted to adopt but was discouraged by notorious cases like that of Baby Richard, in which a child lived happily with his adoptive parents until his birth father won custody of him a few years later. However rare they are, such cases undermine people's faith in our adoption system and encourage them to look to other countries for children, while so many of our own country's children go without proper care or love. At an event in the East Room of the White House promoting National Adoption Month, thirteen-year-old Deanna Moppin spoke eloquently about the longings of these children: "I would have a place that I would call home. I would have a room that I would call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back."

Adoption in America is also made more difficult because of a historical bias against interracial adoptions,

which can mean interminable waiting until children are matched with parents of the same race. Although many adopting parents would prefer to bring up children who share their own cultural and racial identity, many others do not have a preference and would gladly take a child of a different background. Today, despite heroic efforts by groups like One Church, One Child, there are far more minority children needing homes than there are same-race homes for them. To prevent these children from languishing in foster care, my husband signed legislation and ordered that new guidelines be put in place to prohibit federally funded agencies from using race as the sole deciding factor in placing children.

The village can take it further. We could set a goal of reducing our foster care and adoption rolls by 100,000 children each year for the next five years by moving children either back home or into adoptive families, whichever is in their best interests. We could be willing to terminate parental rights more quickly whenever physical or sexual abuse is involved. We could recruit qualified citizens to share with overworked social workers, lawyers, and judges the burden of moving children's cases through the courts. We could make decisions by birth parents to give up children for adoption more difficult to overturn, especially when a child has already become strongly attached to an adoptive family. We could ensure that government continues to cover some of the costs associated with adoption. We could enlist more businesses to follow the leadership of Wendy's president Dave Thomas, who has been vocal about businesses subsidizing adoption costs as well. In these and other ways, we can see to it that considerations like regulations, money,

tody decisions must be made. Regardless of individual feelings, everyone involved in the process, especially a parent, has an obligation to temper the pain children will inevitably experience.

Anyone who has raised children knows how attached they are to the security of routine. Long after divorce, they usually harbor hopes that their parents will reconcile. The anxieties that come with divorce require that parents do whatever they can to avoid creating additional uncertainty. Parents need to remember that little things often matter most—maintaining mealtimes, helping with homework, telling bedtime stories, taking weekend excursions, praying together. Children's needs must come first.

In deference to their children's feelings of shock, abandonment, and insecurity, adults have to control their own feelings, whether they are relieved and pleased at leaving a marriage, or angry and resentful at being left. This requires a degree of awareness and self-control that can be hard to muster in the midst of so traumatic an event.

Simple acts of decency and civility may be most important: Refusing to criticize the other parent to a child. Providing a decent level of child support, because your child deserves to be taken care of financially, regardless of your feelings about your former spouse. Honoring the times you promise to spend with your child. Using that time to become involved with your child's life, whether by attending sports events, volunteering at school, or simply sitting together talking. Making the effort to celebrate birthdays and holidays and attend school performances. Sparing your child adult disagreements.

As a lawyer, I handled my share of divorce cases and

tried my hardest to keep the parties out of court by working to help them solve their disagreements. Time and again I saw otherwise rational adults, twisted by revenge, jealousy, or greed, attempting to use their children as bargaining chips. Watching one parent browbeat the other over child support or property division by threatening to fight for custody or withhold visitation, I often wished I could call in King Solomon to arbitrate.

That wise king, faced with two women who both claimed to be the mother of a child, ordered that the child be cut in two, so each could receive half the body. The woman who cried out that Solomon should give the child to the other, rather than kill him, revealed herself as the real mother by placing the child's welfare above the contest over his custody. How I wish that all modern-day parents, divorce lawyers, and judges would put so high a priority on determining a child's best interests.

There are signs of hope, however. Some courts now require that divorcing parents attend classes to learn about the potential effects of divorce on their children. They are given training in ways of keeping their children out of marital conflict, opening up lines of communication, and arranging for parenting to continue in a loving and supportive manner.

I admire the way the Parent Education Program in Columbus, Ohio, treats divorce as a public health issue, "because it constitutes a major life stress for 40 percent of American children and can put many of these children at risk for long-lasting difficulties that can derail their development." Twenty-three states have already established voluntary child custody mediation programs, and four more require mediation through statewide programs.

In Michigan, the Friend of the Court system investigates and makes recommendations on custody, visitation, and support in all domestic relations matters, including divorce. The total population of Michigan is only about 4 percent of the nation's, yet that one state repeatedly collects more child support than any other—10 percent of the nation's total in 1993. At the same time, the state strictly enforces visitation rights, in line with its philosophy of treating "the non-custodial parents as more than simply a billfold."

It is incumbent on the village—friends, teachers, mediators, counselors, and ministers, among others—to advocate for children during and after divorce, especially when parents cannot or will not be there for them. Adults beyond the immediate family reached out to my mother, giving her enough support to make it through a difficult childhood. Similarly, the Louisiana teenager who wrote to me found a male role model in a friend of the family.

A long-term study of children in Hawaii examined why some children from poor and broken homes were resilient in the face of adversity while others were not. The study found that resilience depended on many factors, key among them the dependability of the adults in the child's life and the social supports available to the family.

Although children's relationships with parents, particularly their mothers, were found to be especially important, relationships with siblings, grandparents, other adult caregivers, teachers, ministers, and neighbors were significant too. The study reported that positive changes in behavior and attitudes were possible even after early childhood, "if the older child or adolescent encounters

new experiences and people who give meaning to one's life, and a reason for commitment and caring."

Anyone can provide that reason for commitment and caring, as long as he or she is stable and devoted to the best interests of the child. When a parent needs help, individuals in the village can pull a child into their embrace and provide guidance and support, informally or through organizations like Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Boy and Girl Scouts.

In the terrible times when no adequate parenting is available and the village itself must act in place of parents, it accepts those responsibilities in all our names through the authority we vest in government. That means our city, county, and state social welfare services are not only the province of their employees. They intervene in families to protect children on our behalf. And by any fair assessment of our foster care and adoption system, we are not doing a good job taking care of our children.

Approximately 450,000 children are in our foster care system at any given time, and close to 100,000 of them will not be reunited with their families. Too many children are in limbo for far too long. There are not enough qualified foster parents to go around, and those who are available are frequently discouraged from forming warm attachments with children whose futures are still uncertain. Caseworkers are overwhelmed by the numbers of children for whom they are responsible and by the severity of the emotional and physical damage many have suffered.

Loving adults are eager to offer permanent homes to many of these children. But the American adoption process can be a nightmare of complex regulations,

outdated assumptions, and institutional inertia. Public adoptions can take years, and private adoptions may be too costly for many to afford. One woman wrote to tell me how she and her husband, both musicians, had spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy who is "the joy of our life." When her cousin's teenage daughter recently became pregnant and could not afford to keep her child, the same couple volunteered to adopt again. As simple as this case should have been—the parents and baby being members of the same extended family and all parties agreeing to the adoption—it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paperwork.

For others, there is the shadow of fear cast by uncommon but highly publicized cases in which birth parents sue to reverse an adoption. A forty-year-old newscaster I met in New Mexico wanted to adopt but was discouraged by notorious cases like that of Baby Richard, in which a child lived happily with his adoptive parents until his birth father won custody of him a few years later. However rare they are, such cases undermine people's faith in our adoption system and encourage them to look to other countries for children, while so many of our own country's children go without proper care or love. At an event in the East Room of the White House promoting National Adoption Month, thirteen-year-old Deanna Moppin spoke eloquently about the longings of these children: "I would have a place that I would call home. I would have a room that I would call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back."

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The village can take it further. We could set a goal of reducing our foster care and adoption rolls by 100,000 children each year for the next five years by moving children either back home or into adoptive families, whichever is in their best interests. We could be willing to terminate parental rights more quickly whenever physical or sexual abuse is involved. We could recruit qualified citizens to share with overworked social workers, lawyers, and judges the burden of moving children's cases through the courts. We could make decisions by birth parents to give up children for adoption more difficult to overturn, especially when a child has already become strongly attached to an adoptive family. We could ensure that government continues to cover some of the costs associated with adoption. We could enlist more businesses to follow the leadership of Wendy's president Dave Thomas, who has been vocal about businesses subsidizing adoption costs as well. In these and other ways, we can see to it that considerations like regulations, money,

skin color, and even parental rights and adult prerogatives take a back seat to the love and security children so deeply need.

Discussions of modern families often miss the point. Although the nuclear family, consisting of an adult mother and father and the children to whom they are biologically related, has proved to be the most durable and effective means of meeting children's needs over time, it is not the only form that has worked in the past or the present. I know many successful adults, like my mother and my husband, who were raised in families that did not fit the conventional mold. Others I know thrived in the care of biological and adoptive surrogates, and even in foster care or institutions. What a family looks like to outsiders is not as important as whether adults know what children need to develop positively, and work to fulfill their responsibilities to each other and to their children.

In addition, however, every society requires a critical mass of families that fit the traditional ideal, both to meet the needs of most children and to serve as a model for other adults who are raising children in difficult settings. We are at risk of losing that critical mass in America today. Parenting has never been easy, but today, when most adults consciously choose to become mothers and fathers, we owe an even higher degree of love and respect to the children we bring into this world.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the families we grew up in, we get a second chance at domestic happiness when we create a family of our own. Bill and I have watched with joy as Roger and his wife, Molly, and my brother Tony and his wife, Nicole, have joined us in parenthood. We've been impressed with the willingness

our brothers have shown to participate in the daily tasks of child care, and particularly with Roger, who learned by negative example the importance of a father's influence on a son's life. Every parent makes mistakes, sometimes serious ones. But if we find mediating influences along the way, as Roger found in his mother, brother, extended family, and wife, we can learn even from the painful lessons our upbringing has to teach us.

Those of us who work hard enough—and are lucky enough—to create a flourishing family life have a bounty of joy and security to share with others less fortunate. By extending our good fortune, we create a village that acknowledges children as our first allegiance and strives to ensure that every child has at least one champion.

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 race, regulations and skin color do not outweigh the more important gift of love.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

8/7/96

Jen:

Melanne & I thought you
should see this - Mrs. Clinton
said some interesting things
about welfare & adoption that
didn't make it into the
Time Mag. piece.

Nice

internal -

INTERVIEW WITH FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
MAY 23, 1996
TIME MAGAZINE

INTERVIEWER: WALTER ISAACSON, MANAGING EDITOR, TIME MAGAZINE

WI: (inaudible...Chelsea... Could you describe that a little bit? Because I think it's interesting, when we talk about children and preparing them for the world.

HRC: Well Chelsea was born into politics, in the Governor's Mansion, and then in her father's comeback election in '82 and then he was reelected in '84.. But she, you know, didn't pay any attention to what was going on. She was too young, she wasn't able to read anything or follow the news. But I knew that being six meant that she would start picking up what people were saying. And Bill and I talked about how we could best prepare her for what would inevitably be, no matter how we tried to protect her, um, the mean spiritedness and the slings and arrows that come with political life.

(Comment by Isaacson about Orville Faubus, inaudible)

HRC: It was in 1986, not only was one of Bill's former opponents, the man who had beaten him in 1980, running against him, but Orville Faubus got into the Democratic primary. So we knew that it was going to be just um, kind of a free-for-all on their parts. So we were sitting at dinner, one night, and I started to explain to her how her daddy had to run for reelection and get people to vote for him, and that in an election people had to go out and explain why they deserve to be given the votes of other people. And she asked me, 'Does that mean we get to live here if he wins?' And I said, 'Yea we get to live here,' I was trying out how to make it simple for her. And then I said, 'But you know sometimes in a political campaign people will say mean things and untrue things.' And she got really upset about that, I remember, and said 'Why would people do that?' And I said, 'Well because they want to win, and that's what they do, they get kind of carried away.' So Bill and I'd talked about it beforehand, and I said, 'Now, for example suppose you're your daddy, and you're running for office and you want to be reelected Governor, what would you say?' And she said, 'Well I don't know!' And I said, 'Well just say something.' And she said, 'Well I'm Bill Clinton and I want to help people, so I want to run for this.' And then I said, 'OK now your daddy is going to pretend to be someone running against him.' So Bill said something like 'Don't vote for Bill Clinton, he's a terrible person and he's mean to people.' And you know Chelsea got big tears in her eyes, you know 'Why would anybody say that about you?' And Bill explained about what happens. So from that time, and I can remember it so vividly,

then for a series of dinners we would do this, and of course as she talked to us more she got more into making the speeches and sometimes she'd say, well, she'd learned about Orville Faubus having closed down the schools in Little Rock, and she'd picked it up from the news somewhere, so at dinner all of a sudden she said, 'Vote for me, don't vote for that other person! He shut down the schools in Little Rock so that black children couldn't go to them!' You know, and everything that I had thought might happen, sort of by absorption, she started to pick up things about the campaign, was happening, but she had a way of expressing it well. And ever since then we've talked a lot about what happens in public life, and we've tried to make sure she's never left without information...

WI: What are you doing this time around?

HRC: Well this time around...

WI: It's going to be a tough campaign.

HRC: Oh it's going to be a very tough campaign. A friend of mine... somebody... I can't even remember where I was, and somebody introduced me the other day and they said, 'You know, they've thrown everything but the kitchen sink, but they'll probably throw that.' And I got up to speak and I said, 'Well they'll probably also throw the kitchen, the house, the housing development, whatever can be hurled.' We're just doing what we've always done, um, she follows the news, she's interested in issues, um, her dad and I try to have at least one meal with her...

WI: Can you give me an example of you talking about something that might hurt her and shielding her from it?

HRC: I think we're sort of beyond that. I think she's kind of come to understand about what is said in politics now. You know, I'll give you an example, when we started all this I expected her to hear a lot of mean things about her father. I wasn't quite prepared for having as much attention as I've received in the last four years... But when I was subpoenaed to appear before the grand jury and all that, usually you know it's I who goes in and says, "Do you want to talk about what going on in the news, or have you heard this, or your dad's got this really tough decision and he'll probably get criticized for it, do you want to talk about it?" But this time it was Bill, he said, 'Do you want to talk about what's going on with your mom?' and all the rest... So we just try to anticipate.

WI: And what did she say? (inaudible)

HRC: Oh sure he sat down and talked with her

WI: Did he go through all the details of the case or anything like that?

HRC: No, we just explained the process and, I mean, she obviously shares our view that all of these investigations are politically inspired so they belong in our category of political conversations and she has a pretty good sense of that. But I guess my larger point was, not that everyone will face what we, who are in the public arena face, but I think everyone to some extent or another, should really think about how to prepare children once they get to be a certain age for the realities of life. I mean you know, jobs aren't always secure, um, when we were back in Arkansas, a friend of Chelsea's, a girl that she'd been in her house and played with, father, killed himself, killed his wife, and killed his two daughters, and these were people that she knew. And so trying to pretend that your children don't know what's going on and what's happening in the world around them, I think, causes a lot of pain and unnecessarily so. You have to be aware of the age of a child -- you can't load-down a young child with more than that child can accommodate, but as a child matures I think talking about um what you confront is important.

WI: I read (inaudible) about Mrs. Onassis and her advice

HRC: Oh Walter that was one of the best...

WI: Do you have any other...

HRC: In the summer of 1991 when it was first even talked about that Bill might run, she was one of the first people who came forward who said she wanted to support him. And sent word to us. And I think Bill had met her but I had not. And then the campaign was so rigorous that I didn't get a chance to accept her invitation to come talk with her until, um, what, probably June of '92 I think. I went to her apartment, and we had lunch and it was one of the most delightful and helpful times that I had during the entire campaign because we talked very specifically about how you give your children, in the glare of public life, a sense of personal space, privacy, self-confidence that they're worthy on their own, and all of the issues that I had been worrying about because of Bill's running for President. And she was so kind, and she told me about how she'd looked for ways to have her children accept responsibility. You know I tell the story in the book about the bicycle, but she also told me how she would expect John and Caroline to be on time, to get ready for school and if they weren't ready, the car that was going to take them was told to go ahead. It was something that she said that I did just so that they would know they had to abide by the rules that other people do as well

WI: What do you do with Chelsea on that? Anything particular?

HRC: Well we've tried to do a lot of things starting from the time she was in the Governor's Mansion, um, you know, making it clear that she had certain responsibilities she has to fulfill, um, I remember one time coming down into the kitchen of the

Governor's Mansion and it was breakfast time and she was watching television and she knew that we didn't want her to watch television during breakfast and I said, 'Why is this on?' And she said, 'Well they said I could,' meaning the people who worked around there, and I said, 'I know but we're your parents and we say you can't.' And then I said to the people who worked, who are all wonderful, I said, 'She's a child. We don't let children decide what's best for the.'

WI: But she can't do the chores like you and I did, like take out the garbage at the White House...

HRC: No,

WI: And make the popcorn even.

HRC: Well but she can, I mean one of the things that I did when we moved in, when Mrs. Bush first showed me around the White House, um, I noticed that Mrs. Kennedy had put in a, have you been up to the second floor?

WI: No, (inaudible)

HRC: In the living quarters Mrs. Kennedy took what had been Margaret Truman's bedroom, I don't know who slept there after that, um, and made it into a dining room and a serving/butler's kitchen. And she did it because up until then you had to eat all of your meals down on the state floor. And she had these children she didn't want to transport to the state floor. And so when I visited with Mrs. Bush the dining room is beautiful but it's very formal. And so when I went into the butler's kitchen I said, 'Could we take out some of the serving area and put in a table so that we could actually, when we were just the three of us alone, eat more normally? And so that was done, and so since then, I mean she makes cookies, she makes bread, we occasionally do a little bit of cooking for ourselves, not a lot, sort of an infamous incident when she was sick after we'd been there for a little while and I went in there to make her scrambled eggs the way she likes it and some apple sauce and everybody was rushing around saying, 'What are you doing? What are you doing?' And I said, 'Well I was going to make her some scrambled eggs and apple sauce.' 'Oh we'll do it!' 'No, no I wanna do it.' So we've tried to bring that sense of normalcy as much as possible.

WI: Do you have any second thoughts about the private school versus the public school decision?

HRC: No, and the reasons I don't is because after talking to many many people I had no doubt, with her having been in public schools for her entire career, that she could have gotten a good education. They were public buildings, and there was no way that the press or the public could be asked not to come in and I was particularly struck with great sadness about what happened when Amy Carter first started in her public school and according to

press accounts which I read, by about the third or fourth day she'd gone out to recess with the other kids and there was such a jam of press and onlookers waiting to catch a glimpse of her that the school made the decision, because they couldn't ask people to leave, that she would have to stay in at recess. So for me the privacy and security issues unfortunately were ones we'd never had to face before but I know that we had to face them then.

WI: You were, I think down at Emma Gladney once, speaking was that right, I remember reading that somewhere, where you talked about having considered adoption because it happened to us too. We went through a long period before we had Betsy and even going through Emma Gladney. And Cathy had had a few miscarriages and everything, and then we finally had a child. Did you consider adoption at all before?

HRC: Well, we've talked about it, I must say we were hoping that we would have another child and um,

WI: You were hoping to have a second child?

HRC: Yes.

WI: Are you still hoping to have a second child?

HRC: I have to tell you Walter, with the reality, I would be surprised but not disappointed! (laughter) My friends would be appalled I'm sure but um, I think it would be terrific.

WI: I think so too. I would have loved to have had a second child and I think (inaudible)

HRC: Your faces just lit up, that's the way I feel about it. (laughter)

WI: I know, I know, I think we both have (inaudible). Would you consider adoption now?

HRC: We continue to talk about it, because we really believe in adoption and I have worked hard to promote adoption, particularly for older kids and across racial lines, kids with special needs. We may still think about that. We'd have to think hard about it, especially if it were an older child, the pressures of the White House on a child like that.

WI: But you could do it though, right, I mean there's no, you've actually, why wouldn't you,

HRC: We've thought about it.

WI: That's great. And it would be, you might want to do an older child or something

HRC: We haven't gotten into that level of detail about it.

WI: But you'd probably have to do it, assuming you win a second term, while you're in the White House, it's getting kind of late after that, right, or is that impolite of me to say?

HRC: It's something that we're all facing you know, as of August 19 I'll be married to a 50 year-old man. That's startling.

WI: And um, have you ever talked about having miscarriages or does that bother you, because I know we talked about it a lot when we went through that and people had told us that you had mentioned it. I don't want to put you on the spot here but

HRC: I never, I never had a miscarriage, I just had a lot of difficulties um, getting pregnant, and then with the pregnancy, but I never had a miscarriage.

WI: Oh, by difficult pregnancies you mean lost pregnancies though or just uh,

HRC: No, no just a lot of uh, questions about you know whether I'd be able to carry out..

WI: I'll leave this off too, alright , were you a DES daughter, because that was Cathy's problem, do you know what that was?

HRC: I do know what that was

WI: Yea, when the mother takes the (inaudible)

HRC: I should ask my mother that.

WI: Yea, that was one of the reasons we had.. anyway, um, but I am fascinated about the notion of you all considering adoption and you've been very involved in the adoption legislation, it's not legislation it was adoption... well explain what it is.

HRC: It's several pieces of legislation I have supported. ON of them began the process of eliminating the prohibition that many states had used toward adopting across racial lines. And the President strongly supported that as well And then it is being further refined because there is some thought that still some of the states have not gotten the message that we're really serious about this as national policy. I also support giving some tax relief to people who adopt babies when they're older.

WI: (inaudible)

HRC: It is occurring, I mean it's been passed I believe in the House, I don't know if it's gotten through the Senate but it is something that is really important. It's a good first step, but a lot of adoption advocates point out how difficult it is to adopt an older child or a child with special needs unless you get some continuing medical assistance, like a lot of these kids when they're in foster care, are eligible for Medicaid but if they're

adopted into a family they may not be. So trying to provide some financial support, especially through the medical needs, both physical and emotional, that kids may have is important to me. And then we're also um, you know, looking at ways of encouraging employers to be more supportive. Mr. Thomas, "Mr. Wendy's" has been a big adoption advocate, because he was adopted. So he has provided benefits for adoptive parents that other employers don't, just the whole range of actions that could be taken to move a lot of the kids who are not eligible for adoption into adoptive homes more quickly than we have.

WI: The fact that you're considering adopting, does that inform your thinking about this in any way?

HRC: Well I think it, you know, I've seen a lot of these children, um, and have visited with them, and I believe many people have concerns about adopting, particularly an older child, and in fact I was asked that question at an event that I had at the White House a few weeks ago where we highlighted adopted children other than babies and infants. And a reporter said, 'Don't you worry about the outcome?' And I said, 'Well I think any time you take responsibility for a child you have to worry about the outcome. There are so many things that are not in your control, and so many characteristics that can go one way or the other that any child has, so

WI: When did you all start considering adoption?

HRC: Well considering may be too strong, I think 'talking about it,' and you know

WI: When did you start talking about it?

HRC: We have off and on for a long time. `

WI: Are you talking about it more now?

HRC: Yea I think we're talking about it more now. We'd obviously wait to get serious in considering it until after the election, there's just too much going on in our lives right now but, um, I just think that giving a child a chance and sharing what you have with a child is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself, as well as a child, so I hope that something will come of our thinking about it.

WI: Dealing with the adoption legislation as well, you're very much in favor of, you're sort of split with, I guess it's Ms. Edelman and others, in terms of cross-racial adoption, right? Is that a..

HRC: Well I've never had a conversation specifically with Marian about that, but I believe that finding a home for a child is our first priority and making sure that anyone who does have a cross-

racial adoption is sensitive to the issues that will arise and get support

WI: But might you do a cross-racial adoption yourself, have you talked about that in order to make a statement?

HRC: We haven't gotten into that kind of detail.

WI: Have you talked about whether you'd do it through an agency or other issues like that?

HRC: No.

WI: What's your feeling on orphanages and group homes; they got kind of hit politically when Speaker Gingrich stuck his neck in.

HRC: I think the way that was presented, at least the way it came across, for those of us that listened, was that orphanages were an option for poor parents, and that poverty would be a reason for children to be taken away from their families. I just oppose that with every fiber of my being. I think though that there are situations that both involuntarily and voluntarily could be appropriate for the placement of children um, in well-run and carefully staffed orphanages. But I think it's a very difficult issue to take and make a blanket statement about.

WI: But you were a little bit further along than most people and be willing to sever parental rights as a lawyer.

HRC: Yes, well, I started off when I was at law school, working at New Haven Legal Services on the cases involving children, which is one of the reasons I got interested. And I saw lots of abuse and neglect and I worked at the Yale New Haven Hospital with their pediatrics department and trauma staff in helping to think through what should be the standards for identifying and dealing with child abuse, so I have seen a lot of families have abdicated their responsibilities toward their children and that at some point a child's rights deserve careful attention and some parents do not deserve the continued authority over their children. I know that there's a lot of debate about this and I was criticized during the '92 campaign for my 1973 article about children's rights. But anyone who has dealt with abuse knows that at some point you've got to make a very tough decision and it's not easy. I represented a lot of children or foster parents who were caught in the system and one of the early cases I did in Arkansas was representing couple who had been foster parents and had fallen in love with this little boy and had had him for about four years. And they were told on the one hand by the state that had signed a contract to be foster parents and it couldn't be adoption and then the biological mother showed back up and wanted the baby. And I just kept saying, I said to my clients, 'If at any point I encounter any information or develop the feeling that it would not be in the best interests of this child I will tell you that and I will no longer represent you because what my

principal concern was the best interests of the child. And once you have seen enough abuse and neglect cases, you know you've got to make that decision. The hard thing for us to do in our legal system is to move these cases along because so many of these kids are moved back and forth into situations of violence and drug abuse. The parents aren't helped, they're not really given any chance to be better parents, a lot of them are beyond help. And at some point we have to say, 'Look this child's future means more than that.'

WI: Cathy was counsel for (inaudible) foster care thing, and got so depressed during that whole process. When it comes to um, this also applies to adoptions when the biological parents may change their mind, that can scare people away, which may not be in the best interests of the child too.

HRC: Those cases are really rare but they get so much attention that people do get scared and again we need clear legal guidance and so if a biological mother is counselled and told the consequences of her action and she signs that consent form then she should be absolutely held to it. The problem is, as in the Baby Richard case, when a biological father shows up and claims he didn't know anything. Now that case, it seems to me, could have been handled much more quickly than it was, and if a decision were going to be made that the child was going to be returned it should have been done as soon as possible. But I would still argue, based on all the work that I have done, that that psychological and emotional bond that is developed between responsible and loving caretakers and a child over a certain period of time should not be interrupted except for the most compelling reasons.

WI: What about the parental rights movement that's more on the right about curricula?

HRC: Well I think parents have the primary rights for the upbringing and nurturing of their children.

WI: I'm talking about that legislation.

HRC: But I think that the current legislation as I have tried to understand it would create a right for individual parents to make decisions that not only would affect their own child but would affect other children as well. I believe that there should be like parental "op-outs" and consent, if you don't want your child attending a certain health class about health education, that's fine, I think that a parent should say that goes against my beliefs, I don't want my child to do it and parents should be given that option. But I don't think that gives parents who object to it on behalf of their own children the right to prohibit other parents who think that it is in line with their values for their children to be given such information and therefore to argue that the school shouldn't be able to offer such a course. Or the parents who on religious grounds oppose the

teaching of evolution should have the right to deny their child the access to information about evolution so that the child can make his or her own decision. So I believe strongly in parental rights but I also believe that there has to be some balance in the (inaudible) and implementation of those rights.

WI: The Wisconsin welfare reform plan that the President has given the waver to. What is your feeling about what that could do, to basically say there is no entitlement to cash welfare for children. You can get an earnings credit or you can get wage supplements. Is that dangerous in the long run?

HRC: I don't think we know, an part of the reason the President's granted I think now 38 waivers, is to find out what works, and to give some direction to the national debate. And if you look at any of these states, there are features in each which I think are going to have to be evaluated on their own merits. In Wisconsin as I understand it, and I haven't read the proposal, just the press accounts, recipients are guaranteed employment basically, in either the private or public sector. Now that is very different from just saying there's no entitlement and you're off. So I don't know that we know yet what variations on reforming and ending welfare will work. But I know that there are certain basic features that the President wants to see in any national framework that is adopted by the Congress. But the waivers themselves are turning up some really good information. And we now have, as I recall, about a 1.6 fewer people on welfare than when the President took office. So that we're making some progress and we're seeing some results that I think are very promising.

WI: Does it really make sense, though, to force a mother of a young child to work?

HRC: You know, I've thought about that a lot, and I think about it when I go into a restaurant and I get waited on by a waitress who's working a minimum wage job and has young children at home. Or when I go to a hospital and meet the women who are the orderlies and the nurses' aides who are in the work force with children at home. Welfare was meant to be a transition and welfare is for most people who are on it, a temporary stop on their journey through life. I think the average time is no more than two years. So we have to look at the welfare population and say for most people who are on welfare who come in and out of it, a lot of the changes that are being talked about are not going to be that significant. They need the help and support, the medical benefits that come with Medicaid, but then they find a way off somehow. For a certain population who have been trapped in generational poverty what we have done has not worked. And I think, and I've said this for a long time, and when Bill was Governor of Arkansas he did it, I think getting up and going to work, getting up and going to school, and having to make the same difficult decisions about who cares for your children that every other working mother has to make, is a necessary step toward

learning how to be self-sufficient and independent. Now having said that, I don't think there's enough child care available, that is quality child care that is subsidized for welfare recipients or the working poor, so I think we ought to be moving people off of welfare and yes, I think as many people who are physically able to work ought to work. But I think they ought to have some child care support and they ought to have some benefits to take care of their children medically. Because a lot of the mothers that I see working in the restaurants and in the nursing homes and in the hospitals and on the assembly lines of small plants who are working minimum wage or above, have no medical benefits at all. So we've got to figure out a way to make work pay, not just for the welfare recipient but for the working poor. But I don't think it is fair to subsidize some people and say they shouldn't have to leave their children when millions and millions of women get up every day, and I've stood at plant gates at 5:00 in the morning and I've seen the pick-up trucks with the grandma sitting there and the mother handing off the kids in pajamas so that she can go work the early shift. I just think that we've got to recognize that everybody should have to do their part.

WI: And you don't think it's saying to certain mothers that raising a kid isn't real work, that you have to have real out-of-home work?

HRC: I think that, and I have also advocated this: I think one of the ways we ought to be thinking about reorganizing welfare, is by training women to be early childhood caretakers, and you've got all these women and children, often times in public housing or even in other settings, neighborhoods, intense poverty and welfare enrollment, and nobody's doing anything to kind of help organize them, to help them if you will, help each other take care of their kids. In my book, I write about how angry it made me when these two little kids and suffocated to death, and it made me angry at everybody -- it made me angry at the parents who weren't watching them, at the neighbors who weren't watching them, at the city who didn't have a recreational facility available to them. And I sort of feel the same way about this: there is no more important responsibility than caring for children. At this point in our history, what we're trying to figure out is who is responsible for that and how do we do it well. And everybody should be looking for better ways to do that, and I would spend some time and effort trying to help women who are currently on welfare figure out how to organize themselves better so that they trade childcare duties, so that they support one of their own who is taking care of the children as a way of both of being sure that their children are being well cared for and also providing employment. I was on an Indian reservation I guess a few years ago, and the women there were very upset because the tribal elders didn't see the need for any more childcare. And a lot of these women worked off the reservation, and there was no one for them to leave their children with. And I started talking to them about co-op babysitting, because they

were taking their children off into places and leaving them, and I said, think about how to solve this problem at home -- what would it take to work together so that one of you could stay home and be the child director, and instead of paying a stranger, you'd pay somebody you know? I mean, that's how we need to be thinking about this, I think.

WI: In your book, you quoted a few times and praised Mrs. Edelman. Yet you all had a bit of a rift, and she wrote the open letter to the President. How involved are you with this march, and has there been some separation because you disagree with her on certain issues?

HRC: I don't feel that at all. I don't believe that's the case. You know I was attracted to Marion because of her passion, her commitment, her effectiveness as an advocate on behalf of children, particularly poor children. She does what she does better than anybody in the country, and it's a really important task because it not only challenges all of us to do better but it points out ways that we don't live up to our rhetoric as a nation.

WI: Are you part of the march?

HRC: Yea, I'm going to be I think Friday night at the Kennedy Center we have a big benefit for all of the groups and the sponsors, so I'm doing everything I can to help it and support it. But I have been an advocate, I have been on the front lines, passionately arguing for all kinds of changes, and I have watched very closely my husband, who I also think is a great champion for and of children, taking the realities that you have deal with, and trying always to keep in mind where we should be and what our goals ought to be as a nation but understanding in the political process you may have to take it one step at a time. So I don't feel any separation at all. I see, looking at Marion and looking at my husband, two people in whom I have enormous confidence that they both care deeply about what happens to children, and they both have different roles that perform superbly, in my opinion.

WI: If you could have one piece of legislation get passed right now, just wave a wand or something, and only one...

HRC: Well, one thing I would want to have happen right now is passing the minimum wage, and not just for economic reasons, but for reasons of value, and a way of saying to people who are really working hard, this society values what you do, and we know it's not easy out there. If you look at what's happened to our kids in this really rapidly society, I find that we have the same problems whether I'm in the inner city in Philadelphia, with an all-black student body, or I'm in Corpus Christi with an predominantly Hispanic student body in a poor neighborhood, or I'm in an all-white school outside of Duluth: I hear the same thing: that the severity of the problem and the resources available to deal with them are certainly much more dramatic

where there are jobs or where people are working hard 40 hours a week and they can't get themselves ahead. So anything we could do, starting with raising the minimum wage, which says to people, this is your job as a parent to take care of your children but also we want help you by recognizing that you can't do it if you can't make a decent living the way that you would want to do it. Now there are many other things, since you put me on the spot, that I would do or want to do if I could, but as for what's on the landscape right now, I think that would be such a powerful thing.

WI: With the welfare thing, and the gay marriages, whatever, there's a lot of conflict between what Sen. Dole is saying and what the President is saying. What are the fundamental disagreements between this administration and Senator Dole on welfare reform?

HRC: Let me just back up one minute on that, because my husband has a long record on welfare reform. When he was in the National Governors' Association, he worked with particularly Senator Moynihan and the Reagan White House, in coming up with the Family Support Act, which was a very good piece of legislation. And it was never adequately funded nor implemented under either Presidents Reagan or Bush. So what my husband did was what a lot of governors had to do, and that was to seek waivers from the federal government so that he could get about the business of trying to reform welfare. In arkansas he had a very good success rate of moving people from welfare to work. So I'd say the first difference is he's somebody who's actually done it. He is somebody who has sat across the table time and time again with welfare recipients and asked them what is that you need to do for yourselves that we can give you the support to do to get off. He's listened to the testimonials of people who have found it in themselves to take the educational opportunities, use the child care, find the jobs that his reform program helped provide. The second thing I'd say is that when he came in he said he wanted to end welfare as we know it. He campaigned on that, and he started doing it. If you look at the earned income tax credit, that was as much an economic and tax decision as it was a reforming welfare decision because you cannot make the point about reforming welfare if you don't also say you're going to reward and honor work. And Senator Dole voted against that. And it removed millions of Americans out of being in danger of falling into welfare because all of a sudden there was a floor beneath them. It had a huge impact on our ability to reduce the welfare rolls. He also has a record from three or four days after he took office, he met with National Governors, and he said, 'I don't know when we're going to be able to get welfare reform through, but let's not wait -- you send me waivers; if they're decent, we'll grant them.' So while other people have been arguing about what should or shouldn't be done, his administration has been granting waivers and it's made welfare reform. And I guess the final thing is that he wants to reform welfare in a way that believes will work. And we know that if we don't have some kind

of child care help, it won't work. So I think on a whole range of issues, starting with having done it, having begun to implement when he was doing the earned income tax credit and all the way through the waivers and his consistency of saying yes I'll work with you but here are certain bottom lines I have, I think it's a difference between somebody who talks about it and somebody who actually does it.

WI: Divorce is harder to get. You talked about in the book, staying together for Chelsea, people have done that generation after generation after generation. Should we do something to make divorce as kind of more of a waiting period, I mean is that part of the campaign for children is to say to people, keep families intact if you can?

HRC: I think it has to be. When you're responsible for children I think you have to try to put their interests at least equal with if not ahead of your own. And there is a lot of evidence about the traumas and difficulties that divorced mothers face, whether it be financially or emotionally, and also about what happens to children. Now I do not believe we should prohibit divorce, if that's what people feel they have to do for themselves and their children. I know that there are many instances when a situation is intolerable; I often asked my mother-in-law why she didn't divorce earlier and then didn't stay divorced from Bill's step-father. So I understand the arguments on the other side. What I would hope is that we would do a more honest job of talking about the costs of divorce, and when parents seek, there would be some waiting, or cooling-off period where education and counselling programs would be available, where marital counselling would be available, so that people could understand the consequences of their decisions, as they impacted on the children and as they would impact on their financial well-being in the future. If a divorce occurs, then I think everything that the legal system can do to minimize the disruption in the lives of the children should be undertaken, and I think those are steps that adults who have children should be willing to take.

WI: Does it sometimes annoy you to be lectured about family values by people who have left their wives and children and remarried, like virtually everyone who's lecturing you on family values?

HRC: Well, lecture about family values, regardless of the source, have always frustrated me a little bit, because I don't think we need we need to just talk about family values, we should act in ways that value families and provide, support for parents, not just exhort them to do better but give them tools to do better.

HRC: Are you considering a kids' care like Medicare as a real way to get to health care, focusing on children this time around instead of doing a broad-based

HRC: Well I know that the President has said that in a second term he would look at how we could come up with a realistic effective way of ensuring kids. and I think that would be a very good step for the country to take. Kids are cheaper to insure than us older, creakier(?) people, but when they're sick they're often acutely more sick. Childrens' Hospitals, for example, are more costly than adult hospitals because the technology and the intensity of the care that children need who are injured or ill is greater than what we often need. So I would like to see us come up with some proposals for that and have...

WI: You told that heartbreaking story of that cousins with meningitis

HRC: I met the mothers yesterday. I didn't identify the city because I didn't want to bring any undue attention to them. I met the little girl, Chantelle, who survived, and her mother, and I met I have to say I just don;t understand how anybody can look at these children, who are usually the children of working parents, and not feel that we all have a responsibility to help them get the medical care they deserve. Even at the end of the health care debate in the first two years there were a number of us that said well at least let's look at kids, let's do something we can agree on to move the debate forward. But for political reasons we couldn't get anybody

WI: But that will be part of the second term?

HRC: I hope it will be and my husband has said it should be.