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PREVENTION MAGAZINE

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INDEX

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**REMARKS OF FIRST LADY
HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON**

**National Press Club
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P R O C E E D I N G S

THE FIRST LADY: Thank you very much, Ardath, and thank all of you for gathering to discuss this very important issue.

I particularly want to thank Prevention Magazine for this survey. I avidly read last year's survey and am greatly appreciative that you have continued this annual survey because its message is one that will take repetition, but it is a message that any of us can hear and act on. As Prevention says, you can do it.

And I am also very grateful that the American Academy of Pediatrics is once again a partner in public education efforts that attempt to draw attention on the part of parents and teachers and everyone who works with and has children, to do what they can do in their own homes and in their work places and in anywhere that children gather to make life safer for all of our children.

Today, as we all know, a great debate is

1 taking place that will affect the futures of all
2 of us and particularly of our children. It is a
3 debate filled with statistics and policy
4 statements and budget numbers, but behind the
5 charts and graphs and position papers, it is
6 really a debate about our core values as
7 Americans, about what we believe in, how we
8 define ourselves as people and how we envision
9 our future.

10 Throughout our history Americans have
11 thought of ourselves as an American family, a
12 family whose greatest priority, both in our own
13 homes and in our communities, was our children; a
14 family committed to helping the most vulnerable
15 among us, so that they, in turn, could help
16 themselves.

17 As Americans we have always prided
18 ourselves on our compassion and on the high
19 expectations and aspirations we hold for our
20 children and ourselves as a people.

21 For decades this has been the American
22 way, to put people, especially children, first.

1 And because we have adhered to that American way,
2 the American dream has stayed alive for
3 generation after generation and our country has
4 remained the strongest on earth.

5 But today we seem to be losing our sense
6 of ourselves as an American family. We are
7 allowing ourselves to be torn apart, divided, put
8 in competition with each other over the resources
9 in our land.

10 As the traditional underpinnings of our
11 larger American family are undermined, individual
12 families are being jeopardized. Most parents in
13 America are working as hard as they can to be
14 good parents. They may need more information, as
15 we have heard, about the survey, so that they
16 understand exactly what needs to be done, but
17 they are getting up every day working as hard as
18 they know how, to provide for themselves and
19 their children.

20 I have met with working mothers and
21 fathers over the last many months. And I know
22 the sacrifices they are making to put food on the

1 table, pay the mortgage or rent, cover the
2 medical bills and instill an ethic of work and
3 responsibility in their children.

4 Of course, parents do and should bear the
5 primary responsibility for their own children,
6 but parents know that the care, the nurturing,
7 the love and discipline that every child needs
8 cannot be delivered in a vacuum. We are all
9 affected by what goes on around us.

10 As the National Council of Catholic
11 Bishops said in a pastoral letter in 1991
12 entitled Putting Children First: "We know that no
13 government can love a child and no policy can
14 substitute for a family's care, but the policies
15 that our nation has can either support or
16 undermine families as they cope with the moral,
17 social and economic stresses of caring for
18 children."

19 The reason, for example, that our children
20 do fairly well in terms of seeing their doctors
21 and dentists is because we have support, both
22 through private insurance that is partly

6

1 employer-paid, and through public insurance, so
2 we know that there is a relationship between what
3 families feel they are able to do for their
4 children and whether or not they actually can do
5 it.

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

11 And all of us, through our local, state
12 and national governments play a role. It makes a
13 difference whether or not there is a helmet law.
14 These things do matter in the lives of children.

15 Unfortunately today, the social safety net
16 known as Medicaid is being dismantled at a
17 break-neck pace. It is being dismantled with
18 very little discussion and no real dialogue.
19 Decisions are being made in haste, not only about
20 who pays for health care in America but about who
21 gets health care and who doesn't.

22 We are all for balancing the budget, and

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1 we are all for giving states and cities greater
2 flexibility to administer programs, but as the
3 President has said many times, there is a right
4 way and a wrong way to get our economic house in
5 order.

6 The wrong way is to cut health care
7 coverage for millions of children, disabled
8 citizens, and the poorest of older Americans, all
9 to finance a \$245 billion tax cut for the
10 wealthiest families in our country.

11 Medicaid is the primary health coverage
12 for nearly a quarter of all children in America,
13 and one-third of all children under three. More
14 than half of these children live in families with
15 working parents, parents who are not receiving
16 welfare checks.

17 Medicaid is the primary source of health
18 coverage for millions of children who are
19 disabled or who suffer from chronic illnesses.
20 Suppose that child that we think should be in the
21 seat belt or the safety seat is for whatever
22 reason not buckled in well enough? Accidents

1 happen. By definition, they are not
2 predictable.

3 So we have many children who, as the
4 result of accidents that perhaps could have been
5 prevented, but for whatever reason were not, find
6 themselves with serious injuries that require
7 many, many days, weeks and months of medical
8 treatment and rehabilitation.

9 Medicaid is the primary source of health
10 coverage for nine out of ten children with HIV
11 and AIDS, children who through no behavior or
12 action of their own have acquired these
13 difficult, very tragic illnesses.

14 Medicaid is the primary source of prenatal
15 and maternal health care for low-income pregnant
16 women. Medicaid is an important source of
17 coverage for older Americans living in extreme
18 poverty or with serious disabilities and is the
19 largest insurer for over two-thirds of those
20 older Americans currently in nursing homes.

21 Medicaid is a life-line, literally, for
22 millions of children and families in America.

1 Ripping out this life-line, ripping up this
2 safety net is not the American way. It is not
3 the American way to deny infants the shots they
4 need to stay healthy. It is not the American way
5 to deny treatment to children who are disabled or
6 desperately ill.

7 It is not the American way to punish
8 hard-working parents whose families' health
9 coverage disappears when a job changes or is
10 lost. It is not the American way to make the
11 oldest among us give up their possessions and
12 live a life of poverty to pay for a spouse's
13 nursing home care.

14 Cutting \$182 billion from the Medicaid
15 program will force families to make grim choices,
16 choices between health care for their children or
17 nursing homes, choices between education and
18 vaccinations, between food and prescription
19 drugs, between buying that car seat or that
20 helmet and putting that money aside to meet what
21 is considered a necessity.

22 As this debate continues in the weeks and

1 months ahead, I hope that policymakers, wherever
2 they are, begin to think about these issues not
3 as partisans but as parents. I hope they will
4 not get so wrapped up in statistics and policy
5 papers and sound bites that they forget the most
6 basic concern of all: The well-being of
7 America's children.

8 We know how we feel when one of our own
9 sons or daughters is sick. Nothing else in the
10 world matters to us. Will he get better? Will
11 he be okay? Is this a passing flu or something
12 more serious? We want answers and we want cures
13 and we want them fast.

14 As parents we use our wisdom and knowledge
15 to plan ahead for the health of our children to
16 make sure they get what they need, but suddenly
17 when it comes to legislating and making policy,
18 parents turn into partisans and good parental
19 instincts retreat.

20 Would we ever, as parents, say that only
21 one of our four children could go to the doctor
22 or get a vaccination or have a hearing test? Of

1 course not.

2 Would we ever, as parents, say we have to
3 cut back on the necessary medical care for our
4 children to pay to keep our older relative in a
5 nursing home? Would we ever as parents say that
6 a child of our own with spina bifida or cerebral
7 palsy no longer deserves treatment or care? Of
8 course not.

9 We would make the sacrifices. We would
10 keep driving the old car. We wouldn't take that
11 vacation we looked forward to. We wouldn't put
12 the new siding on the house. We would economize
13 by clipping coupons. We would do whatever we
14 possibly could. And yet today we are making
15 decisions to ignore what is common sense in the
16 lives of most of us.

17 In a precipitous and even reckless attempt
18 to meet fixed budget targets, we are now as a
19 society on the brink of doing things we would
20 never do as parents. We are ratchetting back
21 medical care for our children. We are violating
22 our most sacred duty as parents and as citizens.

1 How can we legislate what we would not
2 approve as parents? How can the restrictions of
3 medical care for our children become the public
4 policy of our nation? It is one thing to tell
5 already very hard-working parents, worried about
6 down-sizing and layoffs, having to work longer
7 hours just to keep up, having both parents
8 working longer hours, that they have to do more
9 to prevent illness and injury, which they will
10 when they hear the word from Prevention and
11 pediatricians, do the best they can, but at the
12 same time to say: "But we are beginning to shut
13 the doors to those of you who cannot afford to
14 walk through them for the medical care your
15 children will need."

16 Our children deserve better than that. We
17 should do all we can to prevent any harm to
18 them. As the Academy says, solutions before
19 problems.

20 And when problems come, we should do
21 everything we can to ease the pain and solve that
22 problem as quickly as possible. That's what good

1 parents do and that's what a good country should
2 do as well.

3 Thank you very much.

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