

2/8/95
KIWANIS LUNCHEON

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

February 8, 1995

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT KIWANIS LUNCHEON

MRS. CLINTON: Please be seated and let me repeat my welcome to all of you. There are many of you whom I have known and worked with for a very long time. Others whom I have heard of and admired and others who are here and I am having the opportunity to meet for the first time. This is a great gathering of people who are concerned about children and I'm very grateful that all of you can be with us today. It is my pleasure now to introduce a gentleman who has been relentless in his efforts on the work that the Kiwanis has done in bringing together the Advisory Council and in promoting a number of initiatives. I've had the pleasure of meeting him briefly before on behalf of the work done for immunization and I would like to ask you to join me in welcoming now John Cuny.

MR. CUNY: Good morning. It is well welcome to this honorable house and thank you so much for having us today. I am John Cuny with Anthem Health and as well a proud Kiwanian. As you all know we are gathered here today to recognize and pay tribute really to many of you for the work that has been done on the part of Kiwanians International - our Young Children Priority One. As many of you know, in 1990 the Kiwanis International Forum to Continuing Service Program called Young Children Priority One -- it was designed to address the needs of children from prenatal through age five. Young Children Priority One was a landmark program for our organization. It was the first time in history that the Kiwanis International service theme was established for all clubs. And it was the first time as well that all the service hours were dedicated to the needs of our children. I think that is a very important point to make here today.

This idea was conceived by a gentleman by the name of Dr. Will Blechman who served as Kiwanian president from 1990 to 1991. And due to his initiative has since been carried out by three subsequent presidents of Kiwanians. Now if we could, I would even like to recognize Dr. Blechman for his work.

As a member of the Health Care community and a fellow Kiwanian my company Anthem Health became involved about three years ago. And folks, as we looked around at the opportunities for us, there could be nothing better than to serve the needs of our children and all of our nations' children. We've developed educational outreach materials, supported events such as this, and really acted I hope to be a proponent of the educational

needs of our families across the country. It's a great honor for us at Anthem Health, several of my associates, to be here today as guests of our First Lady and pay really tribute to all of you for the work you do for our children. And at this time I would like to introduce to you the Kiwanis International President Ian Perdriau from Melbourne, Australia. Ian will be the fifth Kiwanian president to carry the torch for young children. He and more than three hundred thousand Kiwanians across the country and the world are addressing the needs of children on a daily basis. So if would please join me in welcoming Ian Perdriau.

Mr. Perdriau: Thank you John. Mrs. Clinton, ladies, and gentleman I'd like to first of all thank you for the warm welcome. Coming from Australia as I said earlier this morning, from an Australian summer to a Washington winter, is something of a culture shock. But I thank you for the warmth of the White House Mrs. Clinton, and I thank you again for your warm welcome. Mrs. Clinton did remark that I don't sound as though I come from Arkansas but on behalf of 8,600 clubs and 320,000 Kiwanians all around the world I want to thank each of you and your organizations for serving on our Young Children Priority One council.

We Kiwanians aren't experts in child care. What we are experts in is involving businesses and professional people in voluntary community service. So we need your guidance and advice to achieve the goals of our continuing service program Young Children Priority One. Young children have more needs and more potential than any other age group. Serving these needs and helping young children fulfill that potential has become the most exciting and rewarding service program that Kiwanis Clubs have ever undertaken. Will, you have been recognized but I would like once again to recognize Dr. Blechman. It's his vision that really has us here today. It's his vision that has created another program, an extension of our Young Children Priority One Program, where Kiwanias for the first time are becoming involved in a worldwide service program to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders in the world. We have been backed on a program in which we hope to raise \$75,000,000 worldwide. And Will I complement you again for that. And I would be remiss if I also didn't complement our staff person Chris Rice for the effort that he has had for putting this Priority One council together.

Last year we in Kiwanis raised \$17,000,000 and contributed more than 1.6 million volunteer hours for Priority One projects. But we couldn't have achieved that level of success without your help. Each of your organizations has important programs and objectives of its own. So it's extremely generous of you to share some of your leadership and staff time to assist Kiwanians in our program. We are grateful for your participation on our advisory council and for the local partnerships with our clubs in countless communities. Kiwanis International plans to continue its focus on Young Children Priority One for the foreseeable future. My successor Eddie Sigurdsson, from Iceland, is here

today and he is as committed as I am to our Young Children focus. We look forward to continuing association between Kiwanis and each of your organizations. I know I speak for everyone when I say thank you to Mrs. Clinton for your hospitality on this occasion. Your interest in young children is recognized globally. Do let us use this wonderful occasion to rededicate ourselves to our respective programs and continued mutual assistance in this great cause. Thank You.

MR. CUNY: Now I have the great pleasure of introducing our First Lady. As you all know and as Ian articulated she has served us well as a strong and national voice for our nation's children. As many of you know she has worked during her days in Little Rock both to create programs that would guarantee affordable accessible programs to treat young children for both drug and alcohol abuse programs. She has served as the chair of the Childrens Defense Fund. And in her role as an attorney has authored noteworthy papers on the legal rights of children. On Capitol Hill as we all know she has bravely spoken out on behalf of health care for our children. She herself has once said, and I quote, "Nothing is more important than focusing on the needs of the future generation and taking care of the needs of our children. Children cannot be raised by lecturing and wish lists about how they should behave. They have to be raised by example." These are words that all of us I think here today can easily subscribe to. So if you would, please join me in welcoming our First Lady.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you very much John and Ian. I did not think you sounded like you were from Arkansas, I thought you sounded like you were from Louisiana. But we are delighted that you both sound like you are from, and are from Australia and are giving such important leadership to this Priority One commitment of the Kiwanis around the world. I wanted to say just a few words, I could not pass up the opportunity to just talk for a few minutes about what our challenges are, both those that are in the private sector the philanthropic world, the not for profit delivery world as well as the world of government as we face the challenges posed by rapidly changing conditions and the impact those conditions have on children worldwide.

I think that it is fair to say that what you have taken on, what Dr. Blechman's vision was in 1990, is the most important priority task that could be taken on by any group of people. I don't think that there is any other challenge that we face as a world and certainly here in our country than making sure that our children are given the opportunities they require to develop into the kind of people and citizens that we will all need. Every other issue that covers our front pages from one end of our globe to the other is really a means to an end. The end is that we will have the quality of life for ourselves and our families that will permit us to enjoy to the best of our abilities all that is offered during our lives. And so anything else that is debated,

any other issue that grabs the headline is secondary to the priority that you have accepted and are working toward achieving. And I'm particularly pleased that this partnership that the Kiwanas Clubs has really instituted exemplifies what I hope will be partnerships that will be sprouting up all over the world. Because making young children the Priority One campaign as you have really exemplifies the way the private sector and the public sector, individuals and organizations can all work together. Much of the work that we have to do for children is work that is in our families and in our communities. But as I have tried to say over and over again children are not merely the products of their families and their immediate surroundings, they also are affected by the values and actions of their larger societies. So it is a false debate as too many people unfortunately engage in to say that only families are responsible or only governments are responsible when in fact the truth is we are all responsible and we all could do a better job in caring for the children who are entrusted to us.

The real needs of children seem to get a lot less attention than the rhetorical campaigns that are waged around the issue of children. And in the coming months, especially in our country, we cannot lose sight in all of the debates that will occur, of the realities that will affect our children day in and day out. Certainly our poor children are more at risk than others. We see that. We know that. We look at the results of inadequate parenting, inadequate housing, violence that afflicts too many of our children -- we see what happens when children do not have access to health care, when their education systems are not responsive to the needs they bring through the schoolhouse doors. But we also must recognize that children who are not poor also have problems in our society today. We were recently reminded of that with the publication of the child care study that just came out. We know that children of every income level, of every racial and ethnic group have problems that must be addressed both by the adults in their lives and by the rest of us. Because ultimately we are all responsible for the lives of our children.

It is rather fitting I think that we would have represented here the president of the International Kiwanas from a country that many of us admire and think highly of - Australia. And then the incoming president of another country - Finland. Both of those countries are attempting to deal with many of the problems that are being faced by every society around the world.

But I think it is especially imperative that rich countries like the three of these, Finland, Australia, and America, recognize that they have even greater responsibilities that must be addressed. I think that if we look back over the last decades we can see how efforts to resolve childrens problems have achieved some steps of progress, often then taken steps backwards only to regroup and move forward again. I think especially in our country now we have to recognize that the idea that children are primarily the responsibilities of their own families, and

then after that private charities, and then after that perhaps localities, and perhaps after that states, and then finally after that the federal government -- does a grave disservice to the needs of children and also refuses to recognize that in a time where mobility is paramount, where people are not in anyway bound to the neighborhoods from which they grew, many of the responsibilities that we face are national and cannot be stepped aside from and shunted to any other forum or jurisdiction.

We know that in the 1980's efforts to try to change the way that children were cared for meant that children were thrown off welfare rolls. That programs for children were put into what are called block grants in our country with the net effect that a number of children who were needy went without services and help. And we saw in our country an increase in the number of children living in poverty. It is no great recognition to say that the largest percentage of children living in poverty who are advanced developed countries are America and Australia. I think that has something to do with the fact that we are very much somewhat individualistic cultures. We very much prize our opportunities to make it on our own. I have yet to meet a six month old or a five year old who can make it on his or her own. And poverty is still the largest determinant of childhood misery and poor development. So we have tried some things in our country in the past that are being revisited now which we know will not help children but instead will further drive more children into poverty with the effects of more children at risk with the impacts on society that we unfortunately know so well.

But there are many, and many of you in this room are not willing to throw your hands up, are not willing to give up but in fact every day are doing all you can to live up to the Kiwanis motto of making children priority one. Think of what would have happened in the past and what will happen now and in the future if for example the Junior Leagues or the Children Defense Fund or the Child Welfare League and others had not worked to stop the repeal of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act. Think of where we would be now if the Council for Exceptional Children and other disability advocacy groups had not worked to block repeal of PL94142, an important national law that gave opportunities to children with disabilities. With help from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the March of Dimes, and various hunger groups, key members of Congress were able to end an effort in the past to cut WIC and food stamps, an effort we will have to engage in again. And perhaps very importantly now and in the future the willingness of the groups in this room to wage the battles that were necessary in 1993 and 1994 to fully fund WIC and expand Head Start and put children back in their rightful position at the head of our national agenda have been very important.

Think for a minute about the extraordinary benefits to children and to society of your immunization campaign. As you know the president was delighted to help with a public service

campaign to get out the word about what you were doing. And this administration has launched a comprehensive immunization program with the goal of immunizing 90 percent of our two-year-olds by the year 2000. Already we have seen tremendous progress. Just from 1992 to 1993 the rate increased from 12 percent - by 12 percent from 55 percent to 67 percent. That is not where we need to be but we are at least trending in the right direction thanks to many of you in this room.

The president was able to fulfill his promise to increase Headstart funding by \$760,000,000 over two years. We know that Headstart is an effective program for children. We will have to work hard to prevent it from being cut back and going in the wrong direction.

By signing Goals 2000 the president demonstrated his commitment and one shared by many of you to expanding educational opportunities and raising standards. Because we want children to aspire to do better regardless of their background or environment. And we need to ensure that schools have the tools to work with children.

I think it has been frustrating and will continue to be for those of you who have been on the front lines of working on behalf of children. To see the extent in this recent debate to which rhetoric obscures reality. If we are serious about welfare reform, for example, we ought to be serious about child care as well. We know that will be difficult to reform the welfare system to do what it needs to do to move individuals from dependency to independence. But the pressure to make the program work better will be increased exponentially if child care is not available for the children of these women who are the primary recipients of our welfare benefits. The president has stated and I think all of us would agree that I think that children should be the guiding principle in every discussion of health care reform whether it be Republicans or Democrats doing the talking. There are ways we can help strengthen families and some of those we've tried to do in the past two years. We have been able through the changes in the tax code to lift 15 million families out of poverty by cutting their taxes -- something the president believed in very strongly. We have seen a creation of new jobs, we've seen very important economic expansion, a recovery which seems to be talking hold, and many other achievements that are aimed at strengthening the family unit first and foremost. Because we believe that the family is the most important part of society and the best way to tend to the needs of children and we ought to do everything we can to strengthen families and keep them intact before giving up on them. And that is one of the goals of this administration.

We know that much of lies ahead of us will require all of us to work hard together in order to do what needs to be done. That doesn't mean that things can't be changed and made better. I am a big believer in accountability, and evaluations, in cutting

things where they don't work, and basically saying that we're not going to continue down a road that does not produce results. But I believe we ought to do it by certain guiding principles. Not just for quick, short term political benefit. And as the President said in the State of the Union address there are certain fundamental national needs that should be addressed in every state - north, south, east, and west. Immunization against childhood diseases, school lunches, and other nutritional programs, Headstart, medical care for pregnant women and infants -- all of these are in the national interest. And it is that idea that really has sparked the work that many of you have been engaged in and that your organizations have stood for over many, many years. Doing right by children has been long struggle. Look how long the Junior Leagues and the Child Welfare League have been at this. Look at how many decades the March of Dimes has been involved. Look at all of your organizations and thank all of you for the work you've done together and the new recruits to this important effort. So I am grateful for the Kiwanis commitment and for each of you taking part in this important challenge. Because that is the way that I see it. The struggle is basically the same. We should want for every child what we want for the children we love. And what we want for those children often means we have to be advocates. We have to be willing to stick our necks out for our own children and we have to do so for all children.

I look forward to working with you. I am grateful to you and I hope that as the dust settles, much of the overblown rhetoric and the heated exchanges will settle down and give way to a much more reasonable conversation about how if we say children are our priority in our country, we actually deliver on that promise. Thank you very much.

MR. CUNY: In conclusion before we get our lunch, I want to thank each of you and your organizations and all of the tireless workers who have expended the energy and time as Mrs. Clinton has noted. We must care for these children whose needs are many for our future. Mrs. Clinton we thank you particularly for your kindness in hosting us today and for all that you and the President both have done and continue to do for our children. So enjoy your lunch, and to all of you God bless you for what you do and particularly God bless our nations children.