

Remarks During the Morning Session of the White House Conference on Child Care October 23, 1997

[*The First Lady welcomed the conference participants, and a videotape was shown.*]

The President. Thank you very much. Welcome to the White House. Thank you very much, Kathy Carliner, for your remarkable statement. And I thought you were very good in the film. Rob Reiner wants to give you a screen test. [*Laughter*]

I am so happy to see all of you here. There are many people here who might well be introduced, but I think I must start with the people who are terribly important to whether we will be able to fully achieve our part of the great agenda we are going to lay out today, the Members of Congress who are here. And I'd like to call their names and then, when I finish, ask them all to stand.

Senator Herb Kohl, who sponsored legislation on child care; Senator Jack Reed; Congressman Bill Clay; Congressman Sandy Levin; Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro; Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey; Congresswoman Sue Kelly; Congresswoman Maxine Waters; Congressman Xavier Becerra; and Congressman Nick Lampson. Would the Members of Congress who are here please stand? Thank you for coming.

I'd also like to thank my longtime friend—Hillary and I have been friends of Governor Jim Hunt and his wife, Carolyn, who are here, for almost 20 years now. And I think Governor Romer is here or on his way. Mayor Cleaver, we're glad to see you. And John Sweeney, the head of the AFL-CIO, and others who have come to be with us today, I thank you very much.

This is a happy day at the White House, first, for all the people in the administration and all those who have worked with them for months and months and months to help this day come to pass. And second, and even more important from my point of view, this is a happy day because I have been listening to the First Lady talk about this for more than 25 years now—[*laughter*—and it may be that I will finally be able to participate in at least a small fraction of what I have been told for a long time I should be doing. And I say that in good humor but also with great seriousness.

This is an anniversary of sorts for me. It was 6 years ago today, as a newly announced candidate for President, that I went back to my alma mater at Georgetown and began a series of three speeches outlining what I thought America ought to look like in the 21st century and what I thought we would have to do to create a country in which everyone had an opportunity, everyone was expected to be a responsible citizen, and where we came together, across all the lines that divide us, into one community.

There are many things that are necessary for that to be done, but clearly two of them are, first, people in this country have to be able to succeed at work and at home in raising their children. And if we put people in the position of essentially having to choose one over the other, our country is going to be profoundly weakened. Obviously, if people are worried sick about their children and they fail at work, it's not just individual firms, it's the economic fabric and strength of the country that is weakened. Far more important, if people fail at home, they have failed in our most important job and our most solemn responsibility.

Second, we'll never be the kind of country we ought to be unless we believe that every child counts and that every child ought to have a chance to make the most of his or her God-given abilities.

That's why we're here today, to examine where we are and what we still have to do. And what we still have to do is quite a lot, to make sure we live by what we believe when we say that all parents should be able to succeed at home and at work and that every child counts. No parent should ever have to choose between work and family, between earning a decent wage and caring for a child. Especially in this day and age when most parents work, nothing is more important, as you have just heard Kathy Carliner say, than finding child care that is affordable, accessible, and safe. It is America's next great frontier in strengthening our families and our future.

As the Catholic Conference has noted, no government can love a child and no policy can

substitute for a family's care. But there is much that we can do to help parents do their duty to their children. From my days as Governor of Arkansas to my service as President, strengthening families has been a central goal of what I have worked on. I'm very proud that the first bill I had the opportunity to sign into law as President was the Family and Medical Leave Act, so that no parent has to choose between caring for a child or keeping a job when a family member is ill.

The expanded earned-income tax credit helps to ensure that parents who work don't have to raise their children in poverty. No one who is out there working full-time with children should have to worry about that. Expanded Head Start programs are serving more families than ever before. We've collected record sums of child support enforcement. The historic balanced budget I signed this summer provides a \$500-per-child tax credit and helps parents to pay for their children's college education through IRA's, expanded loans and Pell grants, the HOPE scholarship, and other tax credits.

The Congress has before it now a program of Secretary Riley's called 21st Century Community Schools, in which we ask for funds to help our States keep our schools open after classroom hours for children who have no place else to go and need that environment.

We've also made some progress on child care. Since 1993, child care assistance has increased by 70 percent to help families pay for nearly a million children. Last year in the welfare reform debate, we fought and won the battle to expand child care assistance by \$4 billion over the next 6 years, giving States an unprecedented opportunity to lead, to innovate in efforts to make child care more affordable.

But we have to do more. With more families required to rely on two incomes to make ends meet, with more single-parent families than ever, more young children are left in the care of others even in their earliest years. And as the First Lady said, we learned at our Conference on Early Childhood and the Brain, that's when children develop or fail to develop capacities that will shape the entire rest of their lives. It's also true that more and more schoolchildren are returning to empty homes after school.

The first thing we have to do is to make it possible for parents to spend time with their children whenever possible. That's why I hope the Congress will vote to expand the family and

medical leave law so that parents at least can take some time off for their children's medical appointments, teacher conferences, and other basic duties. And I support flextime laws that will allow workers to choose between receiving overtime in pay or in time off with their families.

But during those times when children can't be with their parents, they must get care that keeps them safe and that helps them to learn and grow. As we all know, too often that isn't the case. Too often child care is unaffordable, inaccessible, and sometimes even unsafe. The cost, as Hillary said, strains millions of family budgets. And government assistance meets just about a quarter of the need. Even for those who can afford it, sometimes good care is hard to find, as Kathy said in her remarks. Waiting lists sometimes takes months or years to move, forcing many parents to cobble together unstable arrangements.

The shortage of care puts older children at risk, as well. Five million of them between the ages of 5 and 14 are left to fend for themselves after school. And as they get older, that increases the chances that they'll be exposed to drugs, tobacco, and crime.

Finally, studies have shown that too many child care facilities are literally unsafe. The tragedies that have befallen families who depended on child care continue to make headlines all across our nation. This conference is an important step forward in addressing all these issues. What we learn today should spur us on to find ways to help parents, all parents, afford safe, affordable, high quality child care, whether it's at home, a child care center, or a neighbor's house.

In the coming months, our administration will develop a plan, to be unveiled at the next State of the Union, to improve access and affordability and to help to assure the safety of child care in America. In the meantime, I want to announce four specific things we can do right now.

First, I'm asking Congress to establish a new scholarship fund for child care providers. Too many caregivers don't have the training they need to provide the best possible care. Those who do have training are rarely compensated with higher wages. The scholarship program I propose will help students earn their degrees as long as they remain in the child care field

for at least a year, and it will ensure that caregivers who complete their training will receive a bonus or a raise.

Second, we have to weed out the people who have no business taking care of our children in the first place. I am transmitting to Congress the “National Crime Prevention and Privacy Compact,” which will make background checks on child care providers easier and more effective by eliminating State barriers to sharing criminal histories for this specific purpose. I urge Congress to pass and States to ratify this legislation.

Third, I’ve asked Secretary Rubin to oversee a working group on child care, composed primarily of business leaders working with labor and community representatives, to find ways more businesses can provide child care or help their employees afford high quality child care. And again, I thank John Sweeney for his important support of this initiative. In some ways, the most gripping part of that film we saw was the father talking about how he was just consumed with worry at work. No parent should ever have to go through that.

Finally, we must use community service to strengthen and expand access to after-school programs. Today, the Corporation for National Service through its To Learn and Grow Initiative will pledge to help after-school programs all across our country to use volunteers to provide better care to children. It is releasing a how-to manual for groups who want to incorporate community service into after-school programs. And I think that, Secretary Riley, if we can win in our little budget battle here on the 21st Century Community Schools, then together, we can do some real good out there on this issue.

My friends, for centuries—over two now—the American dream has represented a compact that those who work hard and play by the rules should be able to build better lives for themselves and for their children. In this time and even more into the future, child care that is too expensive, unsafe, or unavailable will be a very stubborn obstacle to realizing that dream. So let us commit ourselves to clearing the obstacle, to helping parents fulfill their most sacred duty, to keeping the American dream alive for them and, most important, for their children.

Thank you very much.

[At this point, the First Lady opened the panel discussion. Ellen Galinsky, president and co-

founder, Families and Work Institute, discussed the need to provide better quality child care as a choice for parents.]

The President. I’d like to ask one question. First of all, I can’t help saying this—when I heard you say that warm and responsive child care actually triggered a biochemical reaction that reduced stress—I wish we could have a center like that for the White House staff and the Congress staff. [Laughter] We may actually come up with a revolutionary new proposal here today. [Laughter]

Let me ask you a serious question. One of the things that I constantly try to deal with here, that I’m supersensitive to because I was a Governor for 12 years before I came here, is trying to determine who should do what—what we can do and make a difference, what we have to basically either exhort or incentivize or require some other people to do.

I was quite taken by the comment you made that only 36 hours of training of a child care worker can make a huge difference. I can’t help thinking there probably are a lot of young, often single parents that might benefit from the same 36 hours of training. And I’m wondering how you think that issue ought to be dealt with. Should States basically upgrade their training standards and put funds into it? Should there be training centers established, more than are there now—even if everybody were required to do it, are there enough places that do the training in all States?

Talk a little bit about how we might set up an infrastructure and pattern of training to give—let’s suppose we said within 2 years we wanted every child care provider, even people who do it out of their homes, wherever, to get the 36 hours of training, and we’d like it to be open, let’s say, to low-income parents who are having their first child—how would we do such a thing?

[Ms. Galinsky discussed available resources and the level of interest in training.]

The President. But what percentage of the people who are now providing child care get that kind of training? That’s the question I’m trying to get.

[Ms. Galinsky responded that in a recent study, few caregivers actually completed required training. The First Lady agreed that the child care licensing system compared poorly to that for

other professions. The discussion then continued concerning care before and after school hours.]

The President. Thank you. I would just like to make a couple of observations. I thought what you said was terrific. First of all, until—the crime rate in America has been going down for 5 years now, rather steeply, but it's been going up among people under 18. It may have leveled off, may be dropping a little bit now; we're hopeful. But if it is, it's because more and more communities are doing what you suggested. We need another—at least another year to see whether it's changed.

You are very familiar with what's been done in Boston, and one of the things that's been done is the whole sort of juvenile justice system has been geared to be warm and responsive. Juvenile probation officers make house calls with police officers, and community groups walk the streets in the afternoon to, basically, almost pick the kids up and give them things to do and get them involved with things. And as far as I know, it's the only major city in America where nobody under 18 has been killed by a gun in 2 years now. But it's not rocket science. It's a systematic attempt to take personal responsibility for all these children after school. And I can tell you, if you see the flip side of it in these juvenile crime rates, it's really touching and quite moving.

The other thing I wanted to say is, I wondered if you had any sense, just as a practical matter, of whether these programs tend to work better if they are school-based. And the reason I ask that is, I think that we fight these battles around here all the time of how to spend the school money—and most money for schools comes from the State and local level anyway. But I think one of the biggest problems that these schools have on the issue you've talked about is that in school after school after school after school, financial problems have caused them to cut back on their art programs, cut back on their music programs, cut back on their nonvarsity athletic programs. The things that children used to typically do after school or could stay after school and do, these school districts, as they're now budgeting and as they're now staffed and under the rules under which they now labor, they cannot—more and more schools are dropping these programs. And I think it's disastrous, because a lot of it is just exactly how children relate in a kind of a non-

linear, just purely intellectual way that both of you have said is so important. And I was wondering if you've seen that and if you think that's contributing to the problem.

I mean, a lot of people, without any programs, used to just stay after school because there was an art project, there was a music project, you were getting ready for a concert, the intramural teams were playing. And this is—you know, there are huge school districts in this country where all of these things are a thing of the past. People look at you like you've lost your mind when you talk about this now; they haven't had these things in years.

And it may be that one of the things we ought to be exploring is whether we can reinstitute some of these things in the lives of our schools that would naturally lead to an out-of-school atmosphere so they wouldn't think about adopting a new program approach. Anyway, I just kind of wanted to ask you that: Are the schools the best place if they work, or does it not matter, if you do it right?

[Michelle Seligson, founder and director, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, responded that it was a community-by-community decision and then described the components of good after-school programs. The discussion then continued.]

The President. I have to excuse Secretary Rubin in a moment to return to his duties, but I wanted to make one point and ask one question. The point I want to make is, he tries real hard to put on that sort of cold shtick, you know, that this is just economics, but—

Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin. “Shtick” is an Arkansas term. *[Laughter]*

The President. I learned that from him, that word, you know. *[Laughter]* But I'm sure you could see there was more there.

It occurred to me, listening to you talk about this, that this child care issue is an example of what makes our work both wonderful and maddening. How many times have Secretary Riley and I said that every problem in American education has been solved by somebody in some school somewhere, so why don't we get uniform excellence?

I just had the most difficult policy development process I have been through, I think, since I've been President, that Secretary Rubin and I did together. It was on trying to develop America's position on climate change. But it had

very little to do with the science. There is literally enough technology out there today to enable us, without lowering our standing of living, indeed while raising our standard of living, to substantially cut our emissions of greenhouse gases. And I can cite you industry after industry after industry that's made a ton of money doing it on their own, so why doesn't everybody do it? Why don't we even have a critical mass of companies doing it? And I ask you that question.

So we've got another example here with child care. If you can cite these examples where all of these companies are making money and having happy, more productive employees, what are the barriers? Why is the market dysfunctional in cases like this, and what can we do to make it work? Because if we were trying to get hook-ups to the Internet, we'd have 100 percent penetration in one-tenth of the time it takes us to get 10 percent penetration for educational excellence, environmental conservation, or the spread of child care. What's the difference? [Laughter]

Secretary Rubin. Are you asking me? [Laughter]

The President. I think it's the single, most important question about social policy today. You and I think about this all the time, but I don't know what you think about this.

This is not in the notes, you know, he's not prepared to say this.

[Secretary Rubin suggested a peer group approach to identify and promote best practices to deal with such problems.]

The President. Thank you.

[The First Lady then continued the panel discussion on ensuring access to safe, affordable child care.]

The President. I was glad to hear what you said about not being able to sit still after 3 o'clock. I'm glad to know you've been sitting still before 3 o'clock. [Laughter] I didn't know—I have never seen you still for 2 minutes in all of our acquaintance. This is amazing. [Laughter]

I don't think you can answer this now, but I think it's quite important that we be explicit about a dilemma that we will face as we move toward next year—the State of the Union, what our position ought to be. We all know that there will be, in the context of the budget agreement we just adopted, fierce competition for limited

money. We're going to have some more money to put into this; we'll do the very best we can. It will be a priority, but still, it seems to me that there will be competition for what the best way the Federal Government can spend more money in child care is.

We could increase the tax credit to either make it more generous to people who get it now or move it up in the income limits. We could expand Head Start, particularly the Zero To Three program, where we've only got just a few thousand kids now—25,000 or something—and I think the early results are pretty promising. It's a terribly important initiative.

Or we could devise some way to help get these salaries up, which—you know, abysmal. When you were talking about the salaries, Hillary gave me a chart which showed that child care workers on the whole are better educated than the American work force and lower paid. So we keep saying we want all these people to come in and get more education and more training, and yet—and there are some cases where people don't have any education or training, but there are a lot of them that are quite well-educated that are working for ridiculously limited wages.

So what's your sense about how we ought to go about making that decision? And I'll just give a blanket invitation to the audience, too, that if you were in my position and you knew you couldn't do 100 percent of all these things, would you do a little bit of all of them, would you focus on one, would you focus on the other? And I invite you to make your views known to us, either today during the conference or in writing, because this will be a difficult thing. Congressman Lampson is still here; he's going to have to make a decision about how to vote on this stuff. And we will have to decide.

[Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala said that resources should be invested in quality, focusing on caregivers. The discussion then continued.]

The President. Well, thank you very much. I agree with the last thing you said for sure. [Laughter]

Let me say, the reason I wanted Governor Hunt to come here today, apart from our 20 years of friendship and my immense admiration for him, is that—if I could go back to the question I asked Secretary Rubin—the great trick

we have with all great social questions in America is—that we know that Government can't solve alone, either because we don't have the resources or the capacity—is how to have grassroots, community-based partnerships that still, when the day is over, add up to a system that serves everybody instead of just makes nice, touching stories we can all tell each other at seminars till kingdom come.

And that is what they have done in North Carolina. They have kept the entrepreneurial spirit. They have the partnership. They've cobbled money together, from first one place, then another, and he's put a lot of new money in it, and because he has taken this initiative and set up a framework within which creativity and partnership can flourish, they have a system. And I still believe—I'll say it again—I think that is the great sort of challenge that America faces that goes across so many of our problems and plainly relates to this.

The only question I wanted to ask you about it that I would like you to specifically address is, do you have enough money to deal with the dilemma that raising quality standards must increase your cost to some extent, and does that price anybody out of it? And if not, why not?

[Gov. James B. Hunt of North Carolina stressed the need for additional State and Federal funding, as well as help from the business and non-profit sectors.]

The President. You know, just one other thing I'd like to say that I think we ought to consider—this is a little thing, but you talked about the bully pulpit—I think a lot of people are just plain old-fashioned ignorant about what's involved in being an effective, successful child care worker—would be surprised at the average educational level of child care workers in America and the average pay. And I think that we ought—one of the things that we ought to do with this bully pulpit idea of yours is start trying to find ways that every community and every State can honor outstanding child care workers the same way we honor teachers today, or scientists or others, because I think that's terribly important. I just don't think society—I don't think they mean to devalue people in this work, I just think they don't know—most people.

[Governor Hunt agreed, noting that he held an awards banquet for child care workers in North Carolina last year.]

President Clinton. I don't think you can underestimate how important it is for people to say to other people that they matter. And if it matters in your personal life, it's got to matter in all these other areas, too. I think it's a big issue.

[*The First Lady thanked Governor Hunt for his example, and the discussion continued.*]

The President. Well, that is, I think, an extraordinary way to wrap up our morning session. I can't think of anything that could be added to what you said. But if you think about what all of our last speakers said, it amounts to a plea to us to do what we can to both increase the coherence and completeness of community-based action within a framework that creates a system that involves all our children.

And again, let me say to all of you involved in this work, I am profoundly grateful to you. I thank you for being here today. This has been an immensely enlightening day to me. I have been struggling to understand this issue, especially since one day several years ago—we all have our little epiphanies in life about these matters, but Hillary had been talking to me about child care for years, and one day when I was running for Governor, well over a decade ago—I used to make a habit in every election season of going to the earliest plant gate in my State, because the workers came to work between 4:30 and 5:30, and even the vote-hungriest politicians wouldn't get up that early, so I always had them all to myself. [Laughter]

And I never will forget, one day I came home and I told Hillary, I said, "You won't believe what happened to me at a quarter to 5 this morning." It was a Campbell soup plant in North Arkansas, and this pickup truck rolled up. And as often happened, the husbands and wives—and one was taking the other to work, and they would come up in the dark and kiss each other good-bye. And so this pickup truck came up, and this lady leaned over and kissed her husband good-bye and opened the door. And the light came on, and inside were three children under the age of 5.

And so I went over and talked to the young man when his wife went into work at a quarter to 5. I said, "What are you doing with these kids? I mean, how do you do this?" He said, "Well, we've got to get them up every morning at a quarter to 4, and we dress them up." And he said, "I keep them as long as I can, but

I have to be at work at 7. So I had to find somebody who would take care of them at 6:30—three kids under 5. But he said, “We’ve got three kids under 5. We both have to work.”

Now, there are millions of stories like that. And they are no less gripping for the parents than those who don’t have quite such strange circumstances. But it is inconceivable to me that we have had all of you wonderful people working at this and we’ve put all this money in it, and we still never developed a systematic approach or, in the words of Patty, a quilt that

everybody can be a part of. And that, I think, we should all leave as our mission.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:15 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to working mother Kathy Carliner, who introduced the President; Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado; Mayor Emanuel Cleaver II of Kansas City, MO; John J. Sweeney, president, AFL-CIO; and Patty Siegel, executive director, California Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

Statement on the Death of Ann Devroy *October 23, 1997*

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn that Ann Devroy, longtime White House correspondent for the Washington Post, passed away earlier today.

For more than a decade, no journalist dominated and defined the White House beat with the kind of skill, shrewd analysis, and gruff grace that Ann brought to her reporting. As the saying goes, she always knew how to afflict the comfortable—and she made more than one President squirm—but she did comfort the afflicted.

When White Houses did not get a fair shake in the press, Ann would often be the first to set the record straight. And she always wrote and reported with the interests of her readers first in her heart, trying always to make the White House story easier for a citizen to grasp.

Her friends in the press, her friends here at the White House, and all those who admired her tough but fair reporting will join me and Hillary in extending to Mark, Sarah, and Ann’s family our deepest condolences.

Statement on Signing the Second Continuing Resolution for Fiscal Year 1998

October 23, 1997

I am pleased to have signed into law today House Joint Resolution 97, the second short-term continuing resolution for fiscal year 1998.

The resolution provides 1998 appropriations for continuing projects and activities of the Federal Government through November 7, 1997, except those funded by the five bills that I have already signed into law.

I urge the Congress to approve the remaining 1998 spending bills that include the items contained in the Bipartisan Budget Agreement and to provide funding for other priority programs. To give the Congress time to adopt such bills,

I have approved this second continuing resolution.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,

October 23, 1997.

NOTE: H.J. Res. 97, approved October 23, was assigned Public Law No. 105–64.