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PEDIATRIC AIDS
FOUNDATION

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT PEDIATRIC AIDS FOUNDATION
NEW YORK CITY

MRS. CLINTON: -- very much for having this event. I feel personally very grateful to be here and be a part of it. I am pleased that our daughter, Chelsea, could come as well, because we believe that there are many heroes -- heroes all over New York, all over America -- who need the support and the love and the resources that this event is providing.

I am delighted to be here with the co-chairs because of all the work that they have put into this. And I am also delighted to be here with Mrs. Guiliani, and I am very grateful that she would join me, and I want to thank you for that, Donna.

You know, there is hardly anything that can be said that can ever adequately describe what AIDS does to the men, women, and children that it afflicts. There isn't any way for those of us who are hoping to be helpful in the ways we are best able to express clearly how we feel when we watch the struggle of those who are fighting. But I hope we all realize that they are fighting not only for themselves but they are fighting, in a way, for everyone, because AIDS is not just a disease of individuals. It affects families, work places; it affects the entire society.

And the children affected by AIDS are growing in number. In the United States today HIV infects 1,300 to 2,000 newborns each year and is now one of the top 10 leading causes of death of young children. Worldwide, the numbers are even more staggering. In 1990 alone, one million children acquired HIV from their infected mothers before or during birth. The World Health Organization predicts that by the year 2000 there will be 10 million children infected with HIV worldwide.

We know that for many of those children life will be all too short and will be filled with pain and anguish. Through June of this year over 5,700 AIDS cases have been reported in the U.S. among children less than 13 years of

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age, and of these more than 3,000 children have already died. The number of children with AIDS is increasing. And we see no end in sight without the kind of concerted effort on research, prevention, and treatment that you are helping to support today.

In addition to the children who are infected with HIV, many more are affected by HIV and AIDS. Children are being orphaned; children are being left alone to raise themselves, so that now we can anticipate that across the world by the end of the 1990s 10 to 15 million children will be orphaned by the death of one of their parents through AIDS.

The event today wants to go and build something positive on those terrible and sad statistics. People are working very hard on research. Funding for pediatric AIDS research at the National Institutes for Health has increased by over 25 percent in the last 20 months. We know that we are making breakthroughs. A recent NIH study that many of you may know about has shown that when the drug AZT is administered to HIV infected pregnant women, the rate of transmission to their babies drops significantly.

With respect to prevention and treatment, we are also making progress. We have achieved a 30-percent increase in funding for Title 4 of the Ryan White Care Act because this Administration believes we should not turn our backs on people or children with HIV or AIDS but instead must provide the services they need to be taken care of in dignity to the fullest extent possible.

We also know that we have to continue to do even more. And one of the voices of conscience that has constantly asked what more can be done and has worked positively to make it even more likely that we will achieve some of our goals with respect to research, prevention, and treatment is Elizabeth Glaser.

Nobody has fought this disease with more dignity or courage. Nobody has given more hope to more people. Nobody has personally withstood the tragedies and the struggles to the extent she has yet never giving up on either herself, her family, or the rest of us who need her voice.

I think about all of the people who have so much to be grateful for, so many blessings they have been given, who at the slightest disappointment, the slightest frustration or irritation basically give up, who do not see the glass as

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half full but instead see it as half empty, who refuse to work on behalf of others because they have disappointments in their own lives that color their view of the world.

Well, Elizabeth is a hero not only to those with HIV and AIDS. Elizabeth is a hero to anyone who understands that you always have to bring hope, you always have to fight against despair, you always can find more meaning in your own life by helping others. And when Elizabeth helped found the Pediatric AIDS Foundation in 1988 there was no pediatric AIDS research agenda. It was Elizabeth and her friends and co-founders who made pediatric AIDS an issue on the national research agenda.

Elizabeth has gone beyond categories. She doesn't care whether you're a conservative or a liberal, a Republican or a Democrat, because she knows that those labels are meaningless in the face of an epidemic like AIDS, that what is most important for this country today is to recognize first and foremost we are human beings and we need to support one another in our struggles, and particularly our struggle against AIDS.

I have the great honor today on behalf of the President to make a presentation to Elizabeth, who never wants you to do anything for her, who never wants recognition for herself, but wants continually to keep the spotlight on the children who are affected with AIDS. But, Elizabeth, you have been an inspiration to so many of us. You have been a real hero. And I think all of us want to take a minute to thank you.

And so the President of the United States of America awards this Certificate of Commendation to Elizabeth Glaser. And it reads as follows:

"Five years ago, Elizabeth Glaser turned her grief over the loss of her daughter and the anxiety over her son's and her own health into activism and hope for the future. She challenged us to confront the disease that went unmentioned for too long in our society, teaching us that no one is immune from AIDS. With extraordinary courage and an intimate knowledge of this deadly epidemic, she urged our nation to move beyond prejudice, bolster efforts to find a cure for AIDS and offer compassion to those who live with its effects.

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"Today Elizabeth continues her valiant work on behalf of the world's children, giving us reason to believe that this plague will one day be a nightmare of the past. Guided by the loving support of her family, the kindness of her friends, and the memory of her beautiful daughter, Ariel, Elizabeth has set an example of caring leadership to which we can all aspire. The White House, Washington, D.C., September 25, 1994, William J. Clinton."

And on behalf of the President and, really, Elizabeth, on behalf of a now awakened, more compassionate, and hopefully more loving nation, all of us, thank you.

(End of speech.)

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