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Divider Title:

11/30/93 National Child Labor
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REMARKS BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
TO THE NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE¹
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The Chemical Bank Building
New York, New York

MRS. CLINTON: I'm sure every one of you in this audience this evening are overwhelmed by the stories that we have heard. Last week, during the swearing-in ceremonies, my husband talked about -- of service for America. And he said what is so clearly illustrated by the people who are honored tonight that whatever is wrong with America can be fixed by what is right about America. (Applause.)

We have so much about what is right with us tonight. I want to thank Mayor Dinkins for being here, and for his consistent support that has been highlighted. I want to thank Mr. McGillicuddy for putting into action the kind of corporate commitment that is essential for furthering the causes of young people and children.

I want to thank Paul Lair for his personal and corporate commitment to these issues over many years. I want to congratulate him for his 26th wedding anniversary. That, in itself, is an accomplishment worthy of note. (Applause.) worthy of note. (Applause.)

I want to thank my friend, Phyllis for her untiring commitment to these issues, and I want to add my voice to the voices of the nominators who brought all of these people to the attention of this committee that chose them. Because, they, too, are what we honored last week during Inaugural Week: Faces of Hope.

You may have read about the luncheon the President hosted, at which he and the Vice President and Tipper Gore and I invited people whom we had met along the campaign trail because of the work that we had seen them doing or the courage they had displayed against adversity, because we believe so strongly that there are millions and millions of people like the ones we honored last week and like the ones who are honored tonight, who, in every way and every day make a difference on behalf of children and youth.

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And what I hope we can do over the next year is to knit together individuals whose work we honor today, those who we recognized last week, many who are in this audience and the millions more around the country who are trying often against, very, very difficult odds to save one child's life, to reach out across a gulf of violence and despair and hopelessness to try to make a difference.

I was privileged this morning to go to P.S. 115, where I saw the New York Cares Project that Maria Alvarez is being honored for -- (inaudible) -- and what I noticed there was not just the children who were being tutored, with smiles on their faces, but the smiles on the faces of the tutors. There is no substitute for love and caring and compassion, and human beings touching one another. And we will, I hope, begin to try to provide the institutional support that people like those being honored today deserve in their fight against pediatric AIDS or gangs, or adolescent depression. Or in their effort to bring people together to work in their communities to try to make life more hopeful and more possible for the children and young people who live there.

But no matter how much work we do, in the White House, in the court house, up and down every street and every -- (inaudible) -- small town, what children need more than anything else are adults who care about them, who love them, who teach them, who discipline them and who are willing to stand up and fight for them against a world that is often cruel and unfair.

And most of us who are in this room were blessed with some adult -- a father and a mother, or a father or a mother, a grandparent, an aunt or an uncle, a teacher or a priest or a coach, a neighbor -- somebody who at some point made us believe that we were valued human beings in God's eyes and the world's. And we need again to remember the children I saw at that school this morning, who were lit up and happy because -- not that there were TV cameras in the room, but they were -- (inaudible) -- the volunteers who had come to see them. They, the persons who helped with multiplication tables, to take ice skating. And like all of those who are honored tonight, we have to begin to take steps we know need to be taken to reach out to all of our children.

You know, Lewis Hine captured vividly for an earlier generation the faces of hope and hopefulness as well as hopelessness and despair. I sometimes think that those dark black and white photographs had an intensity that we have lost in this information age in which we are barraged by images, or the faces not just of children in America, but around the world, lose their individuality. And where the feelings that should be provoked in the faces of a child who is in despair, are somehow lessened. So we have to fight against our own cynicism and skepticism. We have to fight against our own feelings of hopelessness in the face of such big problems.

I know the President is convinced, I know that I'm convinced, I know the people who were given these awards this evening are convinced, that each of us, every day, can make a difference in the life of some child or young person if we are willing to take the risk to reach out and try to do that.

So I'm grateful for being honored, but I'm even more grateful for being reminded once again that the work of the National Child Labor Committee goes on, and that the lives of children will be touched and changed because of it. And because there are millions of people represented by our award winners who understand what is at stake in this country if we are to really live up to the promise we hold out for ourselves and our own children by making sure every child has a chance and no child is left behind in this country of ours. Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

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