

Remarks for the
Congressional Black Caucus
September 18, 1998
DC

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PRESERVATION

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Parents Magazine Child Care Awards
September 23, 1998
New York, New York**

Thank you. Thank you very much Ann, I am very honored to receive this award from *Parents* magazine which does so much on behalf of parents to inform and educate us. I am very pleased to share this award with the 1998 National Child Care awardees and I hope I have a chance to meet and greet all of them.

I want to thank them personally for what they are doing in homes and centers in the Academy and in corporations, in government, on the front lines everywhere around our country to provide better, safer, more affordable child care and to put it within the grasp of the working American family.

I want to thank Annie and John Heinz and everyone at *Parents* magazine for making it clear that if we truly value children then we must help their families. And we must value people who try to, in their own ways, assist parents in doing the most important task any of us will ever face -- caring for children.

People who are committed to children know how important the work they do is every single day. But all too often, that work is not given the value it deserves in our society. I remember one friend, who told me years ago with tears in her eyes that with the birth of her second child she could no longer afford to remain in the profession she loved -- namely taking care of children. She was going to go to work in an office to earn more money to help support her other children.

So many child care workers face such a dilemma because they can't get the status, the respect, the prestige or income that they deserve to have. When I wrote my book, "It Takes A Village," there were some who criticized me and said, "Oh, what could she be talking about? What is this village? It only takes parents to raise children."

Well, of course it takes parents. There aren't any more important people in a child's life than a child's parents. But it also takes family members. It takes neighbors and school teachers. It is our responsibility to nurture and guide our children along with us. It even takes people who our children and we may never meet. They are the people who keep our water safe, our air clean to breathe and the food that we serve our children safe to eat.

It does take people in society to support families so that families can do the most important work that they are entrusted to doing. In order for parents to do that work they need information, advocacy and a place to make their voices heard. *Parents* magazine has done that for more than 70 years.

I had to go back and review past issues -- I haven't been reading it quite that long. Back in the 1920's *Parents* magazine was telling us how to feed underweight children so that they could get

healthier to help and prevent the spread of disease. In the 1950's *Parents* magazine explained why segregation was wrong and desegregation was important. In the 1960's we wondered about seat belts and Head Start. And in the 1970's there were discussions of the moment about what choices women would make in their lives.

And in the 1980's you were very good about making it clear that a woman's choice should be respected -- women who stay at home full-time caring for their own children and women working for a living who may or may not have children and women like most of us who were trying to be fair to our responsibility in the home and fulfill our obligations at work.

You helped shatter the myth that a working mother can bring home the bacon, fry it in the pan, care for her children and sleep for more than 45 minutes a night. You really did give a little bit of a reality test. And by doing so, made it clear that the choices women make should be respected and that we all have a long way to go in making it possible for each woman, each mother to do the best job she can.

I want to thank you for in the 1990's, tackling what I believe is a very important issue -- a defining issue -- for working parents today, namely child care. For years parents have whispered about child care problems around water coolers and at the edge of driveways. But you helped transform these very private kitchen table conversations into formal discussions which has reached everywhere, including the White House.

One *Parents* magazine article read, "If a mother chooses to devote herself to home-making and child-rearing, she need not harbor any insecure feelings." What I like about this comment is that it was an article which was published fifty-five years ago.

We saw that caring for children outside the home while mothers worked was not harmful to children if it was done appropriately. Now of course we know in today's economy, the percentage of married working mothers with children under six has already doubled in the past three decades. We know that low-income families spend up to 25% of their earnings on child care. We also know that nearly 5 million school aged children are latch key children, going home alone after school usually to sit in front of the TV and they often find themselves in trouble.

Now we have to decide what we really mean about supporting families and caring for children, as Annie said at the White House conference last year. We brought together many people, some of them are in this room today, to talk about what we need to do as a nation.

We know that good child care does make a difference. We know that if we provide good quality, well-trained, well-paid working professionals to care for our children, our children will be better off. I have also listened to stories about all the programs that are being done around our nation to meet the need of child care. And as I listened to the awardees descriptions, I know that good child care is alive and well around our country.

But I also know that there are many places that do not have access to the kinds of child care

provided by the people we honor today. We would like to clone the family day care centers, the corporate day care, the academic programs, so that they could be affordable and universally available to all our families. It is time that we really do fix our child care.

The President's proposal -- which he worked on again with many of you in this room who were very helpful to the White House in crafting the President's announced proposal to make a historic investment in child care -- would do so much good for the children and families in our country. It would make child care so much more affordable for working families through tax cuts and subsidies. It would promote early learning. It would improve quality and safety by enforcing state health and safety standards, by facilitating background checks for all workers and increasing scholarships for child-care professionals to upgrade their income-generating ability. And it also would provide after-school care to over half a million children a year.

I have found as I have traveled around the country since the State of the Union, that many people in America think that because the President announced his child care proposal in the State of the Union, well then, it happened. And I was struck by that when I was with Congresswoman Ellen Taucher when I was in her district in California a few months ago. We were at a school which had added a building for their after-school program. And we were talking to experts and parents and supporters of the program. And every question they asked assumed that the President's child care program was through Congress or was about to be through Congress.

One teacher said to me, "Oh, I am so excited. I want to thank you and your husband because the extra money that we are going to get from the Federal government will allow us to provide more facilities to provide after-school care for many of the poor children in our district that we have left to reach."

Well, the Congresswoman and I looked at each other in amazement because we knew very well that the existing Congress does not have child care at the top of its list of priorities. And that they had not held hearings. They had not done the work that you would expect serious legislators representing working families would do to try and help those families with their child care needs.

Although there are only a few weeks left in this Congressional session, it is not too late for Congress to act on child care legislation. Everyone cares about child care -- everyone who reads Parents magazine, everyone who applauded my husband's announcement and thought we had it done. Everyone -- working families, teachers, advocates, business leaders -- anyone who understands the relationship between high quality, affordable child care and productivity in the work place would make it a point to have their voices heard by contacting members of Congress and making a single message absolute and clear that child care is not a luxury but a necessity.

This should not be a partisan issue. We are not talking about Democratic or Republican or Independent children. This should not be an issue that divides Americans, but instead brings them together across racial and economic and all other kinds of lines we sometimes get a little bit concerned about in our country. We should talk about what parents and children need and the Congress should act now. It should not go home without taking important steps to provide the

support the President asked for on child care.

Right now Congress is working on the Appropriations Bill. The Senate has included about \$180 million for new funding for child care -- far below the President's request, but at least it is a step forward. Both houses have increased funding for after-school care, although well below the President's request. These steps are small and the needs are great.

Congress should help parents meet those needs in the years to come. If parents and those who support parents speak out on behalf of child care, then I believe we will put into place the kind of building blocks that will enable most families to have the kind of child care that we are honoring today with these awards.

You know, children don't vote. But so often the needs of children and working families are overlooked in a great rush to deal with the issues that truly demand the larger votes and the more organized interests. That is not what our country should be like as we move into the 21st century. We must put our children first.

We must make good on the promise we made when we reformed welfare. We will have jobs, child care and health care for people who are going into the work force. What will we be saying to families who are working extremely hard in this very demanding global economy? You have to work and work hard but when it comes to child care you are on your own?

That is not the way to breed security, confidence and competence in the future. I hope that everyone who is eligible to vote in these upcoming elections will think about what is really important in our nation's futures. And there is a long list of issues: education and health care, the environment, social security reform, national security, dealing with terrorism, child care. They are issues which truly affect how we will live in the next century.

Those are the issues that American should be paying attention to. Those are the issues Americans should be voting on. Those are the issues that will make a difference in the kind of country you have in the years to come.

Thank you very much.