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National Adoption Campaign
Launch
The White House
12/20/99

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Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

The White House, Roosevelt Room
December 20, 1999

Well I think Mario and Pierre and Crystal did a wonderful job, and I'm delighted that they could be part of this program. And I want to thank everyone who is part of this. And thank you so much, Deanna, for your very important comments as well. So to the Robertson family and to the Borie family, and to the members of the Children's Action Network and the Dave Thomas Foundation, and friends and supporters of adoption—including two very important friends and supporters, Senator Larry Craig and Senator Mary Landrew. I want to thank both of you for coming. Also Carolyn Graitm (phonetic), who is the deputy mayor for Children, Youth and Families here in the District of Columbia. Rene Russo, who has become an absolutely unparalleled spokesperson for the cause of adoption. And my friend, Jennifer Perry, who is the executive director of Children's Action Network, who is here with her two daughters, Angela and Casey.

We are delighted to welcome all of you to the White House, and particularly during this time of holiday celebration and remembrance. We just came from reading The Night Before Christmas in the East Room to a large group of children, and this is truly one of our favorite times of year. But as excited as we are about the season, and as much as we have to be blessed for and give blessings for, we know that family is at the core of this holiday time. And we all are very well aware of how many children in our country don't have their own family. We cannot forget the tens of thousands of children who are still waiting for permanent families this holiday season. These children are growing up without the steady guidance of parents to teach them right and wrong, to instill values, to nurture their dreams, to tell them they're special. But many of the adoptive parents here are the best witnesses as to what a wonderful reward and gift that is to be given, to have that great blessing and opportunity to do that.

Over the past seven years, we've all worked very hard to improve foster care and to promote adoptions in America. We started with the Family and Medical Leave Act, which helped adoptive parents—really all parents—take time off to care for their children without fear of losing their jobs or their insurance. We've put an end to racial discrimination in adoption. We've seen tax credits pass for families that adopt. And in 1997, we passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which cut dramatically the amount of time a child has to spend in foster care and set an ambitious goal of doubling the number of annual adoptions by the year 2002. Now that is a goal we are well on our way to meeting, but even meeting that goal is not good enough.

Just last week, some of you were with us as we watched the President sign into law a bill that will provide young people who age out of foster care the extra training, counseling, housing and health insurance they need to fulfill their potential as adults. And as excited and moved as I was to hear the young man and young woman speak about the importance of this program, I really hope that what we do today will help make it possible for us to have fewer and fewer young people aging out of foster care in America.

Now we know that this has to be a partnership. Government alone cannot strengthen our foster care and adoption systems; we have to work together. And I have seen firsthand the wonderful work that businesses and churches and foundations and private citizens do to help find loving, safe, permanent families for America's waiting children.

That's why I'm pleased to join everyone here today in launching this new partnership between the Children's Action Network and the Dave Thomas Foundation. Dave wanted very much to be with us today, but there was a tragic death in his organization, and he was unable to join us. But he has, as many of you know, become a very strong advocate for adoption, which is something he knows firsthand in his own life can make such a difference.

Well I thank the Children's Action Network and the Dave Thomas Foundation for drawing more attention to America's waiting children, through the primetime television special which will be seen, I think, on December 23rd, and through the PSA's that you're sponsoring along with other initiatives. I thank all of the corporate sponsors, especially Scholastic Books, which has donated so many copies of Little Miss Spider, a wonderful book about adoption.

For several years, I've had the privilege of working with the Dave Thomas Foundation on many efforts to promote adoption. And there are few people or institutions that have played a greater role in changing our attitudes, opening our minds, and moving children and families together in adoption. Because Dave cannot be here, we want to extend our sympathies to him in the loss that he and his organization have suffered. But we're very pleased that Jan Heffner (phonetic), the executive director of the Dave Thomas Foundation, could join us today. And I'd like to ask Jan to come forward to say a few more words about the importance of this new initiative.