

HILLARY CLINTON ON CHILD CARE

Hillary Clinton was an active First Lady and later, a U.S. Senator. Child care issues remained one of her concerns, as this condensed speech shows.

I wanted to come and tell you why this is an issue that deserves White House attention, and deserves the attention of our nation.

More and more families are seeking child care. Over half of all the infants under age one are in day care. Twelve million children under the age of six, and 17 million more age six through 13, have both parents or their only parent in the work force.

The plain fact is that there is simply not enough quality care for the children who need it. Quality care is financially out of reach for the hard-working American families whose children deserve the best attention they can receive.

Now, there are many reasons to put our children's needs first. One reason is because we know that how we care for our children is critical to their intellectual and emotional development. Just 15 years ago, even scientists thought that a baby's brain structure was virtually complete at birth.

Now, neuroscience tells us that it is a work in progress, and that everything we do with a child has some kind of potential physical influence on that rapidly forming brain.

Experiences in those first three years of life can also determine how well a child learns. When someone speaks, reads, or plays with an infant or toddler, he or she, whether it is a parent, a grandparent, an older sibling or care-giver, is activating the connections in that child's brain that will one day enable her to think and read and speak and solve problems herself.

Now, what that means is that sub-par care, whether in the home or in a child care

setting, means that a young brain is being deprived of what it needs to live up to its natural potential.



Another reason we need to act is that we now have evidence that child care is too often inadequate.

A recent national study of child care centers found that 70 percent of children are in care that is barely adequate. Ten percent are in care that is dangerous to their health and safety.

That means that they spend hours of their days with care givers who do not follow basic sanitary practices, who rarely cuddle, talk to or play with these infants and toddlers, in rooms that lack toys and other materials to encourage development, and in places where the ratio of children to adults is too high for individual attention.

Now, there's no doubt that the most important, lasting influence on any child is that child's family. But we know that good, quality child care can improve a child's chances, if that child is in a difficult family situation. So turning to child care is not just something that is a nice issue to talk about.

It is, as the President calls it, the next great frontier of public policy. To build up and strengthen our families, to give them more support so they can do their jobs both at home and in the workplace, will help us chart that frontier for generations of American children to come.

Group Discussion: *What are the main points Hillary Clinton makes about the need for better day care for children? What does she mean when she says the issue is "the next great frontier of public policy"?*