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CHILD CARE ACTION
CAMPAIGN BENEFIT

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
TO THE CHILD CARE ACTION CAMPAIGN BENEFIT
NEW YORK CITY

MRS. CLINTON: -- so much. This is like old home week. I see so many of you in this audience whom I've had a chance to work with not only on the Child Care Action Campaign but in any other efforts attempting to promote the well-being of children and families. And I am very glad to have the opportunity to be here with you.

I am also pleased to be here with some friends who are on the platform with me. I want to thank Tom and Meredith not only for their kind words but for their example as well. Many, many, many years ago -- they may not even remember -- I was invited to their home through a friend of a friend, and had a lovely evening there, and came away impressed by their personal commitment to their own family and the way that they evidenced that in their lives.

And I am also delighted to be with John Mack Carter who has, through the years, brought a lot of good information about families and children through Good Housekeeping. I have said on many occasions that I am a loyal and devoted reader of women's magazines. Much of what I know about how to conduct my life comes from women's magazines.

And I am also pleased to be here with Dick. I used to read news weeklies. I don't read those anymore. I will again, Dick, I promise. But I am grateful for his leadership both at Time but also at the Child Care Action Campaign, because it was rather unique that he would take on the responsibility of chairing what still to too many people is viewed as a women's organization devoted to a women's issue. Dick has demonstrated very clearly that he believes that the future of our children is an issue that should affect all of us, because it does whether we choose to acknowledge that or not.

I hope that each of you who is here this evening will not only have a good time and, I hope, spend some money on behalf of this campaign by going back to the silent.

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auction and having the fun I always did by wandering around, hovering near the one thing I really wanted, sighing with despair every time I had to go back and add my name, and often losing out to someone else hovering nearby, -but often making friendships that otherwise I would not have begun to start, because this organization needs your continued financial support to make the case that it makes so well.

My time on its board under the leadership of Ellie Guggenheimer has been one of the really great experiences of my private not-for-profit life, because Ellie gets more things done in an hour than many of us get done in a year. And I'm very grateful for her leadership.

I want to say just a few things, though, about the state of children and where we are in our society right now, because Tom and Meredith and Dick referred to the challenges that we are facing. It's a really kind of contradictory time. On the one hand we are hearing more than ever before the voices of those who denigrate and demean any kind of social action or governmental program aimed at helping people, who often point erroneously to their belief that such programs cannot be a help and often make things worse.

And on the other side we still hear the voices of those who refuse to take individual responsibility as adults, as mothers, as fathers, who think of ways to blame society, some abstract creation, for the problems of our children. As with most arguments like that, both are dreadfully wrong and misguided.

One of the most cogent explanations about what our society needs to be thinking when it comes to children occurred a few years ago in the Catholic Bishops' Report on the Family when, after going through many of the arguments that are made about how the individual has to be responsible and the government should not help, and on the other hand how the government has to be responsible and individuals often are victimized and therefore cannot accept responsibility. The report says, wait a minute, children are the result of both the actions and beliefs of their parents and families and of their society.

We are absolutely, all of us, whether or not we are parents, responsible for the conditions of our children. Because our failure to recognize and to engage in what is a futile and in many respects very destructive argument about what we should or should not do as individuals or through our governmental institutions not only begs the point but allows

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too many children for too long to be forgotten, and, once again, we don't accept the responsibility that those forgotten children pose us.

It is way overdue for those of us who care about children to cut through the rhetoric and to say as clearly as we can, yes, parents have to be responsible, and they must be more responsible than too many have been for too long. Yes, parents must do everything they can to sustain a family environment that is good and nurturing for children. And, yes, parents are the primary shapers of their children's future.

But also we must say, yes, society through its governmental institutions also has responsibilities. It is very difficult to point the finger of blame at parents who are afraid to let their children walk to school not because of their actions but because of the environments in which they live.

It is difficult to point the finger of blame at parents who in good faith send their children to schools where the roofs are falling down, where the facilities and the resources are less than they were when I was in school, where the textbooks are as old as they were when I was in school, and expect those children to be well educated.

We have to accept responsibility for children. And that also requires us to expect responsibility from children, to begin to expect them to demonstrate that they are capable of living up to high expectations and holding them accountable for their behavior. There are many ways we can do this as we begin to try to chart a third way to demonstrate how we care about children and what we are willing to demonstrate by committing ourselves to the future of children.

We have blueprints. We have information available. The Child Care Action Campaign, the Carnegie Foundation, the Children's Defense Fund, there are so many groups that have presented us year after year statistical studies that go un rebutted with recommendations for action. It is we who have failed to act.

So I would add to Dick's three C's that not only must we have the confidence and work to develop a consensus and bring to our action agenda conviction, but we also have

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to have courage to act, act in the face of often times daunting odds that would demonstrate to us that action may seem futile at first glance, but everything we do to save the future for one child moves us forward to trying to make a better future for all of our children.

Your being here tonight is a very strong statement that you care about the future of America's children. I hope that statement doesn't end with your being here, because I think it is the single biggest challenge to America right now. If we cannot address the needs of our children, then we cannot as a nation expect to remain strong and productive and growing and hopeful into the 21st century.

I recently had breakfast with a conservative politician from Europe, someone who here, I suppose, would be a moderate to conservative Republican, who sat down and said to me right off the bat, "I have two questions for you, if you can explain them to me. Why won't America provide health care for all of its citizens? And why won't you develop an agenda to take care of your children? You lose too many children to violence, to drugs, to alienation, to despair, to dropping out, to early pregnancies."

He said, "This makes no sense to us, and it does not matter," he said, "in Europe whether you are a conservative or a liberal. What matters is we feel an obligation to the future of our nation, and that means we have an obligation to the future of our children."

Those were difficult questions to answer. Every one of us should think about how we would answer that, and then we should think about what we will do so that the question does not have to be asked in the future.

And there are people who are attempting in their own ways to make a difference. And I am very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce two of my friends who are the recipients of the Child Care Action Campaign's Fabulous Family Award, two people who in their professional lives, their private lives, their public lives have tried to advance a positive agenda for hopefulness and change that would make a difference in people's lives, and their commitment to the kind of future that I think we want to see for our country is being recognized tonight.

And it gives me great pleasure to welcome and make

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this award on behalf of the Child Care Action Campaign, Beth and Ron Dozoretz.

(End of speech.)

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