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For Release

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS TO THE NATIONAL PTA 100TH ANNUAL CONVENTION
WASHINGTON, D.C.
JUNE 22, 1996**

Thank you. Thank you so very much. Don't you feel like you were at the Olympics when that music started? You know I'm so excited about the Olympics coming, we had the torch arrival and departure at the White House yesterday, and the night before. And when the music started, I thought of all those times as a little girl when I would sit in front of our television set and watch the Olympics. My brothers and I would go out and race each other around, and my mother one time went to the dime store, you see how old I am, the dime store, and bought ribbons for us.

It is such a pleasure for me to be with people who care so much about the values that make our country what it is, and who know how important it is to support our children. I want to thank Joan for that introduction, but more than that, for the leadership she has given on behalf on the PTA. She has been a strong, strong voice. And I know she is going to be succeeded by a strong, strong successor. So the leadership of the PTA is in good hands.

And how fortunate we are to be celebrating the 100th anniversary of this important group. I wasn't able to see the slides but I heard some of the laughter and I know that Joan did a quick change from the clothes she was wearing to the clothes she is wearing now. We are celebrating a centennial commitment to the children of this country. And there are lots of parallels between the times when the PTA got started and our times today. I was thinking as I stood backstage that a hundred years ago, we were changing from a society that was primarily agricultural and rural to one that was industrial, where people were leaving the farms and crossing the oceans to come to our cities. Where we faced new challenges about how to educate young people of different backgrounds to be prepared for a new century.

And here we are again, as we move from the industrial age, from the cold war, from the hot wars of this century, to a time when the global economy and technology have changed our world so much, and once again you are ready. You are ready to help us meet our challenges and protect our values. And for that as a mother and citizen, I say thank you -- thank you to the PTA and all of you who are among its leaders.

And during your conference here, I hope you will continue to celebrate your achievements. Since the turn of the century, the national PTA has been at the forefront of our country's efforts to create a better world for all children. Child labor laws, compulsory public education, the national health service, special education, juvenile justice issues, all that we have addressed as a nation in the past hundred years -- in these and many issues, we have seen the strong role that the PTA has played, both at the national level and in countless communities across our country.

And I know that as we prepare for a new century, and for a new millennium, all of us can count on your being there again. On behalf of the President, I want to thank you for helping to put the well-being of our children first in the recent budget negotiations. The PTA was one of the first organizations that realized that threats to programs like school lunches were threats to the well-being of all our children. Your rallies on the Hill and your participation in an active education coalition were key to our efforts to honor America's historic commitment to education, and to providing all children in this country with the knowledge and skills they will need to fulfill their own god-given potential.

And I am so pleased that your priorities and initiatives for the next years will also address these important issues -- protecting children from violence, AIDS education, reaching out to preschool parents, working with schools of education at colleges and universities to make it possible for more parents to be encouraged to participate in their children's education. Parental involvement is the key to how well our children will do.

Some of you know that I do think it takes a village to raise a child, but it takes strong parents who are committed to being their children's first teachers, to make sure those children get a good start in life, and to make sure the village lives up to our responsibilities as well. But despite all of the work you have done and the stands you have taken, we cannot let down our guard. We must stand very firmly on the side of public education and we need an even louder chorus of parental voices in the upcoming fights over the budgets to come. Because, even as teachers and schools prepare to welcome record numbers of students, some fifty-two million this September, and we know that our classrooms will be filled with more children than there were even in the baby-boom generation. And these children will need the time and attention of more teachers. They will need text books, they will need school buildings that are not falling down around their ears.

And yet there are some in congress who are proposing to freeze the education budget in the face of this new generation of students who need the same support that I could expect when I was

going to school. This is a time to invest in education, not a time to retreat from our historic investment.

You know that as our global economy becomes even more competitive and demanding, that all of us -- children and adults -- must sharpen and raise our skills -- we cannot walk away from the higher national educational standards set by Goals 2000. The national PTA helped turn Goals 2000 into law. And it is working well in 46 states. I ask you to help us defend these standards from those who would wish to reverse this progress.

I also want to congratulate American public education; too many people for too long have only accented the negative, and I for one am tired of that. America is filled with good news and positive stories about how people are solving problems. And just recently we saw a report that American students are second to only students in Finland when it comes to reading ability. Let's make sure Americans know that, because we've sure gotten all the bad news about educational achievement in the past.

So we know we can make progress and our students can live up to high expectations, but we have to keep working. And I urge the National PTA to become an active partner in Secretary Riley's "Read Write Now" effort. He is attempting to link one million disadvantaged kids with three hundred thousand reading mentors this summer. It is the one-on-one personal connection that nobody, nobody can argue against. It is what lights the eyes of a youngster who all of a sudden recognizes a word, and it is what warms the heart of the adult who takes the time to work with that child. Just think of what they could do to turn around the lives and school success of young people, if three hundred thousand of us mentor a young boy or girl this summer.

We also know that computer skills are important and the President is attempting to make sure that every school is hooked up in America to the Internet. We do need to make sure that there are technology literacy funds available, but even more so we have to make sure that our teachers are trained to use those computers in the classrooms.

So there is much, as you gather here in Washington, you have every reason to be proud of. I was thinking to myself how in the last few years the National PTA is again at the forefront of our debates about education, and about our children. And we know that parents today need to help. Every one of us has some area where we rely on someone else. Whether it's the teachers or schools, the doctors and nurses or hospitals, the police on our streets, the people we will never meet, who make sure our air and water are clean and that our food is fit to eat -- we are all interconnected. But I want to spend a few minutes today talking about specially the challenges we parents face in today's world. Particularly because we are living in a media dominated age.

It is a topic I feel very strongly about, and I want to expand on the thoughts I shared with some of you at the National PTA Legislative Conference earlier this year.

Specifically, I want to talk about television. Like it or not, and some days I do and some days I don't, TV is a fact of life. Hundreds of channels with everything from up-to-the-date-news to 24-hour-a-day weather channels to talk shows, to violent movies, to what everyone finds as we use our remote control devices. And for many of our children, those television images are disturbing, they are what some call "junk food for the eyes." And we have in every home in America children who are being influenced by the images and ideas that come into those homes through our television sets.

Now for those of us who are parents, trying to raise healthy, well-adjusted, compassionate children, it is easy sometimes to feel helpless against such a barrage of images and negative influences. But, in no small part due to the National PTA's advocacy and leadership on this issue, we are finally on the road to changing this situation. Let me thank you for working with the National Cable Television Association in the Family and Community Critical Viewing Project, which is helping parents to control the effects of television violence and commercialism on their children.

The President and the Vice President have long supported efforts to give parents the tools to make television a positive influence in their children's lives. And I believe that these past few months have marked a hopeful turning point for families and their relationships to those TV sets in their homes.

Earlier this year, the President successfully advocated for what is called a v-chip in TV sets. It is a device that parents can use to block out programming that they consider objectionable. It is totally within the authority of the parents. In February, at a White House meeting, The President helped persuade the nation's television broadcasters and producers to establish a voluntary ratings system that will inform parents about the content of shows they plan to air. That means that when the v-chip is operational, in just a few years, and the ratings system is going, parents will be able to make judgments by looking at this rating system and then programming the TV set to decide whether or not a program will be permitted to be viewed in their homes.

But parents don't just want to tune out bad shows, they also want to tune in good ones for their children. American families need more and better programming for children. This is especially true for elementary school-age children. A study released by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center showed that while 75 percent of programming aimed

at pre-schoolers could be called "high-quality," just 26 percent of programs targeted toward children ages six to eleven could be called good. Nearly half of the programming was rated "low quality."

Now the President, with your help, has been working hard to establish a minimum requirement for television broadcasters: all that we are taking is for three hours a week of educational, child-friendly programming. I don't think that is too much to ask. And the good news is that it's on the verge of happening. A majority of the FCC Commissioners will soon, I believe, take positive action on this issue.

The three-hour requirement is simple, and it is fair. As Vice President Gore noted a few days ago, "It leaves 98 percent of broadcasting time for other programs."

Next month, the President, the Vice-President, Tipper Gore, and I will meet with media executives and children's programmers to discuss ways to strengthen children's television.

We simply must demand more of the people who are producing - and profiting -- from the shows that young people watch. From my point of view, the very popular "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" show, for example, has no place on any lineup described as "children's programming."

Experts have said that the show is "devoid of any enriching value." "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" show for the example has no place in any line-up described as children's programming. Experts have said that show is devoid of any enriching value. "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" is one of the most violent television programs, on television today. Hundreds of acts of violence, from kicking to missile launches, are depicted in each episode. The shows teach children that heroes always resolve any conflict through violence. They convey to children the sinister message that the more powerful your weapon, the more powerful you are. And even though they are zapped, kicked and fired upon countless times, the Power Rangers never feel any pain or suffer any injury.

As a result of the show's popularity, young children on playgrounds across America are imitating these so-called "superheroes," they kick, they punch, they fight each other, as well as the imaginary archvillains Rita Repulsa and Lord Zedd.

Now you and I know that kind of playground activity has been a hallmark of playgrounds for generations. Long before television, and long before specific shows like the "Power Rangers". But the repetition, the intensity of this message that children see over and over again on television is different.

As Dr. Robert Phillips of the American Psychiatric Association explained, "Children are like little VCRs, they see something once and then they repeat it over and over again."

I know this not just from experts and news accounts, but from children themselves. At a roundtable discussion about the V-chip and TV violence with children and their parents, some of whom were PTA members, I met a 10-year old boy who told me that his playmates "just pretend they are Mighty Morphin Power Rangers or the X-Men and then they'll just go around pretending they're killing each other or such things and think nothing of it."

Producers and broadcasters of shows like the "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" say that they are simply giving children what they want to watch. In truth, they are appealing to the worst in our kids at the very times they are most likely to be watching TV. And, broadcasters are hiding the best children's programming in the least-watched "throw-away" hours.

We must stop showing violent, harmful programs to our kids during prime viewing hours. It is time for our media executives to show some greater responsibility for the children of America.

And as adults and as parents it is time for us to stand up and be counted. Decency and civility are values that are critical to the functioning of our society. Otherwise, in the absence of efforts to reach out to one other to teach each other good and positive lessons about how we work together and about how children grow up together, we will find ourselves and our children so inured to violence and sensationalism that we will not be able to help themselves.

We have enough evidence now from psychological and educational studies which shows that children, particularly from less stable homes, without the kind of structure that many of us have tried to impose, despite the media in our own houses, these children are particularly vulnerable to such messages. And they take those messages to heart. Like those little VCR's and they play back what they have learned.

As parents we cannot wait to act. We are on the front lines. We have to take responsibility, we have to start in our own homes by making clear what is and what is not acceptable television watching. We have to be willing to work with our schools as you have done to help families learn how to watch television critically, and to raise questions so that children know the difference between fantasy and reality. We have to give children something else to do besides watch television hour after hour.

In many neighborhoods we should be working to keep schools open from three to six so that children are not on their own and unsupervised. We should be enlisting ourselves once again in programs, not only to mentor young people but to play with them, more recreational activities. We should take a stand against the

policies making it more difficult for young people to find extracurricular opportunities.

I was recently in Denver and I young man told me that he had been a wrestler for his first two years in high school, but next year because of budget cutbacks his family was being asked to pay \$150 for him to participate in that extracurricular activity. Many of us saw the Richard Dreyfuss movie, "Mr. Holland's Opus" and we could chart the decline in the drama, music, and art that was available that I took for granted in the 1950's and 1960's in my schools, where children now are not being given those opportunities. Television is being used to fill a void that parents, teachers, schools and communities used to fill with positive, productive activities for young people supervised by adults.

So while we take a stand against what we see on television, we should take a stand as you have done on behalf of providing more opportunities for children to say yes to, to give them something that is positive for them to learn from and be part of. There is wonderful opportunity in our country now, because I feel it as I travel around from place to place. Americans are tired of just wringing our hands at our problems -- we want to roll up our sleeves and get about the business of solving them.

And every where I go I find people who are doing just that. And it doesn't matter if I'm in an inner city school in Philadelphia, or in a school outside of Duluth, or in Corpus Christie, or in the San Frenado valley of California, everywhere I go it is so heartening to me, because every parent I talk with, every teacher, every young person is saying the same thing -- they are saying to me, as a young boy in Philadelphia, in a very tough neighborhood, in an inner city school that was attempting to be a haven against gangs, and graphti, and violence, he looked at me and he said, "You know Mrs. Clinton, most of us are good kids, but the only kids who get the attention are the bad kids, you know they are the only kids who get on television, they are the only kids who people really worry about sometimes, and most of us are really doing the best we can."

And I believe that, I know, I've looked into the faces of thousands and thousands of preschooler, and elementary kids, and middle schoolers, and high school students, and they are good kids. And even the ones who are teetering on the brink of gang pressures and family disruptions, and all of the problems children should not have to contend with, but do in today's world, they are desperate to be pulled back. They want some adult to say to them, 'You are a good young person, don't waste your life, learn to read, get out and do something positive for somebody else. Don't feel sorry for yourself, don't let yourself be turned into a victim.'

That is what the PTA has done for a hundred years. Because you have brought together parents and teachers in a partnership. You have presented a united front to our children that reminds ne

of my late father who used to say "You get in trouble in school, you get in trouble at home." And you know, that's the way it needs to be again.

And that is the crusade you are leading. Our children need to know that the adults in their lives care about them and we care about them so much that we not only love them, we discipline them. And we not only teach them, we guide them. And we're not only trying to do our best at home we are trying to make sure they get their best at school. That is what we owe to our children.

That is what you have done for a hundred years. And I believe that, just as at the time the PTA was formed, you have never been more necessary. You have never been more important to parents, struggling to make sense of a world that is sometimes very difficult to understand. You have never been more important to stand up against the forces of commercialism that would use our children, that would try to sell them products, like tobacco at an early age, that is not good for them.

You have stood against those kinds of pressures, and what we now must do, is with the same level of confidence and optimism that created the PTA, go forth into this next century, just as committed, just as concerned and just as ready to take on the challenges of this century, as were those who came before you.

I am very optimistic, I see positive signs everywhere I go of people taking back whether it's the authority in their own homes over the television set, or parental involvement in the schools. And what I hope each of us will do as we meet our challenges and protect our values, is to make it clear to every American, that commitment to children, to their education, their health and to their well-being is not a luxury. It is central to what of nation and people we will be.

Lady Bird Johnson once said that children are likely to live up to what you believe of them. I want every child in America to have at least one adult in their lives who believes that child has God given potential that will enable that child to be a good productive citizen, a good worker, a good family-member. And if we could just commit ourselves to reaching out to all those children, then I believe our future is in very good hands.

Thank you for what you have done for one hundred years, but do not grow weary doing this work -- we need the PTA now more than ever. Thank you all very much.

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