

Reach Out & Read
Boston, Massachusetts
June 4, 1999

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

Reach Out & Read 10th Anniversary
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
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Thank you. I am absolutely delighted to be here. I'm happy to see this beautiful atrium filled with people who are committed to children's health and well-being, and to see so many beautiful children here as well, as a great reminder of what is most important and what we all should care about.

I want to thank Barry for that generous introduction. But it really is all of us who should be recognizing your leadership, Barry, and everything you have done to conceive of and then make successful Reach Out & Read, which has touched so many lives.

I'm also very pleased to be here with people who have worked tirelessly over the last 10 years to make this birthday celebration possible. I want to thank the Boston Medical Center and your chief executive officer and president, Elaine Ullian, who has been so supportive of this effort. I know, Elaine, that you have a great personal dedication to health care and providing quality health care to all people, and so it's a pleasure to be here with you as well.

We're also deeply indebted to Perri Klass for her tireless work on behalf of children, for sharing her many talents, particularly her writing talent, so that the others of us who are not on the inside actually delivering care as she is can have some idea of what the life of a practicing pediatrician is. Also we get insights into her work as a mother of three, and a novelist, journalist, book reviewer, world traveler, and, in addition, one of the moving forces behind Reach Out & Read.

We're also very pleased to have a representative of the parents, and I think that the response to Mrs. Abdulla's remarks from the audience is an indication of how supportive we all are of parents who are reaching out and reading to their children. And I was in the fortunate position, sitting here on the stage and being able to see her husband and three beautiful children sitting in the front row with a stack of books, which should be an advertising picture for Reach Out & Read.

We're also very blessed to have with us elected officials who care deeply about the future of children. And I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm very grateful for the gifts of the books and honored to be a daughter of Massachusetts. But I'm even more honored to be in the presence of a leader like yourself, who cares deeply about what happens to all children. And who, along with your colleagues who are here today from the House who have made it a priority of the Commonwealth to do what we can to strengthen families and provide opportunities to all children. And as you were speaking, Barry leaned over and said to me, "You know, I've seen him read to a child. And that's the real test, which he passed with flying colors." So, it's not just in the bills that you shepherd through the House, but also in your own personal example that we take great pride.

Now there are other elected officials here from the city council and from this area that is served by this medical center. And the partnership between the public and private sectors is really what Reach Out & Read is all about.

I've been looking forward to coming to this celebratory party for a long time. Now it's partly because I'm so pleased with the work that started here 10 year ago, and it's also because I get to see firsthand some of the characters in the books that I used to read on my own and to my daughter. Where else would I come to meet Curious George or Arthur the Aardvark and his other friends who are here? But these characters really exemplify the kind of fun that one can have when you're involved with reading to a child.

You know, Barry had it exactly right, we can spend a lot of time and a lot of money looking for ways to connect with or relate to our children. And I sometimes see parents working very hard to find time to do all kinds of things with their kids. But you know, when you really look closely at what children need and what we are now hearing increasingly from children of all ages, what we hear is that they want more of our time with them. They want to be with us. And sometimes, even when they act like they don't, they want to hear from us and they want to know that we care about them and put them at the center of our lives. Well, that is what I think Reach Out & Read exemplifies. It's not any kind of high-tech, costly solution to re-connecting families. It is the most basic kind of approach which sends a very clear message from an adult to a child: "You're really special, because I'm giving you something that I could never ever replace—the time out of this day to spend with you."

I have lots of pleasant memories from my own growing up years of a grandfather who read to me and my brothers. And certainly, Bill and I have a lot of memories of reading to Chelsea and her friends as often as we could.

I think when we launched this program together back in January of 1997 to take what worked so well here in Boston to the entire country, we could never have predicted the extraordinary response that it has created. We've done a lot of events together, I've been with Barry, Perri, and others on many occasions, in various parts of our country. We've even made Reach Out & Read part of our annual White House Easter Egg Roll—handing out prescriptions and books for reading as children and their parents left the lawn.

But the most important people in this whole venture, with all due respect to us adults, are our children. I, like many of you, have seen the excitement in a child's eyes. I was watching the Abdullah children, and I could particularly see, as their mother was speaking, the alertness and the concentration and, when she finished, the sort of thumbs up that her daughter gave her, because that connection that comes through exciting the interest and enthusiasm of a child is something that can never, ever be forgotten.

I have also seen, from the research that is available to us now, how reading to a child is one of the best ways of building that child's brain. Now we don't actually see that happen, but we can see the results of it when it does happen. Sometimes when I speak about this, I hear

people's questions. They say, "Well, does it really make a difference to read to a child before the child can talk?" Well, in fact, it makes all the difference in the world. Because by reading to a child, telling a child a story, associating those actions with the warmth of an embrace or lying across a chair, or a couch, or a bed together, you're sending a very strong signal to that child's brain cells to get connected up, because there's a lot of good learning ahead. It's no coincidence, therefore, that we launched the Prescription for Reading initiative at the White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning. We know that a baby's brain is a work in progress. And reading to a child literally helps that brain grow.

We've now distributed nearly 3 million books to nearly one million children. And it's exciting to see so many of the private sector partners who have supported Reach Out & Read and Prescription for Reading joining us today. I'm very pleased to announce, therefore, a remarkable number of new commitments to Reach Out & Read in honor of this 10th anniversary celebration. Scholastic Inc., for example, will donate 100,000 books over the next year. And Scholastic will extend its challenge grant to give 5,000 books for every \$100,000 that the program raises.

I was pleased to speak to the Book Sellers Association a few months ago to challenge them to get involved with Reach Out & Read and Prescription for Reading. And Houghton-Mifflin and Candlewick Publishers have also pledged special commitments. CVS Pharmacy is stepping up to the plate with a donation of \$250,000 to support local and national programs. CVS Pharmacy's very generous gift will support Reach Out & Read efforts in eight states and the District of Columbia. And the Cordelia Corporation is pledging a gift of \$300,000, and I want to thank them very much. The Cordelia Corporation's gift will support continued expansion of the program nation wide—and \$50,000 in books for the Reach Out & Read Coalition of Greater New York.

The medical community is also providing vital support. The Pfizer Pediatric Health Corporation has pledged to expand its commitment to Reach Out & Read, and to support the very first national conference, which will bring people together from around the country to learn what we need to know about how we can make Reach Out & Read even more successful. And finally, the Boston Medical Center HealthNet will be the first managed care organization in the country to offer Reach Out & Read as a standard program benefit to its members, and I want to commend you for that. I think Boston Medical Center HealthNet is really on the cutting edge of what health care needs to be doing in the 21st century. How do we do more preventive health care; how do we do more wellness work? Well, this is the kind of initiative that can make a very big difference in the future.

We have a lot to celebrate, and the vision that Barry had 10 years ago that many of you have helped him realize is really now taking off around our nation. Now as many of you know, I've been thinking a lot about the millennium and the end of a century, and we've chosen as our theme in the White House, "Honor the past and imagine the future." The President and I have asked all Americans to think how we preserve the common values that bind us all together as Americans and as human beings, and what are the gifts that we want to bring with us into the 21st century.

Early this morning, Bill and I met with a group of about 40 young people—high school students from all over the country—to talk about what was on their minds, particularly in the wake of the tragedy in Littleton, Colo. And we listened as they talked about all of the issues that they think we need to address as a nation. We talked about the need for sensible gun control, which we hope will make its way through the House of Representatives in the next weeks. They talked about what we should do to try to deal with the culture of violence, particularly as violence is portrayed in our media. They talked about the kind of steps that should be taken in schools to be more inclusive and provide more opportunities for young people to feel part of the school experience, and also what could be done when a young person knew that a classmate had a gun or was threatening himself or others and how that could be brought to the attention of the authorities.

But they also talked a lot about what they wanted from adults, what they wanted from their parents. The word “time” came up time and time again. The feeling that, as one young woman said to me, “You know, we can’t raise ourselves, our parents have to do this for us. They have to be there for us. They have to listen to us. They have to give us the guidance that we need.” They talked a lot about how fast-paced our culture is, how we’re all rushing around, we’re working so hard, and what can be done to carve out that special space and that necessary time for children to feel that they are the most important people to the adults in their lives.

Well, there is more than enough work to go around; there’s a lot of responsibility all of us as adults should share. Each of us in our professional, our business, our private and our public roles, we need to ask ourselves, “What can we do to do better for our children?” Well, one of the ways we can think about responding to that need is through Reach Out & Read. It may, as some have already said, sound like a simple thing. But many of us who have worked with children, studied children, had our own children, know that very often it is those simple things that really matter. So what started here 10 years ago and is now building as a national movement could not be more timely. And the recognition by the Massachusetts’s Legislature under the Speaker’s leadership that these are the kinds of steps that the public and the private sectors should take together to support families in the most important job any of us will ever do, that indeed is the kind of gift that all of us should be taking into the future.

Thank you very, very much.