

PHOTOCOPY
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The New England
Circle Discussion

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**REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT THE NEW ENGLAND CIRCLE DISCUSSION
NASHUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much. I want to thank you for that introduction and for talking about the examples and lessons of your parents. It seems particularly appropriate when we honor the memory of your mother. I want to thank all the Dunfeys who are here. I must tell you I was in a receiving line in a bookstore in Dallas and a woman went through and took my hand and she said, "I had ten children, and honey, it took a city to raise them."

I am very pleased to be here with all of you, and I am especially pleased that Dr. Houssant could be here this evening. I cannot believe this is the first time we've met. I feel like I have known him for a very long time. I am delighted that the former governor of Maine, Governor Brennan, is here. And I am especially pleased that the current governor of Vermont, my friend Howard Dean, is here as well. He is not only a superb governor, but also a physician and brings to his work the combination of skills that are required. I think as we reflect on how we have just finished the first in the nation primary, all of us need a little bit of healing. I was a little worried about even coming back so soon after. But I like coming to New Hampshire so much that I take any opportunity to be here.

I am very honored by this award. It is not only meaningful to me personally, but because it reflects the values of the Dunfey family and the work that all of you have done on the New England circle to keep alive a tradition of civil discourse. I think it is essential to the future of our democracy. We cannot move forward without honest debate about the issues, without including diverse points of view and perspectives in our national discussion. And I think some of us fear that civil discourse is at risk in some quarters or is being telescoped into soundbites and back-and-forth attacks and personal insult as opposed to the coming together in a circle as you envision -- a people of good faith looking for solutions to our problems.

That clearly is what the Dunfey's parents did for them. Having twelve is a circle. Keeping them all together, working with them daily is an incredible accomplishment. One story I

particularly like, which comes from one of Katherine Dunfey's twelve children, is that each of her children believed that he or she was her favorite. As I was meeting some of the grandchildren, I had at least one say, "I'm the favorite grandchild."

That's not only proof positive of the time and interest that was invested in each child, but it's also an example of what it takes to create resilient, productive, successful people -- that there has to be that investment of time and energy, of discipline direction, attention. And that is what is so lacking, not only in the raising of your children, but in our relations with one another -- that we do not spend the time that used to be spent. Our lives have become so hectic that we rush about and rarely have an opportunity just to get to know one another any longer. So an event that celebrates Catherine Dunfey seems to me to be a particularly appropriate place to talk about children and families and communities.

There isn't any more important discussion in our nation today because we know that no matter what else we do, if we do not invest in our children, if we do not cherish them, if we do not strengthen the families into which they are born and that struggle to raise them, then all of the other debates we are having as a nation will not be successfully concluded because we will not have the kind of base of commitment and concern that is necessary for any society to flourish.

We cannot simply talk about family values. We have to act in ways that value families. And most of us know that and attempt to do it in our own personal lives, but we also need to take that lesson -- a lesson that parents like Catherine Dunfey taught -- into the larger community as well. I wrote the book "It Takes a Village" in part because, after 25 years of working on behalf of children's issues and now nearly 16 years, as of next Tuesday, of being a mother myself, I am both very hopeful about what I see happening in our country and also frustrated and discouraged. The hope, however, outweighs the other feeling because I see that we know so much more about what it takes to raise resilient and healthy and happy children and that somewhere in America right now there are families and churches and businesses and schools and people in the media and in every other institution working to change what they do, to try to do it in a more effective way to support families and children.

All of the problems we read about in the headlines of our newspapers or see on the T.V. news have been solved somewhere in America. So despite our frustration and discouragement from time to time, I want to bring a message of hope and optimism with this

caveat -- that if we act in the ways we know we should to value families, if we start working to help each other, if we create partnerships in neighborhoods, if businesses begin to not just think of their workers as disposable commodities, but treat them with respect and honor their roles as parents, if all of our

institutions begin to do what some have already done, we will see a great strengthening of families and improvement in the lives of our children.

There are things each of us can do in our professional lives, certainly in our personal lives and in our public lives.

As I travel around the country, I meet literally thousands and thousands of people. In the last three weeks I think I have shaken 30 thousand hands from one end of the country to another. And I meet mothers and fathers who are struggling to be good parents, sometimes against daunting odds. And I talk with them about what's on their minds, what their concerns are. They're the same concerns no matter who I am speaking with, no matter what race, no matter what part of the country, no matter what level of education or income, the concerns are the same. People want to do well by their children, but so often, given the circumstances that they confront, given the overheated economy that we are living in now that is pushing people harder and harder and stretching them thinner and thinner, it becomes difficult to find the time and space to know how to mother and father our children.

I sometimes ask them questions if they are in a line that I am shaking hands of and they're holding a baby I might say, "Well I bet you're having a good time talking to that baby." And sometimes a quizzical look comes on their face and they might say to me, "Well, why would I talk to her, she can't talk back?" But as Eleanor said, conversation is one of the most important gifts we can give our children. Talking with our children, starting when they are babies, not only builds relationships, it builds vocabulary. It prepares children for learning -- reading books to children, even if a parent is not a good reader.

I met with a group of mothers who were working to get their GEDs yesterday in Louisville, Kentucky, and I asked them if they had been reading to their children, and this one mother just looked so proud. She said, "Yes, I'm starting to do that. I do it every single night. Sometimes I'm so tired I say I can't do it anymore and he crawls up on my bed and he says MaMa, read to me, and I do." And I thought to myself of all the times I was nearly comatose reading "Good Night Moon" or one of the other books that Chelsea liked, and I related immediately to that mother. She knew what she was doing was important, and it was something she had learned and valued because of that.

There are little things that every parent could do starting today that would make a difference. But it's not only information that parents need, all of us need more hands on help. All of us need more hands on assistance in raising our children today. We often don't live with extended families. We often don't even know our neighbors. We don't have any place in the community that we call our own. It is not just true that families under economic pressures have difficulties today. I know as all of you do, many other parents, well educated, affluent parents who are so busy, so harried, so preoccupied that they too have difficulty doing what they know should be done for their children.

I heard an interesting observation by a psychologist from Europe who had spent time in the United States recently who said, after watching the comings and goings of families and children, he was convinced that we are raising our children in automobiles. That's where they spend so much of their time, and it's partly because of the hecticness of our own lives.

So all of us have to begin to think what can we do personally. But that is not enough, because every family is affected by what goes on in the larger society. And every institution has a role to play in assisting parents to be the best mothers and fathers they can be and in taking responsibility for all children. When my book first came out I was criticized by some for saying it takes a village, and there were those who said, "Oh, there she goes again, it only takes a mother and a father." Well, I would respectfully disagree. There are many, many of us who thought we had probably gone to school for too many years who when confronted with a newborn baby, found we knew very little and needed all the help we could get.

My daughter was born at 11:30 on a Wednesday night. The next morning when I was attempting to breast feed her, which I assumed would be very easy and straight forward -- I had seen other people do it, I had read the books, it didn't look like it would be too much trouble. So there I was and all of a sudden, she started to foam at the nose. And I hit every buzzer in my hospital room and the nurses came running and I'll never forget the look on one veteran nurse's face and she just kind of sized up the situation and said, "It would help if you lifted her head up a little." I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I needed somebody to help me.

Think of all of the parents who don't have any kind of help. Think of the loneliness and isolation that so many parents, particularly young parents, particularly single young parents, feel in the face of their responsibilities. The best investment we can make as a society is in educating and assisting parents to be the best parents they can be. Anything we can do to provide home visitors for young families, anything we can do to provide

resource parents so that they can have some mentor and guide to assist them, anything we can do to open up our existing institutions, whether they be schools or churches or anything else, so that young parents feel that they have safe place to come to get the kind of help that I got and that most of the rest of my friends did as well.

Schools and teachers have to take responsibility by recognizing the value and the potential in every single child. Religious institutions have to help awaken the spirituality the children have and assist them in developing their moral consciences and compassion and a sense of service. Children need a sense of community.

Earlier today I was in Philadelphia. I was at an Americorps project in the inner city, and I visited with about twelve young men and women between the ages of 16 and 25 who are rehabbing houses so that neighbors with low incomes can buy them and move in and develop their own homes. Time and time again, as I talked to these young men and women, they said, "I have learned so much. I have learned values. I learned persistence. I have learned how to work. I have learned I have a contribution to make, that I can be of service, and when I go home at night I walk by my buddies on the corner and they all look at me and I stop and I talk with them and most of them would want the same opportunity if we were able to give it to them." Young people want a sense of belonging. They want to be useful. They want to know their place in the larger community.

When you look at what is happening with our boys and girls and teenagers today, so much of it, that causes the problems and the headlines, can be traced to this feeling that somehow they don't have any positive way to express their growing up need, they don't have any places to go, they have no work to do. There is an opportunity for every school, every church to give young people that kind of sense of belonging.

Businesses can also help workers be good parents with family-friendly policies such as flexible work hours, adequate health benefits, decent wages, opportunities for learning. In the recent primary here, there was a lot of talk about corporate responsibility, about the pain that is caused because of downsizing and layoffs, the sense that workers and employees are treated as disposable commodities. Well, it is true that we have to face up to the changes in the economy, but it is also true that there are many businesses that have tried hard to give their employees a sense that they are important, to develop loyalty, to give them the feelings that their families are part of their value to the employer. And so they've done things like provide extensive leave for both mothers and fathers. They've done things like provide tuition, credits for both employees and children to

go to school. They've provided summer camp opportunities -- on and on.

There are so many businesses who could serve as examples. So I would wish that other businesses would follow those examples. We cannot create a strong economy if we undermine the capacity of parents to feel that they are fulfilling their basic obligations to their children. And it is not a question of an either/or. It is a question of doing both, of building a strong economy but doing it in a way that values families at the same time. Businesses have responsibility not just to the bottom line, but to creating a business climate that sends the message that we are all in this together instead of you're on your own.

As we travel around the country, my husband and I, we see many see many things that work, but we also become more and more convinced that the single biggest influence in what happens to children today, and the single biggest difference between our growing up and our daughter's, is the media. And I don't want to engage in media bashing, which is all too fashionable, although it is also well deserved. But I think that if the media, and by that I mean primarily television, which has the single biggest impact on children, will only admit what we now know, which is that it is not only the content of television programs that influence our children, it is the process of television watching as well. A recent study has concluded, without much surprise, that reading uses more calories than watching television. I'm thinking of trying to do something that promotes reading among teenagers from the argument that you can get thin by reading. I haven't quite figured out how to put that together.

But certainly those who make the decisions about what appears on television and the movies and music can no longer hide behind the First Amendment. No one is coming to censor them. That debate is over. But unless they change their ways, they will continue to undermine the capacity for this society to raise a critical mass of children who can be hopeful about the future. Because instead of breeding hope, we are breeding distrust and cynicism. We are glamorizing violence and other self destructive behavior, and we are giving children the idea that short term gratification is the only thing worth having. So there is a great moral issue that has to be put on the same level as the economic imperatives.

Think how much better our society would be if media executives making the decisions about the content of television shows and movies and music asked themselves the following question: as a parent, do I want my child watching this or listening to this? And if the answer is no, as it is -- both publicly and privately many of them say they do not let their own children watch what they produce or do -- then why do they subject other children to it?

We are going to be having a gathering at the White House next week that the President called of media executives. I do not know whether we will be successful in persuading them to exercise the kind of self restraint that is necessary. That is why the V chip, which was in the telecommunications bill, is important -- So that parents have some authority over how to program their own TV sets. Now if they're like me, they will never learn how to use it. I still don't know how to run my VCR, but somebody can be entrepreneurial and set up a little business about coming around programming your V chips. But it is also true that parents may have to take more dramatic actions like turning off the television set, like joining with other parents to boycott shows that are particularly offensive.

There is nothing against the First Amendment in citizens exercising their own First Amendment rights and saying we are not doing this any longer. If strangers walked into your house and said some of the things that your children watch on television, you would call the police. And yet we let the TV set run for hour and hours and hours with very little interference.

I hope that the debate about what we need to do for our children will be broadened to include all these other institutions because there has been a false debate up until now. It has been positioned that it is either the government or the families. And you knew how the debate goes -- if the government does something then that undermines the family and it undermines the family's self reliance. That is a false debate. All of us have a role. I believe that television has had more of an impact coming from the private sector on how our children think and feel than any government program you can name in the last 50 years. So it's not the government versus the family. It is the entire society, and as part of that, government does have a role to help families and to do what it can to serve as a safety net for poor children, to be there when children's needs are not being met. But the debate has to be broadened for us to get to the point that we really talk about what the government can do successfully.

Now all the talk in the New Hampshire primary about what business hasn't done or what business could do - I didn't hear any of the candidates on the other side calling for the Congress to raise the minimum wage. That is something the government can and should do to help families. Only the government can pass the family and medical leave act or give tax breaks to working families. And only the government can enforce standards to keep air clean and water safe. To anyone who thinks government has no role in strengthening families, I ask where would our nation be without the G.I. bill or the National Institutes of Health or the system of land grant colleges and universities?

In the middle of the civil war President Lincoln and the Congress during that time created land grant colleges because they understood then that education was going to be the key for Americans being able to prosper and develop in the future. And now we have those who would cut back on aid for education, who would make it difficult for young people to afford to go to college, who would cut back on programs like Head Start that give young children a chance to be prepared, when education is the key for so many children and teenagers now and into the future.

I am optimistic that we are going to come up with the right answers to these problems, because I see so many examples of what works. I visited a charter school in San Fernando Valley in one of the poorest neighborhoods in California. A school that has 95 percent Hispanic and five percent African-American students with a Chinese-American principal and a Cuban-American vice principal. Anybody who doesn't think immigrants are building America has not been the places that I have been in America in the past three years. Until last year, that school was located next to several broken down houses that were used by neighborhood gangs to sell and use drugs. The school got some state funding to bulldoze the crackhouses and build new classrooms, and they celebrated the opening of 14 new classrooms and in the auditorium where we met, there were parents of every educational background who had come together to support the school -- the kind of partnership I write about in the book, where my father used to say you get in trouble at school, you'll get in trouble at home. That's the sort of partnership that has to be rebuilt to support our teachers and principals.

Everywhere things like that are happening. People are taking back their neighborhoods from drugs and violence, schools are opening up longer hours so that working parents can be part of their children's education. We see so much good that is happening and in the midst of all of the political rhetoric, we should not lose sight of what we are capable of doing together if we share information, we pool our resources, we believe in our abilities to move things forward. If the willingness is there, every neighborhood, every school religious institution, every business, every government in this country, starting today could do something positive to improve the chances of families and children and every family to do something as simple as reading or talking to their children. If we take on this challenge of rebuilding our village, we're not talking about returning to a time when we all lived as small units, we're talking instead about the values and relationships that connect all of us and how do we reassert the fundamental values that we look to because we know they have stood the test of time about what it means to be a responsible parent or a responsible citizen.

Children have no vote, they have no say in the political or business or economic decisions made. They can't lobby a

Congressman. They can't make a campaign contribution. That's why all of us, whether or not we are parents, have to be their voice. And if that voice is loud enough, it will be heard above the political din, it will be heard and reverberate through the global economy and all of us will, once again, act in the way we should because we know our primary responsibility is to the next generation. Thank you all very much.

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