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**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
TO THE PARENT TEACHERS ASSOCIATION  
ARLINGTON, VA**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much. I am just delighted to be here. I want you to know just how much I appreciated that introduction, but I want your board to know how much all of us appreciate Joan's representation of you. She has done an excellent job of conveying the positions of the PTA, the concerns that parents and teachers have, to the President and everyone else.

I think that the PTA's leadership and dedication to issues on behalf of children has always been important, but it's perhaps even more important now -- more than at any point in your history. I believe that because we have many forces at work, not only in our country but around the world, many of which are very positive, many of which really do open up possibilities for countless numbers of people. We are learning so much about the way the human brain develops that it will give us so many more good ideas about how to help children and how to teach effectively at home and in the schools. But at the same time that so many good things are happening, we would be foolish indeed if we did not recognize that there are many challenges, many risks and many difficulties as well in the world that we face and that our children are being brought up in. And so a kind of commitment to partnership, to taking stands on behalf of parents and children and education that the PTA has long been known for is especially critical today. I can think of many examples, but I will only mention a few.

On behalf of the President and the Administration, I will begin by applauding you for your leadership in the effort to combat teen-age smoking. The PTA has helped the Department of Health and Human Services promote the "Stop the Sale" program against tobacco smoking targeted at children. And your partnership in the new National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids makes you an indispensable ally in what the President is attempting to do. I think that this battle against tobacco is especially important because we know that 3,000 children a day pick up the habit of smoking. We know that children have been targeted. In my book, which I've referred to, I talk about the

evidence -- overwhelming evidence -- we have about how the tobacco companies have turned their marketing influences on our children. And I think it tells us something that is important to know.

There is always a tension in our society between those who have the right to advocate and sell their products in our free market system and the rest of us who, both individually and together, sometimes have to protect ourselves and particularly our children against certain products and against the consumer-culture emphasis of those products. And there is no clearer example of this than smoking. And I thank you on behalf not only of the President, but on behalf of my daughter and her friends and all of our children today. This will not be easily done.

Joan and I were talking before when we came in about the conference yesterday that the President hosted on youth and violence. And that was particularly focused on illegal drug usage, and we know that that was a great challenge to us. But tobacco smoking we also know is a gateway experience for other destructive experiences such as illegal drug usage. So by focusing on the tobacco industry's efforts to entice children to smoke we are also saying don't use our children for other kinds of dangerous activities as well.

As some of you I'm sure know, the President and the Vice President held a closed-door meeting with executives from the entertainment industry. All networks were represented, all the cable stations, all the major movie studios, to discuss with the industry their willingness to create a voluntary rating system. This would never had happened if the telecommunications bill had not included the V-chip. And for many, many years the PTA, and now a lot of other individuals and groups, have been raising the alarm about the content of television. And many of us have tried in our own homes to control what our children see, but we know that that is often only half the battle. Because even for my friends who are part-time homemakers, they don't watch their children 24 hours a day. They don't follow their children to their friend's homes. They know that their children are being exposed to things that they wish that they were not. So it's a constant effort on the part of parents to reassert authority in our own homes. And to stick behind the entertainment industry to move toward voluntary ratings combined with the V-chip will give parents an enormous tool that we don't now have.

Even before the V-chip can be put into television sets, which won't start for about two years, the ratings system, which is supposed to be available as of next January or earlier, will give parents more information than they've had up until now. We won't have the convenience of the V-chip, but at least we can try to exercise more vigilance because of that.

After the closed-door meeting and the press announcement by the President, the next day the President and the Vice President and Tipper Gore and I met with some PTA members and some children and some experts to talk about how we would actually implement this V-chip and ratings system in our homes. It was a great discussion because many parents have been reading your media guides, have been having meetings about this. Some of the active chapters that have made a real outreach effort, not only through PTA meetings but through community and neighborhood meetings as well, were able to describe what has been done up until now. I think that when we had the conversation, one of the most telling comments that was made was made by a young boy, 10 years old, who came to this event with his parents, and he was very upset because he's worried about younger children. And, you know, he knows what he's supposed to watch and what he's not supposed to watch. And he knows it's not real, but it's these little kids, and I quote, "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." And I thought that was pretty astute observation, even though he was talking about those little people, four and five years of age.

But at that same meeting there was a very impressive statement by Dr. Robert Phillips of the American Psychiatric Association, who explained, and it wasn't so much for the Gores or my husband and me because we already believe this, but it was in part to convey this to the media that was covering the event - that children are like little VCR's, they see something once and then they repeat it and they repeat it over and over and over again. I don't think there is any doubt any longer, and I go on at some length in my book to try to make this point so it could be more popularly available to people. All the studies that have been done, they've all concluded the same thing -- that violence does desensitize our children, the repetitiveness of it, the unreality of it.

And in addition we are now getting research that the kind of presentation of family life on television, the dysfunctionality in the comedy series, in the talk shows is also undermining children's sense of what a family should be. So there isn't, I think, any room for argument about the way the content of television affects our children.

I also, though, would like to add a word that I believe the process of television watching is also damaging to our children. We now know that television watching is a much more passive activity than reading, for example. You burn more calories when you read. I'm thinking about a new campaign. You know, "lose weight by reading." There might be something in that. And so we know that the passivity of it has affected children.

We also know that the instant gratification that it conveys undermines children's willingness to stick to hard tasks and to try to learn the things that don't come easily because you can just hit the remote control when you're watching television. And many of my friends who are teachers tell me they feel like they're clicked off all the time because a lot of learning is simply hard, boring, repetitive work. And our children have got to, once again, understand that schoolwork is their work and that it's not television that should consume most of their hours. So I hope that the progress that you have made in raising these issues gives you a lot of satisfaction, because I'm convinced that we would not be able to point to the success of the V-chip and this ratings system, we would not have launched this campaign against tobacco's influence on our children if it had not been for the work that you have done in so many of your efforts, both locally, at the state level and nationally.

Having said that, there is still a lot ahead of us to do. Certainly the work you've done on the critical media viewing project has got to be spread more widely, and I urge you to do all that you can to reach as many parents as possible. Too many parents still don't know what you know about how best to watch television together as a family. Too many parents still don't know what so many of you knew and did with your own children and which you advocate -- the kind of talking to children and reading to children that helped prepare children for school -- things that cannot be done if the television set is on from seven to 11 hours on average in the family home. So the more we can reach out in a helpful way to help parents be the best mothers and fathers they can be, the more likely we are to strengthen families and to help our children become resilient, productive young people.

So on my behalf, and certainly for the President and all who care about these issues, I want to thank you for your leadership. I want to thank you for your support on behalf of these important issues and I also want to ask you to stay as committed as you are, because I think we're finally getting an audience again. I don't know that we had one for a while there. People were not listening. But the PTA is growing again in many areas of the country. Parents are once again understanding what their primary obligations are. Schools are opening themselves more readily to parental involvement. So I see the convergence of a lot of good things that are coming to pass, and we just have to make sure that they continue and grow and give more and more parents and teachers the tools they need to make life better for our children. Thank you very much.

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