

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR THE NEW ENGLAND CIRCLE AWARD DINNER
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[Acknowledgements: Jack Dunfey, Chairman; Eleanor Dunfey Freiburger and Tom O'Neill III, vice-chairs; Pam McDermott, vice-president; Jerry Dunfey, president, and ~~Mary Catherine Dunfey~~, ^{Maria Freiburger} who present you with the award; and Harvard Professor Alvin Poussaint [pooSAHNT], moderator] - Governor Howard Dean

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to join you this evening. I want to thank the Dunfey family and the New England Circle for working so hard to keep alive a tradition of civil discourse that is so essential to our success and endurance as a democracy. We cannot move forward as a country or as a society without honest debate about the issues and the inclusion of diverse points of view and perspectives in our national discussion. And as we all know too well, civil discourse is at risk in some quarters of America today.

It is a great honor for me to accept this award in Catherine Dunfey's name. Over the years, I have heard many wonderful stories about Mrs. Dunfey, all of which reflect her abiding commitment to family and community. One story I particularly like, which comes from one of her 12 children, is that each of her children believed that they were her favorite. To me, that is proof positive of a mother who took the time and interest to fully invest in each child she brought into the world.

I understand that close to 30 of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are here tonight. I know you are all proud of what Catherine Dunfey represents, not only in your own lives but in the life of this region and the nation.

An event celebrating Catherine Dunfey seems a particularly appropriate place to talk about children and families. And I can think of no more important discussion for our nation today.

As a society, our greatest challenge on the eve of a new century is to cherish our children and strengthen America's families. We can't simply talk about family values. We must act in ways that value families.

Most of us understand that there is nothing more important in this world than how we raise and love our children. Parents have the primary responsibility for making sure our children grow up in stable, loving, two-parent homes. Nothing can replace the attention, encouragement and discipline of a parent.

But there is also much that we can do as a society to help parents, support families and cherish our children. The question is how, as a society, do we build strong families, secure more educational and economic opportunities for individuals, rid our neighborhoods of crime, protect our environment, and nurture our children?

We can only do it through partnerships in which all segments of society -- from individual citizens to schools to religious institutions to businesses to the media to government -- all take responsibility for the way their decisions and actions affect children and families.

There are things that each of us can do -- in our personal and professional lives -- to improve the future for American children.

I am fascinated, as I travel around the country, to meet people who are struggling to be good parents. They want to do well by their children. And I ask them if they talk to their children, or read to their children. And they get a quizzical look on their face, and say, "Well, no, not really." You don't have to be a good reader to read stories to a toddler; you don't have to speak perfectly to engage your child with words. These may seem like little things, but they are vitally important to the emotional and intellectual development of children. And they don't cost a cent.

Let me also suggest that we should not assume that only parents from poor backgrounds have trouble raising their children. This is not true. I have seen many middle and upper-middle class parents who are too busy, too harried, too preoccupied with their own work or projects to take an active role in parenting.

Schools and teachers can take responsibility by valuing the potential of every child. Too often children are categorized, labelled, and dismissed as failures simply because their skills or interests are not conventional. [story of your tutoring Mary in Arkansas]

Religious institutions can help awaken the innate spirituality that children have and help them develop their moral consciences, compassion and sense of public service. Children need a sense of community; they need, as my husband often says, "something to say yes to." And we see, around the country, churches that are not only bringing people in, but reaching out to their communities.

I recently had the opportunity to visit a church in San Francisco that provides a good example of a church that has expanded its religious and social roles. Glide Memorial Church

is known for its spirit of inclusiveness and diversity -- it has a congregation of over 6,000 people from a wide range of backgrounds. Glide Memorial offers services ranging from job training classes and drug recovery programs to food and clothing drives and after-school tutoring for at-risk students. It also provides more than 3,000 free meals every day to hungry and homeless people in the surrounding neighborhood.

Businesses can help workers be good parents with family-friendly policies such as flexible work hours, adequate health benefits, decent wages, and opportunities for growth and learning. In an era of downsizing and lay-offs and a corporate culture in which loyalty to one's job does not necessarily guarantee job security, working parents are understandably anxious about how they can be assured that they can take care of their families.

Businesses have a responsibility not just to the bottom line, but to creating a business climate that sends the message "we're all in this together" instead of "you're on your own."

As many of you may know, I have been traveling around the country talking about children, and I've probably shaken about 23,000 hands in the last three weeks. And over and over, people come up to me and talk about the futility they feel as parents when it comes to the values, images, and messages conveyed to their children through the media.

Don't get me wrong. I am a firm believer in the First Amendment. But I am also a firm believer in taste, decency, and civility, and those ideals are not mutually exclusive.

Think of how much better off our society would be if the media executives making the decisions about the content of television shows and movies stopped and asked themselves the following question: "As a parent, do I want my child watching this show?" If the answer is no, they shouldn't produce or broadcast the show, or any show like it that is not suitable for children.

Much of what our children see on television -- gratuitous sex, violence and drug abuse -- is undermining the very values parents are struggling to instill in their children. That's why the V-chip -- or anti-violence chip -- that was included in the telecommunications bill that the President recently signed is so important. It will help parents screen out programs they believe are inappropriate for children.

As you know, the President has invited major broadcast executives to the White House next week for an unprecedented discussion of what we can all do -- together -- to clean up the airwaves for our children. This is an important step in creating

the kind of public and private partnerships we need to better the prospects for our children's futures.

Finally, there are some things that only government can do to help children and families. Obviously, government is not a panacea. But only government can raise the minimum wage. Only the government can pass the Family and Medical Leave Act or give tax breaks to working families. Only the government can enforce standards to keep our air clean and our water safe.

To anyone who thinks government has no role, I ask: Where would our nation be without the G.I. Bill, the National Institutes of Health, or our system of land grant colleges and universities?

Now I happen to be very optimistic that we can meet the challenges our nation faces. I'm optimistic because every day, somewhere in this country, someone, some family, some group, some community, is solving one of the problems that needs to be solve.

In virtually every state, there are examples of partnerships -- between government, business, the media, schools, parents and religious institutions, or some combination thereof -- that are making life better for children.

Let me give you a few examples:

-- I recently visited the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center, a charter school in one of the poorest neighborhoods of the San Fernando Valley in California. The school was about 95 percent Hispanic and 5 percent African-American. It had a Chinese principal and a Cuban vice-principal.

Until last year, the school was located next to several broken-down houses that were used by neighborhood gangs to sell and use drugs. The school fought for and received state funding to bulldoze the crack houses and build new classrooms. This summer, the school celebrated the opening of 14 new classrooms. This was one of the most inspiring examples I have ever seen of a community coming together on behalf of its children -- even against the most difficult odds.

-- In Brookline, Massachusetts, an assisted living center brings together elderly tenants and children in day care for intergenerational activities.

-- In New Haven, Connecticut, police and mental health professionals have joined forces to assist children caught in the crossfire of violence with the Child Development -- Community Policing Program.

-- In Washington, D.C., residents of the Fairlawn

neighborhood grew so fed up with the drugs and crime on their streets, they formed a coalition to patrol the neighborhood. Members wear bright orange hats to identify themselves, and they carry notebooks and sometimes video cameras to record information for the police. The Fairlawn Coalition deters illegal activity, and since its inception, residents have felt increasingly secure.

What these programs show us is that we can succeed if we share information, pool our resources, and believe in our own ability to get the job done. The concern is there; the willingness is there. If only we can now tap into all of the unfulfilled potential of parents, schools, communities, corporations and of our government to do right by our children.

Children have no vote; they have no say in the political, business and economic decisions made by individuals, or institutions, or our nation. That is why we can and must be their voice. Thank you.

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