

Pediatric AIDS Foundation Awards
Washington Press Club
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Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation Awards
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Washington Press Club
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Thank you all. Thank you. Well, it is my honor to be here, once again, for one of the most important events that I think goes on in Washington every year, as we take the energy and the generosity of individuals, corporations, and foundations in a great show of philanthropic spirit and put that to work on behalf of the extraordinary, groundbreaking work that these scientists and their colleagues are doing. I am grateful to be here with all of you and to have a chance, once again, to thank those of you who support the foundation and the work that Elizabeth started so many years ago.

I want to thank my friend Paul, whom I appreciate for not embarrassing me. But more than that I want to thank him for his courage, commitment, and his support and friendship. I'm honored to be with him once again as we recognize the outstanding work that the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, and these scientists, are doing to push the frontiers of science even further.

I want to thank the remarkable leaders of this foundation, who have helped to build it into what it is today. I know that Suzie Zeegan is often very modest about her contributions, but she has been a stalwart, steadfast voice and heart of this organization for so many years. I'm glad that she is joined by Kate Carr and Janis Spire, and all of you who are on the board and involved in the work of the foundation.

And I want to say a personal word of appreciation and gratitude to Mary Fisher. Her tireless work, her eloquent powerful voice has meant a lot to many of us, and I know that she will not rest until we do all that we can on behalf of the work that she so well represents.

None of us would be here today—not Suzie, not Paul, not me, not Mary—none of us, were it not for the inspirational life and work of our friend Elizabeth Glaser. Her spirit animates this gathering, as it does any time we come together. No one fought harder—or more—to bring attention and resources to the issue of pediatric AIDS. No one who ever heard her speak or met her will ever forget that fabulous laugh and that very persistent effort that she put into making it clear to all she met that this was an issue that was not just confined to those who were suffering from the tragedy of HIV and AIDS—and particularly as it affected children—but for every human being. And that work that she started and that spirit that is still with us has brought hope to millions and millions of children and adults who suffer from this disease. She transformed literally the way this country responds to HIV and AIDS.

It was something that started very simply, sitting around a kitchen table with Suzie and Susan, and deciding to undertake what must, at that time, have seemed like an impossible task.

But once again, one person and a small group of people have made a tremendous difference. And as Margaret Mead famously once said, "It is only a small group of people who ever make a difference in changing the direction of the world."

So here we are to celebrate the 10th anniversary, a "decade of progress, a decade of promise," and to go forward into this upcoming decade with the same level of commitment, motivation, and dedication. And there is no group that has done more than this foundation to make it possible for us to say that we are looking at a decade of promise.

Ten years ago, almost no one knew about AIDS; let alone that it could be transmitted from mother to child. There was ignorance; there was fear. And we have come a very long way indeed. We've come to the point where we can say that there is a pediatric AIDS research agenda and that we can point to the progress that all of us have seen made because of the dedication of scientists.

We can look back at the decade of breakthroughs that have dramatically reduced mother-to-child transmission and greatly improved the quality of life and life expectancy of infected children. There are also more drugs—once only available to adults—that are now benefiting children.

I want to underscore something Paul said and thank all of you who joined us in our fight to make pediatric labeling a reality. It was a long struggle, but it was one that we could not have achieved without the support of this foundation and many of you here today. Now we have a regulation in place assuring that prescription drugs are tested for safety and efficacy in children. This regulation will ensure that doctors know *which* drugs to prescribe and *how much* to give to their youngest patients. We believe this initiative has the potential for saving countless lives, and we could not have done it without you.

In the past several months, the Clinton Administration has also launched new initiatives to address AIDS in minority communities, to strengthen our efforts to find a vaccine, and to boost our international efforts to care for children orphaned by AIDS. Those are three very important initiatives, and let me just briefly address them.

As I look around this room, I see that there are not many representatives of minority communities, which are the hardest hit part of the American population. And certainly if we look abroad and we see what HIV/AIDS is doing in Africa and Asia, it makes that emphasis even more urgent.

The effort to find a vaccine, which these scientists to some extent are focusing their work on, is something that the United States is even more committed to. And working with partners around the world, we hope we will see progress.

And finally, international efforts to care for children orphaned by AIDS are extremely

important. I've seen varying statistics, but I keep seeing the number: 40 million orphans from AIDS in the next ten years.

So we've come together to celebrate what we've achieved, but also to look towards the future. And we have a lot to be thankful for when we look at the health care of our children. In the last six years, because of the leadership of this President and the Administration and the supporters in Congress and elsewhere, we've seen improvements in the health of America's children. Immunization rates are at an all time high, infant mortality at an all time low. And thanks to the President's program for children's health insurance called "CHIP," millions more children are eligible for coverage, and we have to make sure that we reach the 5 million children who are eligible but not currently enrolled.

I'm also pleased to announce today that the President's fiscal year 2000 budget includes a new \$40 million grant program to support graduate medical education. This is something that has worried me for quite sometime. Some of you may know that graduate medical education—how we fund the training of our physicians, our research scientists, our hospitals, and our medical centers—is funded by Medicare. And what we have found over the last several years is that the funding for those who work with children and are being trained to work with children is grossly disproportionate to the need. I can't remember the exact figures, but something like over \$9,000 a year is spent out of Medicare to fund the training and work of physicians who work with adults, and about \$400 a year for those physicians working with children. We have worked for quite sometime to change that, and I am very proud that the President's budget will make a start on that.

There is no way we could talk about treating children with HIV or AIDS or any chronic or acute condition if we don't have the doctors and the trained staff ready and able to treat them throughout our country. So we need to do more to train doctors who care for our children and provide vital health services for the poorest, the sickest, and the most vulnerable among our children.

Too long children's hospitals have been trying to carry this responsibility without adequate resources. I ran into Senator Kennedy as I got off the elevator. Senator Kennedy and others have introduced a bipartisan piece of legislation to make permanent the funding of those who work for children's health and I hope, in addition to the grant, we will see a permanent solution to this problem.

But we have a lot of work ahead of us. Here, and around the world especially, new HIV infections are increasing, and women of color and young people are among the most vulnerable. Every hour of every day, two more American adolescents are infected with HIV. And around the world, 1,600 children are infected every single day.

As we all know, the ravages of pediatric AIDS are the most severe in the developing countries, where over 90 percent of new infections now occur. By the end of this year, 40

million people will be living with HIV or AIDS. And by the end of the next decade, AIDS will have orphaned over 40 million children.

Now when you're confronted with statistics like these, it is sometimes difficult not to feel overwhelmed. But the founders of this foundation and this effort, and Elizabeth herself, would not accept that as an excuse at all. The legacy that Elizabeth leaves us is one that is driven by and shaped by hope, not despair; one that chooses action over inaction; one that is determined, regardless of the odds, to find effective treatments, a vaccine, and eventually a cure.

Now we know that that can only happen if we have the kind of support and dedication of the scientists that we honor today, and I am very proud to ask them to stand and receive their individual awards. These gifted individuals represent some of the brightest investigators from the international research community. While they work at separate research institutions, they all share a deep commitment to not only furthering their own work, but collaborating with those who are their partners here and around the world.

The first recipient is Dr. Robert Doms from the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Doms, will you please come forward? Dr. Doms is investigating how a cell gets infected with HIV. And I told Dr. Doms and the other scientists that I read the summary of their work, and as a lay person, I have to confess I wasn't quite sure what CCR5 was, what it did or what it didn't do, but I know how important the work is that each of them is engaged in. Dr. Doms is attempting to discover how we can block the infection by learning how the cell gets infected in the first place—which would then lead to the development of an effective vaccine. And so on behalf of all us, and literally on behalf of millions of people who will maybe never know your name, Dr. Doms, but will benefit from your work, congratulations! [The First Lady presents the award.]

Dr. Philip Goulder from Massachusetts General Hospital is investigating the immune response of AIDS-infected children in the United States and Africa to bring us closer to the discovery of an AIDS vaccine. I want, particularly, to thank Dr. Goulder and those who work with him for partnering with scientists and physicians in Africa where the need is so acute, and where we have an opportunity to make a tremendous difference. Because, as so many of you know, the progress that we've made in extending life expectancy and quality of life for many people living with HIV/AIDS is dependent upon a very expensive drug regimen which is out of the reach of people in most of the rest of the world. So the work that is being done by Dr. Goulder and others is critical to bringing hope to people in parts of the world that now don't have an opportunity to benefit from what has already been achieved. Dr. Goulder—congratulations. [The First Lady presents the award.]

Next is Dr. Jule Overbaugh from Seattle's Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. She is collaborating with other researchers to further reduce mother-child HIV transmission—particularly during breastfeeding. You know, we spent years persuading women in developing countries to breast feed. This was one of the great causes of the 1970's and early 80's, to persuade them that their breast milk was more effective for their children to build up their

child's immune system, and not to be persuaded by advertisements promoting the use of formula when they didn't even have clean water that they could mix with the formula. But, of course, now we are trying to figure out what we do with that success, because the breast feeding, which is very important for many reasons, is one of the ways that HIV is transmitted. As part of the work that Dr. Overbaugh is doing, she is studying HIV-infected infants and mothers in Nairobi, Kenya. And I want to thank her also for helping to focus on the issue in Africa.
Congratulations. [The First Lady presents the award.]

Dr. Paul Johnson from Harvard Medical School is researching new ways to help boost the immune system's response to HIV infection in children. And that is something else that we are so hopeful about, to learn more about what can be done to fend off HIV once it enters into a child's system, to prolong life and really do everything we can to diminish the impact of HIV and postpone or eliminate the development of AIDS. Thank you, Dr. Johnson for your important work. [The First Lady presents the award.]

You know, I feel, as I hand out these awards to these scientists, the way I felt when I first went to a doctor younger than myself. These four incredible scientists are so young, and for all of us we think of that as a very hopeful sign that the research that is going on is engaging the attention and the intelligence and expertise of our young scientists and researchers. And certainly by evidence of them today and the work that they are doing, we have every reason to be hopeful. So let me on behalf of the foundation thank all of you, who have been part of this work, who have been involved in carving out this very unique contribution that the foundation is making to furthering scientific endeavor and to highlighting the work that these four scientists are doing.

It is a pleasure and an honor for me to be part of this presentation once again, and to do all that I can along with all of you to make it possible for us to move forward against this disease, and do everything we can to protect our children from it, and to help those who already suffer from it to lead lives of quality as they try to fulfill their entire God-given promise.

Thank you very much.