

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

10/2/95
CHILD HEALTH DAY

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 2, 1995

REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT THE CHILD HEALTH DAY DINNER
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. I am honored and greatly appreciate that award.

I want to add my thanks to Dr. Wynder for his lifetime of devotion to improving health for all Americans, young and old. I am delighted to be anywhere with my friend, Dr. Koop, whom I admire so much and who I only wish would be more heated in terms of our policy about children and health.

I am pleased to be here with Cokie Roberts and with all of you who care about this foundation and its mission.

I think though, that Dr. Koop, you know who is just quite outspoken on the need for weight control and healthy eating and all that goes along with it, is probably behind the fact that none of you have eaten tonight, which will probably delight him if no one does. But I will try to speed through my portion, so that for those of you haven't eaten all day, you can get about that business.

I also want to thank our two young students who are here with us for their participation. I was very proud of you both. You did very, very well. I have seen Cokie Roberts interview lots of people, and she didn't stump you, and she didn't in anyway get you -- you just really responded well. I was very impressed.

I want to add just a word or two about this occasion and about what we are up against in our efforts to try and improve health for children.

I want to begin by informing this foundation that the President has named today, October 2, 1995, as Child Health Day, continuing the tradition started so many years ago. And he called upon all Americans to deepen their commitment to protecting children and taking the necessary steps to meet our

obligations to them and to our nation's future.

Now I must say, that as we gather here tonight, it seems that there are fewer and fewer people who share your commitment to these goals.

We are, as you know, in the midst of a great debate, taking place primarily in Washington, but being felt and carried on throughout our country that will affect the future of every child we know.

It is a debate filled with statistics and policy statements, budget numbers and sound bytes. But behind the charts and graphs and the position papers, it is really a debate about our core values as Americans -- what we believe in, how we define ourselves as a people, and how we envision our future.

Throughout our past, we have thought of ourselves as an American family. A family whose greatest priority was our children. Now the reality did not always match the rhetoric -- we know that. There were abuses going back to Colonial times.

But at least there was a stated commitment to one's own children and to those common investments that would help in the nurturing of all children.

A family was committed to helping particularly those who were most vulnerable among us -- so they, in turn, could help themselves.

You know if a member of our own family falls sick, we call a doctor. If a family member is hungry, we help find a meal. When a family member is poor, we try to provide training and schooling and a job. And when a family member is disabled, or very old, we help provide care and assistance.

For decades, this has been the American way: to put people, and especially children, first. And because we have adhered to that American way, the American Dream has stayed alive for generation after generation and our country has remained the strongest on earth.

But today, we are losing that sense of ourselves as an American family. We are allowing ourselves to be torn apart, divided, put in competition with each other over our resources.

As our larger family is undermined, so are individual families who are the backbone of our country.

Most parents in America are working as hard as they can to be good parents. I have met with working mothers and fathers throughout our country, and I know what they are doing everyday

to put food on the table, to make it possible that the mortgage or the rent is paid, to cover the medical bills, and to instill an ethic of work and responsibility in their children.

It is not easy, and I only wish that all of us in this ballroom tonight and in settings like this across the country would just take a little more time to see and to hear what the lives of so many Americans are like today.

Now of course, parents bear the primary responsibility for their children, and they should. They have to provide the care, nurturing, love and discipline that every child needs.

But as the National Council of Catholic Bishops said in a pastoral letter in 1991 entitled, Putting Children First: "No government can love a child, and no policy can substitute for a family's care." But "government can either support or undermine families as they cope with the moral, social, and economic stresses of caring for children."

So let's not fool ourselves. National policies -- whether they are about education, health care, work, or welfare -- are mirrored every day in the lives and experiences of our children.

And government can and I would argue, should play an invaluable role in safeguarding the interests of children and their families.

Unfortunately, a crusade is now underway to abandon America's historic commitment to children.

A few months ago, the President warned that Congress was about to wage a full-scale war on the children of America. Well, it might of sounded extreme at the time, but the evidence is in and he was right.

There are many cruel examples I could talk about. But since we are here today to reflect on the state of children's health, I would like to say a few words about one program in particular.

The social safety net known as Medicaid is being dismantled at breakneck speed. It is being dismantled with very little discussion and no real dialogue. Decisions are being made in haste -- not only about who pays for health care in America -- but about who gets health care, and who doesn't.

We are all for balancing the budget. And we are all for giving states greater flexibility to administer programs.

But as the President has said many times, there is a right way and a wrong way to get our economic house in order.

The wrong way is to cut health care coverage for millions of children and older Americans with disabilities to finance a \$245 billion tax cut for the wealthiest Americans.

Let's not confuse flexibility with budget cuts that affect real people and will make their lives even harder.

Medicaid is the primary source of health coverage for nearly one out of four of all children in America -- and one out of three children under the age of 3. More than half of these children live in families with working parents.

These are children, remember, who are eligible for Medicaid, not the children who live in working families who make just too much money over the line to be ineligible. These are parents who are not receiving welfare checks.

Medicaid is the primary source of health coverage for millions of children who are disabled or who suffer from chronic illnesses.

Medicaid is the primary source of health coverage for 9 out of 10 children with HIV and AIDS.

Medicaid is the primary source of prenatal and maternal health care for low-income women. There is no way, Dr. Wynder, we can even improve on our efforts to provide prenatal care for pregnant women if we do not have the safety net known as Medicaid, or if we turn over Medicaid to the states and give them the option of cutting coverage, which indeed, they will be forced to do.

Medicaid is an important source of coverage for older Americans living in extreme poverty or with serious disabilities, and is the largest insurer for over two-thirds of nursing home residents.

Last week in the Congress, it was not only decided in one committee that every regulation currently affecting nursing homes would be eliminated, but that the spouse of a person who goes into a nursing home will be expected to sell his or her home and car.

Imagine if you will, if you were living on a small pension and your husband had a small pension, and you had your Social Security so that you were able to make it, but you had no room to spare. And one of you came down with Alzheimer's or had a stroke, and without Medicare and Medicaid coverage for home health care, a nursing home is the only option and it would mean selling your own home and selling your assets.

And then perhaps you could go live with a relative, a child,

but if the child lived in a different state, with different rules under the state flexibility governing such programs, whether or not you could make that move would be up in the air.

So obviously, as of now, Medicaid is a lifeline -- literally -- for millions of children and families.

Ripping apart this lifeline, knocking the props out from under the safety net, is not the American way.

It is not the American way to deny infants the shots they need to stay healthy. In one of the few areas where our children's health actually improved on the report card, we are vaccinating more children -- in part because we have Medicaid coverage and much more vaccine that is being made available at lower cost to doctors to be able to do that. Both of those programs are in jeopardy.

It is not the American way to do much of what will be the unintended consequences of these changes that will deny treatment to children who are disabled or desperately ill and punish hard-working parents whose family health coverage vanishes with a job change.

Cutting \$182 billion from the Medicaid program will force families to make grim choices -- between health care for their children or nursing home care for their parents, between education and vaccinations, between food and prescription drugs.

As the debate continues in the weeks ahead, I hope that policymakers, wherever they are, begin to think about these issues not as partisans, but as parents.

We should not get so wrapped up in these ideological battles to forget that we all have an obligation for the well-being of our children.

We know how we feel when our own child is sick. We know how much we care and what we would do in order to get our child the treatment that child needs. As parents, we try to plan ahead. We try to make sure our children get the shots they need. We try avoid their being exposed to illness and injury.

But suddenly, when it comes time to legislate and make policy, parents turn into partisans and good instincts retreat.

Would we ever say as parents that only one of our four children could go to the doctor, or get a vaccination, or have a hearing test? Would we ever say as parents that we have to cut back on care for our children to pay for our parents in the nursing home?

We would do what ever it took -- keep driving the old car,

not put the addition on the house and stay crowded, cancel the vacation. But that becomes more and more difficult when there are very few ways to obtain the resources that are needed.

We are doing as a society things we would never do as parents. We are ratcheting back the medical care our children need and we are violating our most sacred duty and value: caring for our young.

So why can we even think about legislating in a way we would not approve of as parents and restricting medical care for children as national policy?

We should not. We owe more to our children, but beyond that, we are better than that. We do not need to do this.

There are many other options available. We should not permit ourselves to be locked into ideological or partisan positions that will do such grave damage, not only to the poor and vulnerable among us, not only to the safety net, but to the quality of our life together.

So as we ponder this latest report card, we can only hope that we will not permit actions to be taken, that next year will move us from a "D" to an "F."

Because it might only be a grade on a piece of paper put out by a foundation, but it will mean changes in the lives of literally millions of American children and families. Some changes could very well be irreparable.

Let's call ourselves back to our better selves, our better instincts and try again to act like we all are: members of the American family.

Thank you very much.

###

Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at the Child Health Day Dinner

Thank you very much. I am honored and greatly appreciate that award.

I want to add my thanks to Dr. Wynder for his lifetime of devotion to improving health for all Americans, young and old. I am delighted to be anywhere with my friend, Dr. Koop, whom I admire so much and who I only wish would be more heated in terms of our policy about children and health.

I am pleased to be here with Cokie Roberts and with all of you who care about this foundation and its mission.

I think though, that Dr. Koop, who you know is quite outspoken on the need for weight control and healthy eating and all that goes along with it, is probably behind the fact that none of you have eaten tonight, and it will probably delight him if no one does. But I will try to speed through my portion, so that for those of you who haven't eaten all day, you can get about that business.

I also want to thank our two young students, who are here with us, for their participation. I was very proud of you both. You did very, very well. I have seen Cokie Roberts interview lots of people, and she didn't stump you, and she didn't in any way get to you—you just really responded well. I was very impressed.

I want to add just a word or two about this occasion and about what we are up against in our efforts to try and improve health for children.

I want to begin by informing this foundation that the President has named today, October 2, 1995, as Child Health Day, continuing the tradition started so many years ago. And he has called upon all Americans to deepen their commitment to protecting children and taking the necessary steps to meet our obligations to them and to our nation's future.

Now I must say, that as we gather here tonight, it seems that there are fewer and fewer people who share your commitment to these goals.

We are, as you know, in the midst of a great debate, taking place primarily in Washington, but being felt and carried on throughout our country, that will affect the future of every child we know.

It is a debate filled with statistics and policy statements, budget numbers and sound bites. But behind

the charts and graphs and the position papers, it is really a debate about our core values as Americans—what we believe in, how we define ourselves as a people, and how we envision our future.

Throughout our past, we have thought of ourselves as an American family. A family whose greatest priority was our children. Now the reality did not always match the rhetoric—we know that. There were abuses going back to colonial times.

But at least there was a stated commitment to one's own children and to those common investments that would help in the nurturing of all children.

A family was committed to helping particularly those who were most vulnerable among us—so they, in turn, could help themselves.

You know if a member of our own family falls sick, we call a doctor. If a family member is hungry, we help find a meal. When a family member is poor, we try to provide training and schooling and a job. And when a family member is disabled, or very old, we help provide care and assistance.

For decades, this has been the American way: to put people, and especially children, first. And because we have adhered to that American way, the American Dream has stayed alive for generation after generation and our country has remained the strongest on earth.

But today, we are losing that sense of ourselves as an American family. We are allowing ourselves to be torn apart, divided, put in competition with each other over our resources.

As our larger family is undermined, so are individual families who are the backbone of our country.

Most parents in America are working as hard as they can to be good parents. I have met with working mothers and fathers throughout our country, and I know what they are doing every day to put food on the table, to make it possible that the mortgage or the rent is paid, to cover the medical bills, and to instill an ethic of work and responsibility in their children.

It is not easy, and I only wish that all of us in this ballroom tonight and settings like this across the country would just take a little more time to see and to hear what the lives of so many Americans are like today.

Now of course, parents bear the primary responsibility

ity for their children, and they should. They have to provide the care, nurturing, love, and discipline that every child needs.

But as the National Council of Catholic Bishops said in a pastoral letter in 1991 entitled *Putting Children First*, "No government can love a child, and no policy can substitute for a family's care." But "government can either support or undermine families as they cope with the moral, social, and economic stresses of caring for children."

So let's not fool ourselves. National policies—whether they are about education, health care, work, or welfare—are mirrored every day in the lives and experiences of our children.

And government can and, I would argue, should play an invaluable role in safeguarding the interests of children and their families.

Unfortunately, a crusade is now underway to abandon America's historic commitment to children.

A few months ago, the President warned that Congress was about to wage a full-scale war on the children of America. Well, it might have sounded extreme at the time, but the evidence is in and he was right.

There are many cruel examples I could talk about. But since we are here today to reflect on the state of children's health, I would like to say a few words about one program in particular.

The social safety net known as Medicaid is being dismantled at breakneck speed. It is being dismantled with very little discussion and no real dialogue. Decisions are being made in haste—not only about who pays for health care in America—but about who gets health care and who doesn't.

We are all for balancing the budget. And we are all for giving states greater flexibility to administer programs.

But as the President has said many times, there is a right way and a wrong way to get our economic house in order.

The wrong way is to cut health care coverage for millions of children and older Americans with disabilities to finance a \$245 billion tax cut for the wealthiest Americans.

Let's not confuse flexibility with budget cuts that affect real people and will make their lives even harder.

Medicaid is the primary source of health coverage for nearly one out of four of all children in America—and one out of three children under the age of 3. More than half of these children live in families with working parents.

These are children, remember, who are eligible for Medicaid, not the children who live in working families who make just too much money over the line to be ineligible. These are parents who are not receiving welfare checks.

Medicaid is the primary source of health coverage for

millions of children who are disabled or who suffer from chronic illnesses.

Medicaid is the primary source of health coverage for 9 out of 10 children with HIV and AIDS.

Medicaid is the primary source of prenatal and maternal health care for low-income women. There is no way, Dr. Wynder, we can ever improve on our efforts to provide prenatal care for pregnant women if we do not have the safety net known as Medicaid or if we turn over Medicaid to the states and give them the option of cutting coverage, which, indeed, they will be forced to do.

Medicaid is an important source of coverage for older Americans living in extreme poverty or with serious disabilities, and it is the largest insurer for over two-thirds of nursing home residents.

Last week in the Congress, it was not only decided in one committee that every regulation currently affecting nursing homes would be eliminated, but that the spouse of a person who goes into a nursing home will be expected to sell his or her home and car.

Imagine if you will, if you were living on a small pension and your husband had a small pension, and you had your Social Security so that you were able to make it, but you had no room to spare. Suppose one of you was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or had a stroke, and without Medicare and Medicaid coverage for home health care, a nursing home became the only option available to you. It would mean selling your own home and selling your assets. Perhaps you could go live with a relative, a child, but if the child lived in a different state, with different rules under the state flexibility governing such programs, whether or not you could make that move would be up in the air.

So obviously, as of now, Medicaid is a lifeline literally—for millions of children and families.

Ripping apart this lifeline, knocking the props out from under the safety net, is not the American way.

It is not the American way to deny infants the shots they need to stay healthy. In one of the few areas where our children's health actually improved on the report card, we are vaccinating more children—in part because we have Medicaid coverage and much more vaccine that is being made available at lower cost so that doctors are able to do that. Both of those programs are in jeopardy.

It is not the American way to do much of what will be the unintended consequences of these changes that will deny treatment to children who are disabled or desperately ill and punish hardworking parents whose family health coverage vanishes with a job change.

Cutting \$182 billion from the Medicaid program will force families to make grim choices—between health care for their children and nursing home care for their parents, between education and vaccinations, between food and prescription drugs.

As the debate continues in the weeks ahead, I hope

that policymakers, wherever they are, begin to think about these issues not as partisans, but as parents.

We should not get so wrapped up in these ideological battles that we forget we all have an obligation to the well being of our children.

We know how we feel when our own child is sick. We know how much we care and what we would do in order to get our child the treatment that child needs. As parents, we try to plan ahead. We try to make sure our children get the shots they need. We try to avoid their being exposed to illness and injury.

But suddenly, when it comes time to legislate and make policy, parents turn into partisans and good instincts retreat.

Would we ever say as parents that only one of our four children could go to the doctor, or get a vaccination, or have a hearing test? Would we ever say as parents that we have to cut back on care for our children to pay for our parents in the nursing home?

We would do whatever it took—keep driving the old car, not put the addition on the house and stay crowded, cancel the vacation. But that becomes more and more difficult when there are very few ways to obtain the resources that are needed.

We are doing as a society things we would never do

as parents. We are ratcheting back the medical care our children need and we are violating our most sacred duty and value: caring for our young.

So why can we even think about legislating in a way we would not approve of as parents and restricting medical care for children as national policy?

We should not. We owe more to our children, but beyond that, we are better than that. We do not need to do this.

There are many other options available. We should not permit ourselves to be locked into ideological or partisan positions that will do such grave damage, not only to the poor and vulnerable among us, not only to the safety net, but to the quality of our life together.

So as we ponder this latest report card, we can only hope that we will not permit actions to be taken that next year will move us from a "D" to an "F".

It might only be a grade on a piece of paper put out by a foundation, but it will mean changes in the lives of literally millions of American children and families. Some changes could very well be irreparable.

Let's call ourselves back to our better selves, our better instincts, and try again to act like we all are: members of the American family.

Thank you very much.