

**May 3, 2005**

**New York, New York**

Remarks given at: PS 128 Elementary School  
560 West 169th Street

So I think the first thing we should do is give Tayana another hand. I am delighted to be here with all of the students and your principals and teachers, with the President and President-Elect of the American Heart Association who will speak, and with the Governor of my home state Arkansas, Governor Mike Huckabee. We are glad to be at PS 128 because you have such a good example for healthy lifestyles, for good eating and good exercise and I thank you for that.

I just stopped in one of the classrooms and the students told me what they were doing to stay healthy; but the truth is that children being born today could become part of the first generation in American history to live shorter lives than their parents because so many are eating too much of the wrong things and not exercising enough. According to the Center for Disease Control, 9 million children are substantially overweight and the number is expected to grow by 20% over the next 5 years if current trends are not reversed. We are all here today to take a stand against childhood obesity and create a healthy new generation of young Americans.



Credit: Ben Asen for the AHA / Clinton Foundation

When I went into the hospital last September for heart bypass surgery, I was moved by how many people expressed their support and their prayers for me and for my family. And I also appreciated hearing from people who said that my experience had encouraged them to get a check up or go back to a medicine they stopped taking or exercise more and eat better.

When the American Heart Association approached me about working together to combat heart disease, I wanted to do more than just make a public service announcement because of what had been done for me; and because I, frankly, dodged a very big bullet. I felt an obligation to do something substantial with my foundation because health security is one of the four missions that I adopted when I left the White House. We have been working hard to fight HIV and AIDS especially in the developing world, and I am glad to be here to make another big step on the health care front.

We are teaming up with the American Heart Association to fight for healthier lifestyles for young people. And I am delighted that Governor Mike Huckabee would co-chair this effort with me. The problem of childhood obesity is worse in the part of the country where we grew up. While the rate is 16% nationwide, in the South it is 20% and in some southern state it's 25% partly because of the close correlation with lower incomes. Governor Huckabee has an impressive story of his own; he's about half the size he was when I first met him. And while I am always trying to shrink the ranks of Republicans, I never really thought that this was the way to do it. I am really proud not only of his own personal example, but of the astonishing work he has done in Arkansas to measure the body mass index of every single public school student to changing what's in the vending machines. He's got some more good ideas that he will talk about today.

The truth is that our children are consuming more sugar and fatty foods than ever before. Over the past twenty years there's been a tripling, a tripling, in how many snack foods like chips and crackers kids are eating; a doubling in their in take of soft drinks; fried potatoes, including French fries, make up almost half the vegetables eaten by children between the ages of 2 and 19; and this is compounded by the fact there is no more exercise among children than there was twenty years ago.

Children who don't exercise enough and whose diet lacks proper nutrients can encounter serious problems, including stunted growth, cognitive impairment and as we all know obesity, which creates an obliterated risk of heart disease, diabetes, and a range of other illnesses.

The Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association partnership to create a healthier generation of American children is designed to change all that over several years. First, let me say that the American Heart Association has done a fabulous job in raising public awareness about heart disease, about supporting medical research. The work they have done has given longer, healthier lives to many, many people. Under the partnership we announced today all the efforts to healthier eating and living for children will be a part of this. Our goals in this initiative are easy to state and hard to achieve. Working with all the other interested parties, we want to reverse the growth of childhood obesity that has been occurring over the last 20 to 30 years. Stabilizing the percentage of children overweight as the percentage of the total in five years and reducing it within ten. We intend initially to focus in three areas.

First, we want to work with restaurants, food chains, and food producers to encourage them to offer healthier food alternatives for children. Within the next few months, we will convene members of these industries for discussion and offer recognition programs for those that provide healthier alternatives.

Next we will work with schools and community programs to encourage healthier foods in cafeterias and vending machines, and to encourage more active exercise efforts both during the school day and in organized after school programs. We want to develop a Clinton Foundation-AHA award for schools and community groups that adopt programs that meet high standards for promoting healthy eating and exercise. And we will work with sporting goods companies and food companies to support the efforts.

And finally, we will undertake a major media campaign and a series of grassroots campaigns all around America aimed at our children and their parents to promote better nutrition and exercise. Let me say that I am well aware that there is a lot of work going on now. I have received several messages over the last few days from doctors, from people in the food industry talking about the work that they are doing. But what we want to do is not make anybody the enemy here. We really believe that there is a great market out there for healthier eating, for a healthier lifestyle. We know that American parents, including a lot of the people that work at this school, are working longer and harder hours than ever before. That is why almost half the American food dollar are spent eating out and increasing amount of that dollar in the so-called fast food places.

What we have got to do is not just encourage our children to eat better; we've got to give them healthier choices. We've got to change what's in the school menu. We've got change what's in the vending machines. We've got to change not only the menus of these places and have healthier options, but we need to ask people to rethink how this food is prepared in the first place to reduce the sugar, and fatty content of the food.

If we do that, we can make a difference. If you just drop 45 calories a day, which is not much, just 45 calories a day off the food intake of our children, they'll lose 2 pounds a year and be 20 pounds lighter when they graduate from high school. That's a significant factor. So we have to change the structure of the way this has been done. I am grateful for what's been done already. I am profoundly grateful to the American Heart Association; and Governor Huckabee, I am particularly grateful to you for your personal example and because you have done more in Arkansas to address this, I believe, than any other state in the country. So ladies and gentleman, we're going to give this our best shot because we want all these children to live to be 90 years old and to be healthy doing it.

Thank you and God bless you.