

2-10-010 Strengthening  
and separating our Families

Strengthening and Supporting Our Families

Sydney Albert Jewish Community Center

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Thank you very much. I think as we all listen to you, we could just feel the pride in your voice as you talk about the influence that this senator had on your life, and now passing on that gift to your children and so many of the children I saw when I walked in, is a wonderful way to pay back some of the great help, assistance, mentoring, love and attention that the senator gave you. I want to thank you and all the members of the community center who have committed yourselves to this undertaking for all these decades.

I am delighted to be here with Mayor Jennings. I thank you, Mayor Jennings, for your leadership and the work that you're doing in the City of Albany, and I'm pleased also to be here with the county executive Michael Breslin, and I thank you, Mike, for all of your hard work.

There are many board members that (inaudible) along with other elected officials from the city and county and other jurisdictions, and I thank you all for joining us today. In a few minutes you'll hear from the three women who are on the platform with me, each of whom has something to tell us about the challenges that confront families today. And there isn't any more appropriate place to have this conversation -- which is what I hope it will be this afternoon after I have a few remarks and we hear from our three panelists -- I hope that we'll be able to talk together about why it is important that we do all we can to strengthen our families, our bonds among one another, and to create safe places and havens such as this center to help make sure that people from two months of age to ninety-two are taken care of and made sure that they have a place to go where their needs are met.

I know that this center has for many years been a resource and a refuge for citizens of all ages. And I have seen with my own eyes the commitment that the community has to fulfilling the traditions and the values that the center represents. I have been traveling the state for many months and in the last four

days I have been thinking about issues that I hear from New Yorkers are important about the future. And I am so pleased to be here with all of you.

On Monday, in Buffalo, I talked about the economy and the need to bring good jobs especially to upstate New York. On Tuesday, I spoke with a large group of people about healthcare and how we're going to meet the needs of all of our citizens from our very youngest to our very oldest. Yesterday in Syracuse, I spoke about education.

And today I want to talk about something that I've worked on for more than thirty years, and that is how we strengthen families and fulfill our commitments to one another.

As I said earlier this week on Sunday when I formally announced my candidacy, the first time I spoke in public in front of a large group was at my college commencement. And it's been thirty years, and I'm a little older, and I'm a little blonder and I'm a lot humbler and I've gone to work and I've volunteered and I've raised a child of my own and I've spent a lot of that thirty years hoping to and working towards bettering the lives of children and families.

I said something back then that I still believe and that is that politics is the art of making possible what appears to be impossible. And every generation faces different challenges about what appears to be impossible and what could be possible. But certainly within the lifetime of many of you in this room as I look about and I see people of all ages we have seen so many things that we did not believe could happen occur because of people's commitment and willingness to work hard together.

Now that is especially true when we look out at the changes in the family and when we look at the changes in our lives. Together, we've been able to make a lot of progress. We could pick any point in time in the last fifty years and talk about that. I've seen it happen in the last seven years with economic progress we've made, and with lowering the crime rate, and with ending welfare as we know it, and doing a lot of the hard work of knitting our society and our families back together.

So I know that if we are committed to goals that we believe are important as reflecting our values as a society, we can

make progress towards meeting them. I think we can make these kinds of challenges we face today about strengthening families and protecting children, and improving education and extending healthcare and bringing good jobs to every corner of New York our common agenda.

And I know that some people are asking why I'm doing this here and now and I just want to answer as clearly as I can about the commitment that I bring to this decision and the work that I would like to do with the people of New York for our common future. I may be new to the neighborhood, but I'm not new to the concerns that New Yorkers have been talking to me about. And for more than thirty years I have worked very hard to create opportunities for families and children and to make my own contribution to my own family and then to families far beyond.

When I traveled around New York in the last months, I heard on back porches of people's homes from Elmira to New Rochelle, from one end of the state to another, what the concerns are. And I think you know them as well as I do. How do we keep families together? How do we support families and children when they can't be kept together? How do we care for our youngest, our oldest, our most vulnerable? How do we make sure we have the time to do what needs to be done to care for children and for the elderly? These are the concerns that people talk to me about.

And what I would like to talk to you about today is some of the things that I think are important for us to address and to care about. First, I believe we have to recognize that our families are changed, that it's not all for the good, at least I believe. We can't turn the clock back, but we have to insofar as possible recreate the conditions that enable parents to do the very best possible job they can at their most important responsibility - raising children.

I believe every child counts, and every child should have a chance, and that raising children is our most important job. But I also believe that parents, no matter how well-meaning and how hard-working often cannot do that alone. I certainly recall that despite the extraordinary amount of preparation and caring and work that I did to be the best possible mother I could be, there were a lot of moments when I did not have the answers and I needed people to help me.

I can recall when Chelsea was a very young infant and was in one of those moods late at night where she just wouldn't stop crying, and I was walking her and I was singing to her which she stopped me from doing when she could talk, and finally I just looked at her and I said, "You know, you've never been a baby before and I've never been a mother before, and we're just going to have to figure out how to do this."

And I know from my own experience that we all need help, everyone of us, and we have to turn to one another for that help, to our extended families, to our churches and our synagogues, and community centers like this one. And every part of society does have a responsibility to help families do the best job that we can. That's why I wrote a book called "It Takes A Village," because although parents do have that primary responsibility, we do need to help each other and we do as a nation have a duty to help each of us succeed at home and at work.

In my book I wrote about a wonderful report that the U.S. Catholic Conference issued in 1991. It pointed out the kind of false choice that we sometimes feel like we're faced with here in America. And this is what they said: no government can love a child and no policy can substitute for a family's care. The government can either support or undermine families as they cope with the moral, social, and economic stresses of caring for children. So when I talk about good jobs, and health care and education, I am talking about what we can all do to try to help us meet those responsibilities.

If I am fortunate enough to be elected to the Senate, I will introduce a bill to provide a \$1,000 tax credit for mothers and fathers, if they choose, who stay at home with their newborns. The first year we know from all the research and from our own common experience, is a critical one for the bonding between parents and children. I know first hand as many as you do, that it is a very important difficult job. If we give more support, not just lip service, but more support, to parents so that they can choose to stay home if they can afford to do we will be making a very strong statement about what we truly value.

We also have to do more for those, who by necessity or choice, work outside the home. We make it so difficult for mothers, particularly, to be able to be good parents and good workers. Three out of four mothers with young children now

work outside the home. And over the past seven years in the White House, I have fought hard to double America's investment in childcare. But we know that the need is even greater than we have been able to meet so far.

Childcare costs can claim as much as a quarter of a low income family's budget; and federal child care assistance meets just 10% of the needs. I think our children deserve better. I will work very hard to make childcare more affordable, safer and acceptable to all families.

For middle income families, I support raising the childcare tax credit from 30 - 50% of child care costs. For working families who do not make enough taxable income, I support making that credit refundable. That way we can help nearly two million families with their childcare bill.

And I will fight to increase the investments in childcare subsidies, so that more struggling families can get the help they need. For businesses that are willing to do their part, I support tax credits to help cover the costs for on site child care or referral services. And for colleges that want to help parents go back to school, I support grants to build new childcare centers on campuses.

As I was leaving the hotel this morning in Syracuse, there were three maids in the hallway. And they said hello to me. Almost as though it was a chorus, they said to me, "Mrs. Clinton we need help with childcare. We cannot afford good childcare. We don't have any reliable childcare."

I hear it all over. No matter what setting I find myself in.

Finally: to raise quality. I support an early learning fund to ensure that children are prepared for the challenges of school. So that making sure that childcare centers get accreditation, improve their curriculum, and reduce their child to staff ratio.

I have what I call the Chelsea test. Whenever I walk into any place that cares for children, whether it's a school or a child care center, I always ask myself, is this a place that I would want to leave my daughter.

Now there is not any doubt in my mind. . . I would have been honored to leave my daughter here. But I go into places, where I have to honestly say, "No, I would not." I would hope

that we could get to a point, where we would all feel confident, that everywhere that cared for our children had the same quality of excellence and commitment that you all are lucky enough to have here. We also have to do everything we can to make sure parents, fathers especially, take responsibility for paying their child support.

No over the past seven years, we have seen a doubling in the collection of child support payments under the administration's leadership. I am pleased to have been part of that effort. But we have a long way to go.

Today, 1 in 3 children in America live without their fathers. In nearby Montgomery and Fulton Counties, where I just was, 40% of children are born outside of marriage. Now with looking at the statistics, because very often people think that our only problems with out-of-wedlock marriage and children are in our big inner cities. But if you look at New York, some of the highest rates of out of wedlock births are in our rural areas and the two that are nearby are a perfect example.

Therefore too many children live needlessly in poverty or on welfare, simply because their fathers do not accept responsibility and pay child support. I will fight for tough new laws to crack down even harder on dead beat parents. I will fight to pass laws that say to these parents, you will not be able to keep your gambling winnings or receive a passport until you have honored your responsibility to your children. If you get a raise at work, you will have to take steps to ensure that your children benefit from that income. I will also fight to pass laws requiring parents who owe child support to go to work.

And I challenge our credit card companies to deny new cards or new lines of credit to parents until they pay their child support payments. There should be no obligation or debt more important than paying for your own children and giving those children a decent wage to live on.

So we have to make sure that no parent ducks his or her financial responsibility to their children. We also have to do more to try to make it possible for parents who are willing to take responsibility and support their children to have a chance to do so. That's why I think we have to implement new fatherhood responsibility measures, measures that would help low income fathers, who are not living with their children, be

trained for and get jobs, to be able to pay child support, and become better parents.

I will fight for more efforts to help hard-pressed families get the job training, the health care, the child care, the housing, the transportation they need to stay off welfare.

We have a lot of work if we are going to take this large group of children who are not able to get the support they need, from one or both parents. And do what is necessary to set an example for them, so that they can break the cycle and become responsible parents in the future.

Just think about the efforts we have undertaken to reduce teen pregnancy in the last seven years. I am very pleased that a very broad based community effort that I was a part of and so many others around our country has resulted in teen pregnancy rates being the lowest on record. We are heading in the right direction. In the past 8 years, those rates have declined by nearly 20%. But there are still too many American children having children.

That's why I support and would work hard to continue Senator Moynihan's leadership on efforts to create what are called second chance homes for unmarried teen parents, who cannot live at home with their adult relatives. At second chance homes, which are often run by organizations such as this center or community or faith-based organizations, teen moms learn discipline, they learn parenting or other life skills, they learn how to raise healthy children. Studies show that teen moms who have lived at these second chance homes are less likely to become pregnant again and more likely to finish high school.

I have visited some of these homes. Recently, in Rochester, I visited one that is having a tremendous effect. They take young mothers, who sometimes are fleeing domestic violence, sometimes drug or alcohol abuse. They put them into these homes, actually tiny little houses with a prominent center, where they come to have their children receive child care, where the children go to kindergarten, such as children here can, where the mothers got job training, where they are encouraged and helped to finish their education, because what those young mothers need is the kind of parenting they never received. And that is exactly what happened. And as a result, you can see as I did when I met with these young

mothers, that the lessons really take. They leave these second chance homes are much better able to be independent, self-sufficient, and set good examples for their own children.

These are just some of the ways that I think we can support and strengthen New York's families, particularly families that are at risk, and whose children we have to clearly set a better example for. I am no stranger to these issues, they have been my life's work, and I think they are among the most important issues that the next Senator from New York will face.

I have greatly appreciated the help and encouragement that so many of you and others from around New York have given to me. And this will be, insofar as I am concerned, a campaign about the issues that people talk to me about. I am going to run a campaign that uses the best wisdom and ideas of the people of New York. And I pledge to you that I will go to Washington and serve in the Senate to be a voice for the kinds of concerns that so many of you have.