

Democratic Governors' Association  
Chicago IL 8/27/96

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON**  
**REMARKS FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION**  
**CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**  
**AUGUST 27, 1996**

Thank you Governor Caperton for your kind introduction. And let me thank you and Governor Dean both for the wise and visionary leadership you are bringing to this organization and to your home states.

I want to thank you, the Democratic Governor's Association, for inviting me to participate in this conversation about our children and our future. I know you've had an interesting and exciting discussion today and I am proud that many members of my husband's cabinet could join you.

As some of you may know, I've just come from a luncheon honoring Jane Addams and the women who are serving our country in her spirit. This morning, this city dedicated a park in her honor. It is an honor long overdue. More than one hundred years ago, Jane Addams saw the many and disturbing problems of the newly industrializing world she lived in -- soul-crushing poverty, ruthless discrimination against newly-arrived immigrants, elderly people left destitute on the streets.

Most of all she saw children -- young children working in unsafe factories; children neglected by parents struggling to make ends meet; undernourished, poorly-clothed children playing in rotting trash heaps because they had no place else to go; children and future citizens of this country whose opportunities were limited by the circumstances into which they were born. But Addams, who easily could have shrugged her shoulders and ignored all of these problems, did something about them. She created a village.

Through Hull House, thousands of families and children living in one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods were given the chance to make something of their lives. A kindergarten and nursery were built to take care of children whose parents had to work in the factories. Hull House offered printing, metalwork and other trade instruction. Through the music school, art gallery, and theater, children and adults found rich worlds of creative expression. Addams led movements that resulted in the passage of child labor laws and juvenile justice system. But Hull House was by no means a one-woman operation -- people from all sectors of society and all stations of life came together to make a difference.

I believe the spirit of compassion, commitment, and civic cooperation that flourished and still flourishes at Hull House can guide us today. Though the obstacles are different, our fundamental challenge as we head toward a new millennium, remains the same: How do we as a

community and a nation take responsibility for giving each and every single one of our children the opportunity to fulfill his or her God-given potential.

Sometimes the challenges can seem overwhelming: All across America, children are exposed to crime in the streets and violence on the airwaves; they are tempted by the lure of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs; they are growing up with the burdens of poverty, illiteracy, and poor health; they are contending with the pressures of competing in a new and fast-paced global economy.

My husband often says that there's no problem in America that isn't being solved somewhere in this country. In my travels across the country these past four years, I have met people in cities large and small who have stopped wringing their hands, and are rolling up their sleeves to get the job done for our children.

Nobody is doing -- or can do -- it alone. Every sector of society -- schools, churches, businesses, private foundations, and government must work together to do right by children.

I have met parents, teachers, and community members working to create vibrant, first-class public schools in some of the poorest neighborhoods across America: In Philadelphia, in Corpus Christi, and in the San Fernando Valley.

Companies across America are beginning to recognize that family-friendly policies can actually help, not hurt, the bottom line. The Haggard Apparel Company in Dallas, for example, offers to pay 100 percent of employees' medical expenses during pregnancy if they seek prenatal care during the first trimester. Fel-Pro, an automotive product manufacturer based not far from here in Skokie, offers day care, emergency home care for their workers' sick dependents, tuition reimbursements, college scholarships, and subsidized tutoring for children.

In Kansas City, an entire community -- parents, schools, churches, city council, the media has banded together to create a safer, more nurturing environment for all of the city's children. There, city employees are allowed to take up to four hours of paid leave to participate in school activities, whether or not they have children of their own. Volunteers from all over the city staff programs that give young people productive alternatives to violence and gangs. The city's newspaper dedicated many pages of newsprint to exploring a whole variety of children's issues, from child care to child safety to child health to family values.

And throughout Kansas city, I saw billboards asking citizens the question: "Is it good for the children?" It's a question all Americans, as parents, business leaders, politicians, teachers, should ask themselves before making decisions for their families, their communities, and their country.

For too long, issues affecting children have been considered "soft" issues, issues that are marginal to the weighty political debates and deliberations of our country. But issues affecting

children and families are the hardest issues we face as a nation. They are just as central to our future success and prosperity as national budgets, defense strategies, and trade agreements. We need to make it clear to every American that investing children, in their education, their health, their safety, and their well-being, is not a luxury. It is central to what our nation and people will be.

As governors and state officials, you have a direct impact in the lives of so many children and families. And, as the wife of a former member of the DGA, I know you take this responsibility to our children seriously. You have been leaders in embracing new ideas, in abandoning outdated programs, and forming alliances between government and all sectors of the community to secure opportunities for our children. Through your successes, you have shown all of us the crucial role state governments can play in making sure our children thrive.

All of us can learn from your hard work and insights. Recently, an idea that began at the Governor's Mansion in Georgia led to the President's new initiative to make two years of community college universally available to Americans willing to work hard. Governor Miller's HOPE scholarships, which guarantee tuition assistance to college and trade school students who maintain B-averages, inspired the President's scholarships of the same name.

In the fields of education, economic security, the environment, health care, and crime -- topics so crucial to the well-being of our children -- each of you has brought important progress to your home states. From child care in West Virginia to pre-kindergarten in Georgia to charter schools and higher academic standards in Colorado to School-to-Work in Kentucky to strong juvenile crime laws in Nevada to rigorous environmental law enforcement in Washington to health care purchasing alliances in Florida, these are just a few of the initiatives you and your colleagues are developing to help children and their parents at all stages of life.

But these initiatives are just the tip of the iceberg. We can do more. We can do more by exchanging ideas and pooling information, just as all of you are doing today. This year, I had the privilege of participating in several conferences -- one of them hosted by my good friend Governor Roy Romer -- that focused exclusively on the needs of children. These conferences were special because they weren't just gatherings of academic experts discussing the problems facing our children; they were meetings that brought together a wide variety of citizens -- including parents and children themselves -- to share ideas that work and that have made positive differences in the lives of children.

If we are going to put children first, then we all need to take responsibility. We need all Americans to understand that when it comes to children, we all have experience -- and we all can claim a kind of expertise. We have all been children. We all love our children. We all have visions and aspirations for what they can become.

Lady Bird Johnson once said that children are likely to live up to what you believe of them. Let us commit ourselves to making sure that every single child in this country, whether

it's the son of a Wall Street stockbroker, the daughter of Ohio schoolteachers, or an orphaned child growing up in foster care in Chicago, knows in his or her soul that America believes he can become anything he wants to be, and that we will help make his dreams come true.

Thank you.

###