

## Remarks of Dr. Robert Eckel October 20, 2005

Good morning. I'm so glad to be here to address the most serious issue facing the health of America's children. As the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation want to make kids think differently about their health and encourage those who influence them, like their schools, their parents, restaurants, the media, and their doctors, to help kids make healthier choices.

I want to thank the executives at Nickelodeon for placing such a high priority on the health of their audience. Our announcement this morning marks the beginning of our venture to reach kids -- the first, and maybe most important project the alliance will take on.

Nickelodeon's involvement in this endeavor is key to helping us begin our dialogue with kids, the ones who will be affected by our efforts the most.

Our new partnership will help us speak to kids in a way that communicates the sense of urgency about this problem in a language they can relate to. The network has a proven track record of inspiring and moving kids to action through its the Big Help and Let's Just Play campaigns. Through its multiple channels, Nickelodeon will help us put kids in the driver's seat and set them on the road to becoming agents of change in their own families and communities.

More kids than ever are overweight or obese – about 16 percent. That's 4 times as many as 20 years ago. Those rising numbers are causing more kids to develop conditions like high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and type-2 diabetes.

It's not fair that kids have to worry about grown-up diseases. And they shouldn't be burdened with them when they are adults. That's one reason why the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation formed the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. It's important that kids get a jump start on healthy behaviors so they can carry those behaviors into adulthood.

While our overall goal is to reduce childhood obesity, this initiative isn't just about overweight children. It's really about giving ALL kids no matter their shape or size an opportunity to be the best they can be in every aspect of their lives. There are plenty of thin kids out there who sit in front of the computer eating junk food every day after school. We are just as worried about those kids as we are about the ones who have weight issues.

Our vision of a healthier generation relies on more than just a public awareness campaign. We need to change the way kids eat, play and think about their own health. We need to encourage the food industry to improve the quality of the food they serve to kids; work with schools to reintroduce physical activity into the school day where it has been excluded and to improve choices in cafeterias; and, we need to provide parents with tools to help create healthier homes.

We need to bring kids into the equation by creating a movement that inspires them to make this issue their own and to find their own solutions. We need to empower kids to make healthy choices - because those will make them run faster, jump higher and think smarter. Not because a bunch of adults told them it's good for them.



We will launch our kid's movement today when President Clinton sits down to talk to a group of youth from around the country to find out what is important to them. We'll listen to what they have to say and we'll work to build and sustain this movement until that healthier generation emerges. A generation with the energy, enthusiasm and power that comes with a healthy heart.

Developing healthy habits happens over time, not overnight. From a statistical standpoint we might not see a reduction in risk factors right away. But if we teach kids today to lead healthier lifestyles, then, maybe years down the road we will see fewer Americans, young and old, develop high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and diabetes. And the AHA hopes that we might even see a generation where heart disease is no longer the number one killer of Americans.

Thank you.

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