

They have waited a long time for this day. [Laughter]

I thank the Gores. You know, they started their family conference every year in Nashville even before we began our partnership together, and it was a brilliant and unique idea, the idea of every year focusing on the American family and some aspect of challenge or opportunity and bringing people in from all over America to talk about it. There's really no precedent for it as far as I know in our public policy, and it's a remarkable contribution that they have made.

And of course, I thank my wife, who has been talking to me about all these things for more than 25 years now and is sitting there thinking that I finally got around to doing what she has been telling me to do. [Laughter] I was thinking it would be nice to have something new to talk about for the next 25 years. [Laughter] That's one of the major reasons for this event today. And even if the rest of you can't appreciate it as much as I can, you'll just have to live with the truth. [Laughter]

But mostly I thank these children, for they remind us of our fundamental obligations as Americans and as human beings.

You know, throughout our history, our Founders told us that they organized our country in order to form a more perfect Union. And one of the most important ways we have done that now, for more than 220 years, is to always apply our most fundamental values to the circumstances and challenges of each new age. And the reason we have made it is that we have never forgotten that there is no more fundamental value than the American family, than its strength and its integrity. There is no more important job than raising a child. There is no more important responsibility than to create the conditions and give people the tools to succeed at raising their children. But I think we would all have to admit that as a nation we have not done what we should have done to enable all of our families to meet the challenge of the era in which we live.

For some time now, we have been, at least with one foot, in the 21st century. We know that the 21st century will be dominated by globalization and by information and technological revolutions. And we know that it has brought us many great benefits.

We as Americans should be very grateful today for the prosperity we enjoy. Even though

all of you and your fellow Americans have worked hard to earn it and we've made some tough decisions in Washington to help bring it about, we should still be grateful for it. But we know that this new economy, with all the unprecedented prosperity it has brought us, has also imposed some significant new challenges.

We know, for example, that the average working family is spending more hours a week in the workplace than 25 or 30 years ago, with all the benefits of technology. And we know that more and more parents of young children are in the workplace, either because they're single-parent households or because both parents have to work to make ends meet or because both parents choose to work—and they ought to have that choice.

But there is no more important responsibility on us to apply the values of America, the timeless values of America, to modern conditions—none is more important than making sure every American can balance the dual responsibilities of succeeding as parents and succeeding at work. There is no more significant challenge. Indeed, one of the biggest debates we had when we were working through the welfare reform issue was how we could require people to be responsible and go to work without creating conditions which would require them to abandon their first responsibility to be good parents. That is the universal obligation of every parent, and it should be the dominant concern of our Government.

That's what this is about. I don't believe I have ever talked to a parent who was also in the workplace who has not been able to cite at least one example, and oftentimes many, many more, of a conflict between—that he or she felt between the obligations of parenthood and the obligations to the job. And that includes, of course, people who work in the White House—when the President makes them work too late at night. [Laughter] But you just—you know that. Everyone—I saw a lot of you nodding your heads. You just know that. It's part of the fabric of American life.

We know that the Government cannot raise or love a child, but that is not what we're supposed to do. What the Government is supposed to do is to help create the conditions and give people the tools that will enable them to raise and love their children while successfully participating in the American workplace.