

Parents Magazine Awards
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PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

REMARKS AT PARENTS MAGAZINE LUNCHEON

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Thank you. It is a tremendous honor to receive this award...and especially to share the stage with the 1998 National Child Care Awardees who...in homes and centers, in the academy and the government, have been on the frontlines of putting better, safer, more affordable child care within the grasp of America's working families. [Acknowledgments]

And I want to thank Annie, John Heinz and everyone at Parents Magazine for making it clear today that if we truly value children, then we must value the men and women who help us care for them. I remember one provider who told me with tears in her eyes that with the birth of her second child, she had to leave the child care profession, leave the job she loved, and go work in an office because she needed to make more money.

When will we learn that if we want safe and healthy child care, then we need child care providers who are trained and educated...child care workers who stay from year to year...and child care workers who are really compensated for the critical work they do?

You know when I wrote, "It Takes a Village," there were some who criticized me and said, "What could she possibly be talking about -- it takes parents." Well, of course, it takes parents. And the book actually begins with my own parents and grandparents...and how grateful I am for the strength and love and sense of direction and self they gave me. As parents, we know we will always have the primary responsibility for nurturing and guiding our children. But, we also know we can't do it alone. Our children are going to eat food packaged by someone else. Play in backyards other than ours. Come down with illnesses we've never seen.

Parents need information, advocacy, and a place to make their voices heard, and that's what Parents Magazine has helped provide for more than 70 years. You were there in the 20s...telling us how to fatten up underweight children and prevent the spread of disease. You told us why school desegregation was important in the 50s, why we needed seat belts and Head Start in the 60s, why we had to win the fight over women's rights in the 70s. In the 80s, you helped shatter the myth that a working mother can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, care for her children....and still sleep more than 45 minutes a night.

And, in the 90s, I want to thank you for tackling what I believe is the defining issue for working parents today -- child care. For years, parents have whispered about child care problems around water coolers and at the edge of driveways. But you have helped transform these

kitchen-table conversations into a national discussion reaching our State houses...and, yes, our White House and our Halls of Congress.

One Parents Magazine article reads: "If a mother chooses to stay at home and devote herself to creative homemaking and child rearing, she need not harbor any insecure feelings...whether our job is in the armed forces...or in the home caring for children, it is all essential." This statement did not come from the October issue. It was in an article entitled War Jobs for Mothers -- published a full 55 years ago.

When Rosie the Riveter and more than a million of her friends flooded the workforce during World War II, there were some women working in the factories who had to lock their children in their cars or leave them at the local movie theater -- because there was no where else to bring them. Back then, the government stepped in to help provide child care for them because we believed it was in our national interest.

What about now? Now, when the percentage of married working mothers with children under six has more than doubled in the past three decades. Now, when low-income families spend up to a quarter of their earnings on child care. Now, when up to 5 million school-aged children are latch key kids, going home alone after school to sit in front of the t.v...or worse. Now, we must decide it is in our national interest to help parents get child care they can afford and trust.

Many of you were in the room when we heard that message at the White House Conference almost one year ago. It came from parents and experts, from advocates and economists, from the faith community and foundations. They told us that quality matters -- children in better quality child care have stronger language, pre-mathematics, and social skills,

better relationships with their teachers; more self esteem. Yet, the quality of child care in our country is uneven. And good child care is unaffordable for too many working families...too many children are spending their days in places that are at best unnurturing -- at worst unhealthy, even dangerous.

We heard that good after-school programs matter. That most violent crimes involving young people happen between the time they leave school and the time their parents come home. That children in these programs not only stay out of harm's way, but also have better academic achievement and attitudes towards school. Yet, demand for after-school programs outstrips supply 2 to 1.

And we heard about important models being developed around the country to address these challenges. From Massachusetts to California to the awardees today, I have been privileged to see first hand what communities can accomplish when they come together to make good

child care affordable and available. At a first-rate center at Baptist Hospital in Miami, I learned how they had adjusted the hours to fit their 24 hour work day -- and why it made good economic sense to provide this service.

At the Quantico Marine Base in Maryland, I saw what every parent would want for their children -- a beautiful facility, well-trained workers, high standards, unannounced inspections, good wages and solid benefits and respect for the staff. One staff sergeant I met, a single dad raising two little girls, told me that the first day he took them to day care they cried when he dropped them off. The second day, they cried when he came to pick them up.

It is time to take these success stories and rewrite them all over this country. As you know, the President has proposed an historic investment

in child care that would help us do just that. It makes child care more affordable for working families -- through tax cuts and subsidies. It promotes early learning. It improves quality and safety by enforcing state health and safety standards, facilitating background checks and increasing scholarships for child care professionals. And it provides after-school care for up to half a million children a year.

But, one thing I have found is that often times when the President announces something, as he did in the State of the Union, many Americans think the work is over. Early in the summer, I joined Congresswoman Tauscher in her California district. We were at a school which had added on a building for this wonderful after-school program. And we were talking with experts and other supporters of the program. Every question they asked, every comment they made assumed that the President's plan would get through Congress. A teacher said, "You know, I'm so excited that the federal government is going to help us

because we don't have the facilities we need in poor areas for after-school care." [And you know, the Congresswoman and I were somewhat surprised because, of course, we know how difficult it is to get legislation like this through Congress.]

We need to replace this sigh of relief with a national call-to-action. Everyone who cares about child care, everyone who has applauded my husband's commitment -- working families, teachers, advocates, business leaders and the like -- must bring our voices together and once again say for the nation to hear: quality child care is not a luxury, but a fundamental necessity.

This should never be a partisan issue. We are not talking about

caring for Democratic children or Republican or Independent children.

We are talking about caring for American children. Parents cannot go to work without finding safe places for their children...And Congress should not go home without taking important steps to provide them. There is still time to act. Right now, Congress is working on its appropriations bills.

The Senate has included more than \$180 million in new funding for child care. Both houses have increased funding for after-school care, though well below the President's request. These steps are small -- and the need is great. None of us can rest until we finish the job.

And when we do, I believe it will be because parents take the issues that keep them up at night and place them at the front of our national agenda. It will be because parents speak out about the challenges they face with child care -- not only on the soap box, but in the ballot box. Perhaps the time has come for working families to hold our elected officials accountable for their votes on child care. Perhaps the time has come for working families to use the power of their own votes to say that

good child care is just as important to them as trade and taxes.

I hope that at the 75th anniversary of Parents magazine, there will be a lot to celebrate on this front. I hope you will look back with pride at the honorees here today, look back at the contributions you made...and know that this is where the concerns and commitment of working parents turned the dream of affordable and reliable child care into a reality all over this country.

Thank you very much.

