

**Office of the First Lady
Press Office
Files of Lissa Muscatine**

Contents: FLOTUS Statements and Speeches

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**FLOTUS STATEMENTS
& SPEECHES
12/01/98-4/30/99**

FLOTUS STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES 12/01/98-04/30/99

FLOTUS STATEMENTS & SPEECHES

12/01/98 – 4/30/99

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PEOPLE/Teen Pregnancy Lunch
New York, NY
December 1, 1998

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
People Magazine/Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Luncheon
New York City, NY
December 1, 1998

(The first part of the speech was cut off of the audio tape. Therefore, the first six paragraphs may not correspond exactly with Mrs. Clinton's remarks as delivered. Please do not quote directly from this section.)

I want to start by thanking our co-hosts, Ann Moore and Pat Fili-Krushel, for organizing this luncheon and for using their powerful voices to make a difference in the fight against teen pregnancy. I had the honor in May 1997, to present Ann with an award at the White House for all she's done to educate Americans, young and old, about the tragedy of teen pregnancy and what they can do to prevent it.

And I'm told that I, in turn, have also distinguished myself in her magazine. It seems that back in 1993, I became the first person ever to be on both the best-selling and the worst-selling covers of PEOPLE in the *same* year. So I want to thank PEOPLE, not only for being such wonderful hosts to us all, but also for taking another chance on me today.

That next year, PEOPLE did indeed take a another chance on a cover. As Ann tells it, it was during the days of O.J., Tanya Harding, and Susan Smith -- and they decided instead to put teen pregnancy on the cover, and fill the pages with the real voices of teen moms.

And this is what they had to say: "Ever since I've had Caitlin, I haven't felt like a teenager. I've felt like a mom." "I didn't think I'd get pregnant." And finally, "I made a mistake and I'm going to have to live with it. But I won't have a normal life." These are the voices all young people must hear.

And I want to thank the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and each of you for working to make that possible so that all children can live like children should today and grow up to lead this country tomorrow.

I remember at the State of the Union in 1995, when my husband challenged parents and leaders across the country to create a National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. After the applause died down, a group of dedicated individuals rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Many are in this room today. I especially want to thank Governor Tom Kean, for taking on this cause, championing it, and making it bipartisan right from the beginning. I also want to thank a woman who has made this her...

(Begin actual transcript.)

...life's work and that's Belle Sawhill, who served in my husband's first Administration in the Office of Management and Budget. She really pulled together this entire campaign with her commitment, her vision, and her economist's expertise. And, Belle, it could not have been done without you.

Then, of course, bringing Sarah Brown in was a stroke of genius because she knew as much about teen pregnancy and infant mortality -- often two related subjects -- as anybody in the country .

I think you remember shortly after I moved in to the White House, Sarah came to see me and we sat together and kind of ran through all the ideas we could imagine about what we could do to address this and related issues. She brought to her leadership position not only dedication and understanding, but a real personal stake in it, being a mother of three teenage daughters. And so Sarah has come with personal and professional credentials.

Sarah told some of us recently that she had met with a group of teenage boys in Austin, Texas, and when it came time for questions, one of the young men raised his hand. And she thought it would be the kind of question she's heard from many people about what we can do about teen pregnancy, but instead he asked a very different question. He asked, "What's wrong with teen pregnancy?" And that was an important question for Sarah to be asked and for him to ask because, for a lot of people coming out of different traditions and backgrounds, coming from families where maybe their own mother was a teen mother, it is sometimes difficult to make the case as forcefully as we would like that what might have been acceptable and even doable fifty years ago, is no longer really a possible option for most young people who need more education and more support and face far more temptations than were faced by generations a few decades back. So what's wrong with teenage pregnancy is really a question that each of us has to answer over and over and over again until we've reached everyone like that young man who really doesn't know.

From the very first days, the Campaign has worked to answer that question. When it first came together in late 1995, the President chaired a meeting at the White House where diverse leaders like Ann Moore, Whoopi Goldberg, David Hamburg, Sarah Brown, and Belle Sawhill outlined their vision for this campaign. They saw it as a real partnership between the public and the private sectors, between business and not-for-profits, between community groups and parents. And so they were already on target in thinking of the ways we could address and answer that young man's question.

In large measure, because of this partnership we are now at a turning point in the struggle against teen pregnancy. Teens are getting the message that teen pregnancy is a one-way ticket -- and not just to dreams deferred but to the ending of dreams. Fewer teens are now getting pregnant, fewer teens are giving birth, and fewer teens are having abortions. So we are being successful on all three fronts: fewer pregnancies, fewer births and fewer abortions. More teenagers are understanding their responsibility, working up the courage that it takes to say no, or

being smart and responsible enough to use contraceptives. And perhaps the most important and best news of the last several years is that the birth rate for African American teenagers has dropped a full 21 percent. And that is an astonishing accomplishment. I want personally to commend the African American community across this country -- parents and church groups and community leaders, who all came together and demanded something better of their children and set higher expectations.

Now we know, though, that there are many young people for whom this is still a very real life challenge, and so we have a lot of work ahead of us. And we have some particular groups of people that we have to be concerned about. Young women become pregnant for a host of different reasons. Some don't understand why it's a bad idea, like the young man in Austin who asked the question. Some, though, are coerced by older boyfriends and men, and we need to protect these young girls better than we do now. Others are behind in school, are having problems at home and see this as a way out, see it as way that they can gain maturity, status and somebody to love them. So there is a complex of reasons that we have to address.

And we need to do everything we can using every strategy at our disposal to try to reach every single teenager. And the Administration working with the Campaign is doing just that. For example, under the new welfare reform law we're telling unmarried teen parents that they have to stay in school and live at home or with a responsible older adult in order to receive assistance, including the transition assistance and education assistance they need. There will be more second chance homes where girls can learn the skills to become good parents and avoid getting pregnant again. There will be more abstinence education programs. We are also supporting innovative teen pregnancy programs that reach about 30 percent of American communities and are designed specifically for the communities they address, such as the Administration's new "Girl Power" campaign we are working on with athletes, girl scouts, and others to help girls who often fall victim to the minefields of adolescence to stay healthy and stay confident and stay away from the dangers of pregnancy. We are also working with young men, a very important part of this equation. I was pleased that the President's plan for after-school programs was successful in this last budget. It provided more than \$200 million to give young people safe and supervised places to go after school to keep them away from the crime and sexual activity that too often occurs between 3 and 8 p.m. on every single school day. But we still have four in 10 young women getting pregnant at least once in their teens, and our nation is still paying an annual cost of \$7 billion related to health and social and other kind of needs.

We also have a problem with Hispanic youngsters, and I was particularly pleased to notice on the guest list that we have representatives from our Hispanic American media. For the first time in history, Hispanic youngsters have the highest teenage birth rate in our nation. They are also now the group most likely to attempt suicide and most likely to leave high school -- a full 30 percent drop out and many never even enroll. So although we've made progress in the African American community, which has gotten so much attention in the last several years, we need now to put equal amounts of attention in the Hispanic American community. And again the reasons are very complex, especially among new immigrants and their children coming from

countries very diverse in Central and South America. There are different messages that have to be used to reach these young people. But I think all of us should be very concerned about not only the high teenage birthrate but the high suicide attempt rate among Hispanic young people.

So we've got a lot to do ahead of us. But I think if we continue on the path the Campaign has charted; if we recognize that we're not going to reach young people by lecturing at them or handing them a brochure but need to be much more active in their communities, in their schools, in their churches. And if we are much more realistic in talking to them about their lives, then we know we can make a difference. And I've noticed in the media some of the ways you've done that to reach our teenagers, and I want to thank you. Some of you know that we usually scan magazines read by teenagers. You know, it's all about how girls look, what boys want, how you can make yourself more attractive and more appealing. The message is just a constant one of how the most important thing in the world is to find some boy who thinks that you're special and then have a relationship. But finally we are beginning to see some countervailing messages as well.

After the "Real World" episodes with Pedro Zamora, MTV says more children wrote, called and e-mailed them than ever before. For the first time they said they understood that AIDS could actually happen to them. When young people opened up Teen People a few months ago, there were some pictures of some really attractive, good looking teenagers who said they weren't going to engage in sexual activity and they were cool about it. And that sent a very positive message to the young women who read that magazine. When teenagers tuned in to the BET town hall meeting they could hear the voices of real teenagers who called in and told them what it was like to be a teen mother. One 18-year-old called in -- she has three children -- and she described the struggle she faces every day. There is nothing romantic about it, it's not all dressing her children up in these cute little clothes and showing them off to her friends. It's getting them up in the morning, getting them clothed, getting them bathed, feeding them, putting a roof over their heads.

And thanks to Pat and others of you at ABC, when young people turn on One Life to Live right now, they'll meet Jessica, a young girl whose pregnancy led her to elope and disrupt the life of her entire family. One teenager apparently wrote in about this story line and said, "It's good to see someone on TV struggle with this situation and give the message that it is better to wait, and that if you do have sex to use protection." Now imagine what we could do if even more of the media began putting out messages like that, not just on an occasional basis but on a regular basis -- a daily, weekly, monthly basis. So that we could begin to rebuild children's understanding of what reality really is, what parenthood really is, what the demands and responsibilities are.

Through the work that I've done with teenage girls who become pregnant, going back now, I guess, about 25 years, I am always stunned at how these girls have in their minds this sort of white picket fence, happily-ever-after idea of what is going to happen to them. I've talked with girls who have, literally, only the clothes on their back and the diapers for their babies

who've told me with a totally straight face and all this anticipation in their voice that their boyfriend really is going to come back from the army and marry them and they'll live happily ever after, or as soon as he gets a better job they'll be a family, or everything is going to work out just fine. Well, they need to understand that maybe once in a blue moon somewhere sometime, that does happen, but the real story -- the real tragedy, the real struggles -- of these teenage moms is nothing that they want to dream about or aspire to.

So the more we can demonstrate the gritty reality of what happens to these young men and women who enter into early parenthood too soon, the more we are going to be sending a message of responsibility and of hope. That there is something worth waiting for, there is a future out there that they can have if they stay in school, they get educated, they obtain job skills so that eventually they will be able to support the children that they want so desperately to have.

I know that there has been a powerful video created that asks us to imagine a country where babies don't have babies, where children play outside instead of staying inside to take care of their own children, where no young person ever has to ask what's wrong with teen pregnancy. Well, you are helping us to imagine that country and imagine the lives that will be lived in that country, and the success you've already demonstrated gives me enormous hope that when we meet again next year and the year after and the years to come, we'll see even more progress, and even more young men and women will have something to say "yes" to in their lives. And the messages they receive will reinforce a life of productivity and responsibility and true happiness as they get older and are able to take on the role of being a parent.

Thank you all very much.