

ORIGINAL

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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PRESENTED TO THE SAFE KIDS SYMPOSIUM

"UNITING AMERICA TO FIGHT CHILDHOOD INJURY"

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(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I'M DELIGHTED TO TAKE THE PODIUM THIS MORNING AND OPEN THIS SYMPOSIUM. WE'VE GOT A LOT OF THINGS TO TALK ABOUT TODAY AND TOMORROW.

AND THEN WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO OUR COMMUNITIES AND TURN THAT TALK INTO ACTION.

WE MUST DEMAND -- AND WE MUST WORK FOR -- SAFER ROADS AND HIGHWAYS.

WE MUST DEMAND -- AND WE MUST WORK FOR -- SAFER SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND PLAYGROUNDS.

WE MUST DEMAND -- AND WE MUST WORK FOR -- A SAFER MARKETPLACE, ESPECIALLY SAFER TOYS AND BICYCLES.

AND WE MUST DEMAND OF EACH OTHER -- AND WE MUST WORK WITH EACH OTHER -- TO ACHIEVE SAFER HOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN.

IT IS STILL SHOCKING TO ME, WHEN PEOPLE TELL ME THAT -- BASED ON THE COLD, HARD STATISTICS -- THE GREATEST POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE AVERAGE AMERICAN CHILD IS ... THAT CHILD'S OWN FAMILY AND HOME ENVIRONMENT.

THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. AND WE'VE GOT TO CHANGE IT.

HOW WILL WE DO THAT? HOW WILL WE CHANGE THE DANGEROUS
HABITS ... THE HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR ... THE THREATENING LIFESTYLES
... THE UNSAFE CONDUCT OF A NATION OF NEARLY A QUARTER OF A
BILLION MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN?

I BELIEVE WE HAVE AN ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION. IT'S NOT A
SIMPLE ANSWER. BUT, THEN, THIS NOT A SIMPLE PROBLEM.

LET ME GIVE YOU A KIND OF OUTLINE OF HOW I SEE THIS ISSUE OF CHILDHOOD INJURIES.

FIRST OF ALL, AS THE TITLE OF MY REMARKS THIS MORNING INDICATES, I THINK THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY HAVE TO ADMIT THAT -- YES -- INJURIES, INTENTIONAL AS WELL AS UNINTENTIONAL, ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH AND DISABILITY AMONG CHILDREN.

FRANKLY, I PUT THIS ELEMENT RIGHT UP FRONT BECAUSE I DON'T THINK THE AMERICAN PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THIS ... OR WANT TO FACE UP TO IT.

THERE'S STILL A LOT OF FOLKLORE ABOUT "ACCIDENTS" ... ABOUT FATE TAKING A HAND IN THIS OR THAT ... IN OTHER WORDS, A LOT OF FOLKLORE THAT RELIEVES ADULTS OF RESPONSIBILITY.

AND CHANGING THAT TOTALLY ERRONEOUS MIND-SET IS OUR MOST SERIOUS CHALLENGE.

WE MUST NOT ALLOW THE ADULTS OF AMERICA TO "GET OFF THE HOOK" THAT EASILY. WE NEED TO EXPLAIN TO THEM AND CONVINCED THEM AND GET THEM TO BELIEVE RIGHT TO THE DEPTHS OF THEIR SOULS THAT CHILDHOOD INJURIES ARE NO ACCIDENT.

YOU KNOW THAT AND I KNOW THAT. BUT I BELIEVE THAT WE'RE STILL A MINORITY. THAT MOST AMERICANS DO NOT KNOW THAT. AND SO I WOULD PUT AT THE TOP OF OUR LIST OF PRIORITIES THE NEED TO GET THE REST OF THE COUNTRY TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT WHAT WE UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT ... AND THAT IS, THAT CHILDHOOD INJURIES ARE NO ACCIDENT.

THE NEXT ASSIGNMENT ON MY LIST OF PRIORITIES IS JUST AS DIFFICULT, BUT WE'VE GOT TO FACE IT SOONER OR LATER, SO WHY NOT SOONER?

IT'S TIME TO BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES ABOUT THE WAY WE TREAT CHILDREN IN GENERAL IN OUR SOCIETY ... AND WHERE WE NEED TO DO BETTER, WE OUGHT TO GET ON WITH THAT TASK.

CHILDREN DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY GET A FAIR SHAKE IN OUR SOCIETY, AND THEY SHOULD. BUT LET ME SAY PARENTHETICALLY THAT, WHEN I WAS ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF PEDIATRIC SURGERY FOR SO MANY YEARS, ONE OF THE GREAT REWARDS FOR ME WAS TURN THAT AROUND. I BELIEVE THAT TODAY KIDS CAN AND DO GET A FAIR SHAKE IN SURGERY.

I DO NOT BELIEVE YOU CAN SEPARATE THE PHENOMENON OF CHILDHOOD INJURIES FROM THIS ISSUE OF WHERE CHILDREN FIT IN OUR SOCIETY. I DON'T THINK YOU CAN SEPARATE CHILDHOOD INJURIES FROM THE FACT THAT FAR TOO MANY SCHOOL SYSTEMS IN THIS COUNTRY, WITH THE APPROVAL -- TACIT OR OTHERWISE -- OF STATE LAW, ALLOW SEVERE PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT TO BE METED OUT TO THEIR STUDENTS.

BY THIS 9TH DECADE OF THE 20TH CENTURY WE ALL SHOULD KNOW THAT NO CHILD HAS EVER LEARNED A LESSON OR CHANGED BEHAVIOR BECAUSE HE OR SHE WAS GIVEN SEVERE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT.

I'VE READ ALL THOSE STORIES IN THE NEWSPAPERS AND IN WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINES ABOUT THE PRINCIPALS WHO HAVE "CLEANED UP" THEIR SCHOOLS BY PHYSICAL FORCE. AND I AM ASHAMED FOR THEM ... FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES ... AND FOR ANY OF MY FELLOW AMERICANS WHO THINK SUCH PRINCIPALS HAVE "THE RIGHT IDEA." THEY DO NOT.

THERE NEVER WAS A TIME WHEN A MAJOR SOCIAL PROBLEM WAS SOLVED BY THE BEATING OF A CHILD. AND THERE NEVER WILL BE SUCH A TIME.

AND WE NEED TO CONFRONT SOME OTHER HIGHLY DANGEROUS MYTHOLOGIES AS WELL.

FOR EXAMPLE, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE GREATEST THREAT TO CHILDREN IS A FLIGHT OF STAIRS ... ANY FLIGHT OF STAIRS.

I HEARD IT OVER AND OVER AGAIN WHEN I WAS SURGEON-IN-CHIEF AT CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF PHILADELPHIA. CHILDREN WERE BROUGHT IN WITH SEVERE FRACTURES, SPRAINS, CONCUSSIONS, AND CONTUSIONS. AND WE WERE TOLD BY PARENTS OR GUARDIANS THAT THE CHILD "FELL DOWN THE STAIRS."

AND WE PUT THAT DOWN ON THE RECORD AND WE RELAYED THAT INFORMATION TO STATE AND NATIONAL DATA COLLECTIONS AND, SURE ENOUGH, AFTER ALL THE REPORTS ARE IN FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, WE DISCOVER THAT THE BIGGEST THREAT TO CHILDREN IS THE NEAREST FLIGHT OF STAIRS.

BUT THOSE OF US IN CHILD PROTECTION AND IN CHILD HEALTH KNOW THE AWFUL TRUTH. WE KNOW THAT SOME CHILDREN MAY FALL DOWN STAIRS ... BUT THEY ARE PROBABLY A SMALL MINORITY.

MANY OF THOSE YOUNG VICTIMS OF STAIRS HAVE BEEN PUNCHED ... SLAPPED ... THROWN ... AND BEATEN WITH FISTS, CLUBS, AND OTHER WEAPONS. ADULTS DO THAT TO CHILDREN. STAIRS DO NOT PRODUCE THE PHYSICAL SIGNS OF ABUSE.

FOR CENTURIES ADULTS HAVE INJURED CHILDREN ... AND HAVE LIED ABOUT IT ... AND OTHER ADULTS HAVE HEARD THOSE LIES AND THEN MERELY TURNED AWAY.

BUT WE HAVE A CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT LAW NOW AND WE HAVE -- I WOULD HOPE -- A NEW MEASURE OF SELF-RESPECT TO GO ALONG WITH THAT LAW AND WE WILL NOT ACCEPT THOSE TERRIBLE LIES ANYMORE.

WE MUST GO BACK TO OUR COMMUNITIES ... TO OUR NEIGHBORHOODS ... TO OUR SCHOOLS ... AND TO OUR OWN FAMILIES ... AND WE MUST TELL THE AMERICAN PEOPLE THAT THIS MUST BE OUR PREMISE FROM NOW ON:

WHEN A CHILD GETS HURT, WE MUST NO LONGER AUTOMATICALLY PERPETUATE THE MYTHOLOGY THAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE CHILD'S FAULT OR THAT IT WAS THE RESULT OF ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS "ACCIDENT." INSTEAD OF THAT, WE MUST BEGIN PUTTING THE BLAME WHERE IT BELONGS: PERHAPS ON SOME OTHER HUMAN BEING -- MOST LIKELY AN ADULT -- WHO DID THE WRONG THING ... UNINTEN-TIONALLY OR INTENTIONALLY ... BUT NOI ACCIDENTALLY.

SO ANOTHER ITEM ON MY LIST OF PRIORITIES IS TO FACE UP TO THESE MYTHOLOGIES ... THESE THIN EXCUSES AND RATIONALIZATIONS ... RECOGNIZE THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE ... AND GET RID OF THEM.

AND FINALLY WE'VE GOT TO MAKE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULTS. BECAUSE THEY ARE CONNECTED, YOU KNOW. CHILDREN GROW UP AND BECOME ADULTS.

I'M SAYING THE OBVIOUS ... I KNOW THAT ... BUT I BELIEVE THAT MANY OF OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS DO NOT SEE THE CONNECTION. THEY DON'T SEE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THAT YOUNG MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR AND THE LITTLE BOY -- MANY YEARS BEFORE -- WHO WAS KNOCKED FROM HIS BICYCLE BY A PASSING AUTOMOBILE.

WE DON'T SEE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THAT YOUNG WOMAN WITH EXTENSIVE FACIAL SKIN GRAFTS AND THAT LITTLE GIRL -- MANY YEARS BEFORE -- WHO HAD MIRACULOUSLY SURVIVED A HOUSE FIRE.

AND WE DON'T SEE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THAT BLIND AND DISFIGURED YOUNG MAN AND THAT INFANT -- MANY YEARS BEFORE -- WHO WAS NOT STRAPPED IN A CAR SEAT AND WAS THROWN THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD OF HIS PARENTS' AUTOMOBILE IN A HIGHWAY COLLISION.

SOME 19 MILLION CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 15 ARE INJURED EACH YEAR AND THEIR INJURIES ARE SERIOUS ENOUGH TO REQUIRE MEDICAL ATTENTION.

AND 10 PERCENT OF THOSE CHILDREN -- OR ABOUT 2 MILLION
YOUNGSTERS -- ARE INCAPACITATED BY THEIR INJURIES FOR AT LEAST
TWO WEEKS ... MOST OF THEM FOR A LOT LONGER.

SEVERAL MONTHS.

SEVERAL YEARS.

MAYBE THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.

AT LEAST 100,000 BOYS AND GIRLS UNDER THE AGE OF 15 -- WHO
AT ONE TIME WERE HEALTHY AND NOT INCAPACITATED -- BECOME
PERMANENTLY DISABLED IN SOME WAY ... EVERY YEAR.

LIFE IS DIFFERENT FOR THEM. DURING THEIR REMAINING 40, 50, OR MAYBE 60 YEARS OF LIFE, THEY MUST NEGOTIATE RELATIONSHIPS AND ENVIRONMENTS AND MAKE CHOICES THAT THE REST OF US WHO AREN'T DISABLED DON'T HAVE TO MAKE.

IN ORDER TO LIVE A FULL AND SATISFYING LIFE, THESE CHILDREN REQUIRE OF THEMSELVES, OF THEIR FAMILIES, OF THEIR FRIENDS, AND OF SOCIETY AN ADDITIONAL QUOTA OF ENERGY ... AND INTEREST ... AND ASSISTANCE ... AND MONEY.

AND THEY REQUIRE THESE THINGS EVERY DAY.

DURING MY YEARS AS A SURGEON IN PEDIATRICS, I SAW CHILDREN WHEN THEY WERE MOST VULNERABLE. I SAW THEM WHEN LIFE AND DEATH HUNG IN THE BALANCE. I'M SURE MANY OF YOU HERE THIS MORNING HAVE SEEN THE SAME THING.

YOU CAN PICTURE THEM IN YOUR MIND'S EYE. AND YOU ARE MOVED BY THAT PICTURE.

BUT DON'T STOP THERE. TRY TO IMAGINE THEM AS LIVING, GROWING, DEVELOPING HUMAN BEINGS. TRY TO IMAGINE THEM IN HIGH SCHOOL AND ON INTO HIGHER EDUCATION.

TRY TO IMAGINE THEM CALLING UPON EVERY OUNCE OF TALENT,
BRAVERY, AND GOOD GRACE THAT THEY CAN MUSTER IN ORDER TO GET TO
THEIR CLASSES ... TO THE DINING HALL ... TO THE LIBRARY.

AND TRY TO IMAGINE THAT SAME YOUNG MAN OR YOUNG WOMAN
GOING OUT INTO THE WORLD OF WORK, AND CALLING UPON THAT EXTRA
WILL-POWER AND ENERGY IN ORDER TO COMPETE FOR A GOOD JOB AT A
GOOD SALARY AND COMPETE FOR RECOGNITION, JUST LIKE ANY OTHER
CONSCIENTIOUS YOUNG EMPLOYEE.

AND IMAGINE A HAPPY, PRODUCTIVE, AND FULFILLING MARRIAGE
AND HOME LIFE, DESPITE THE INJURED OR MISSING LIMBS, THE INJURED
SPINAL CORD, OR THE SENSORY LOSS.

IT'S ALL POSSIBLE. WE KNOW IT IS. BUT IT'S POSSIBLE IN A
LIFETIME PERMANENTLY SPENT TAKING THOSE EXTRA STEPS, EXERCISING
THAT EXTRA MEASURE OF CAUTION AND CONTROL ... A LIFETIME SPENT
TAKING THAT EXTRA MOMENT TO ASSESS THE RISK OF THE NEXT MOVE ...
A LIFETIME OF EXTRAORDINARY COST IN BOTH MATERIAL AND HUMAN
TERMS.

WE TEND TO VIEW CHILDHOOD INJURIES AS BEING DEVASTATING ONLY TO CHILDREN. BUT CHILDREN SURVIVE AND GROW UP. HENCE, CHILDHOOD INJURIES ARE ONE OF THE LEADING CAUSES OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DISABILITY, OF ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT, AND OF RESTRICTED LIFE EXPERIENCES FOR MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF ADULTS ... THE CHILDREN WHO HAD BEEN INJURED ... BUT WHO SURVIVED.

AND SO THE TRAGEDY OF CHILDHOOD INJURIES IS COMPOUNDED, YEAR AFTER YEAR. FOR MOST OF THE 19 MILLION CHILDREN WHO WILL BE INJURED IN THE UNITED STATES THIS YEAR, LIFE WILL GO ON.

BUT FOR MANY OF THEM IT WILL BE DIFFERENT. LIFE WILL BE A LITTLE HARDER, A LITTLE MORE SPECIAL. AND IT WILL ALWAYS BE THAT WAY.

FOR THESE YOUNGSTERS THERE ARE NO ONE-TIME COSTS OF ANY KIND ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDHOOD INJURIES. THERE ARE ONLY LIFETIME COSTS.

AND THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE WE MUST TAKE BACK TO OUR COMMUNITIES AND TO OUR NEIGHBORHOODS.

FIRST, CHILDHOOD INJURIES ARE NO "ACCIDENT".

SECOND, CHILDHOOD INJURIES CAN LAST FOREVER.

THAT'S WHAT MY LIST OF PRIORITIES LOOKS LIKE THESE DAYS.
BUT THAT LIST HAS NO MEANING -- IT EXISTS IN A VACUUM -- WITHOUT
THE KIND OF WORK BEING DONE BY THE MEN AND WOMEN ... AND
CHILDREN, TOO ... OF THE "SAFE KIDS" CAMPAIGN.

THESE MAY BE USEFUL IDEAS, BUT IT'S JUST SO MUCH RHETORIC,
WITHOUT A NATIONAL GRASS-ROOTS EFFORT TO MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT
SAFER FOR EVERY CHILD IN AMERICA.

AND THAT'S WHAT THIS SYMPOSIUM IS ALL ABOUT. THAT'S WHY I'M
VERY PLEASED TO BE THE HONORARY CHAIRMAN OF THE SAFE KIDS
CAMPAIGN.

AND THAT'S WHY I'M HERE THIS MORNING TO HELP HERTA FEELEY AND MARTY EICHELBERGER AND BERNIE GUYER AND DAVE HEPPEL AND EVERYONE ELSE WHO IS ON THIS SYMPOSIUM OR WHO HELPED PUT IT TOGETHER.

THE NATIONAL SAFE KIDS CAMPAIGN HAS TO WORK. IT HAS TO SUCCEED. IT IS NO EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT AT STAKE ARE THE LIVES AND WELL-BEING OF MILLIONS OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN -- AND THE MILLIONS OF ADULTS THEY WILL BECOME.

THANK YOU.

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