

July 27, 2007

YOUTH OPPORTUNITY: Remarks to the Urban League

Sen. Clinton: Good morning! It is an absolute delight to be with you this morning for this very important conference. I want to thank Mark for the wonderful job that he is doing

[Click here to read Hillary's youth opportunity agenda.](#)

here at the Urban League, and for his strong leadership on so many issues. I also want to recognize and thank the entire Urban League board and the staff, who have put this together and have labored hard to make sure that it was a productive and important event, not just for the National Urban League, but for all of us.

I want to recognize St. Louis' mayor, Mayor Slay, delighted you're here for this important occasion. And other elected officials who are in the audience.

Now there are two people who are not here, who I would be remised if I did not mention. I would hear about it from one, and that is our old friend Vernon Jordan, who said, "You went all the way to St. Louis and you didn't event mention me."

So Vernon, wherever you are, we're thinking of you. And we're grateful to you for your lifetime of service.

Another who I want to honor by remembering him, is Ron Brown. Someone who served our country so well, and whom we miss. His brand of leadership and good humor in the face of challenge is always timely and we certainly could use more of it today.

And George, thank you for keeping the trains running on time.

And finally, I want to thank all of you for ninety-seven years of service. When I think of the National Urban League, I think of the people whom I've known, the projects that I've partnered on.

But according to a recent study by Dr. Silas Lee, who I'm very proud to say is one of my pollsters and given me great advice, and Dr. Bernard Anderson, who served as Assistant Secretary of Labor during my husband's Administration, according to their study between 2004 and 2006, the Urban League contributed more than \$2.5 billion to America's economy. And not only that, in 2006, more than 70 million people were directly and indirectly served through the publications, the seminars, the advocacy and service projects undertaken by the Urban League.

That is an extraordinary achievement -- and it's one that's not often recognized. People don't realize that non-profits, like the Urban League, are drivers of economic progress. And I want to thank you, not only for the good work you do, but for the economic impact that work has.

I also want to really express my gratitude for this opportunity to continue the conversation that the Urban League is leading in our cities, and to fully endorse your Opportunity Compact -- it is a set of priorities which I strongly support built on 4 cornerstones that every American should be able to agree to. The opportunity to thrive, the opportunity to earn, the opportunity to own, and the opportunity to prosper -- that's a pretty good definition of the American dream in my book.

Because I don't have as much time as I would love for this conversation -- I could be up here for hours with all of you, and loving to hear back from you -- I want to focus on one aspect of this conversation -- and that is an issue highlighted in the Opportunity Compact, highlighted in your State of Black America report, and recently in the Dellums Commission. And that is the crisis of 1.4 million young men of color between the ages of 16 and 24 - they are out of school and out of work. That includes nearly one out of every three young African American men. Young men who are not earning legal wages or learning marketable skills. Over half growing up in homes without fathers, a third wind up in the criminal justice system, nearly 5,000 each year are claimed by guns or violence before their 25th birthdays.

Now I don't know about you, but I feel like I've been listening to this conversation all my life. And I firmly believe it is the wrong conversation, I reject it. I reject a conversation about 1.4 million young men as a threat, as a headache, or as a lost cause. I reject the conversation about 1.4 million disappointments, failures, and casualties of a broken system. That is not who these young men are.

I believe it is long past time for a new and different conversation. It is time for America to begin a conversation about 1.4 million future workers, entrepreneurs, tax-payers, community leaders, business executives. A conversation about 1.4 million future husbands and fathers and role models. A conversation about 1.4 million boys who have the God-given potential to grow into strong, proud, loving, decent, productive, accomplished men with our help and support. That is the conversation I want to have with you and America, and that is the conversation I want to take with me into the White House in January 2009. To put forth an agenda to finish the job.

It's time, America, for a change. And I have seen the potential. As a young lawyer right out of law school, I didn't want to go to Wall Street firms, I didn't want to clerk for a judge, all I wanted to do was to work for Marian Wright Edelman at the Children's Defense Fund.

That was my goal, I had met her, she had gone to Yale Law School about 10 years before me, she was legendary with her work in Mississippi on behalf of civil rights and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. I heard she was speaking at Yale, I went to introduce myself to her during my very first year in law school. Heard her speak, was galvanized, went up to her and said, "I want to work for you." And she said, "Well, that's nice, but I can't pay you."

And I said, "Well, that's a problem because I'm working my way through law school, so I have to get paid." And she said, "If you can figure out how to get yourself paid, you can come work for me."

So applied for and I received a Law Student's Civil Rights Research Council Internship, which paid me to be able to go and do the work that has been the passion and calling of my life through my years of public service, and now my years in public office.

And I remember very well one of the first assignments that Marian gave me was to go to a couple of states and find out if we could stop them from jailing children with adults. And then to go door to door and ask people if they had children who weren't in school, because back in those days children were kept out of school for all kinds of reasons. Some of them had physical ailments, some of them had behavioral problems, some of them had to help support their families.

So I have been focused on what we need to do to help children succeed. And I have to tell you in all my 35 years as an advocate for children and families, I have never met a child without potential. And these 1.4 million young men are no different. And when we write them off and leave them behind -- when we squander their potential -- we squander America's potential. And that is nothing short of a moral crisis.

But let's be clear: this is not just a moral crisis -- it is an economic crisis. And it's not just an urban economic crisis. It is not just an African American economic crisis. It is an American economic and moral crisis.

And when we let these young boys and men fall through the cracks, we make a decision to spend \$32 billion a year on prisons. Now we may not draw the connection

all the time, but you and I know that's the decision we're making. We have decided that we're going to spend poorly, instead of spending it smartly.

Right now, across America, jobs are going empty because companies can't find trained, skilled employees to fill them.

So ultimately, the crisis of young men of color is a national crisis. And when I'm President, I will call for a national response -- and a national commitment -- to address it.

I will call everyone to the table. One of the things I really believe in, is getting everybody out there together, and rolling up our sleeves, and starting to act like Americans again. We're the people who are supposed to be the problem solvers. We're not supposed to stand on the sidelines, wringing our hands talking about how terrible things are. We're supposed to be working together to solve problems.

And I want state and local governments, universities, businesses, unions, non-profits, churches, individuals. And I'm going to ask one simple question: "What will you do -- not what you'll talk about -- but what will you do? Not another report, but what will you do in order to deal with this crisis?"

I am not going to accept half-steps or piecemeal measures as an answer. We need a smart, bold, daring, comprehensive approach. One based on the fundamental premise that these young men are all our children. All of our responsibility. Because after all these years, I still believe it takes a village to raise a child. So, that is why today, I am announcing my Youth Opportunity Agenda -- which goes hand in hand with the Opportunity Compact. This is my plan, as your President, to build that village.

An America where every child is valued for his or her God-given potential, and where all of us, from our families to our communities to our country, resolve to do whatever we can to help each child realize that potential.

Now, I believe the initiative has to start from day one -- the very day a child is born -- with early interventions to help that child get on the right path. That's why, as President, I'm going to focus like a laser on those early years. And it's not just focusing on the children; let's focus on the parents and the grand-parents, and the aunts and the uncles, and the brothers and the sisters.

We know what works; I've been doing this for 35 years. I started off at the Yale Child Studies Center, I've done it through Arkansas, and when I was privileged to work in the White House for my husband, and now in the Senate. We know what works.

Let's take these proven programs like nurse home visitation programs, where we send in qualified nurses and social workers and others to go in and help these young mothers and fathers understand what they need to do for their children.

Let's emphasize a program I helped to start during the 90's -- the Early Head Start program. Let's expand and build on Head Start -- a proven success.

And finally, I have made a commitment to universal pre-kindergarten for every four year old -- access to quality, affordable early learning when it really can make a difference in the lives of these children.

An astonishing fact, not from me because I believe this based on all the work I've done. But James Heckman, Noble Prize-winning economist from the University of Chicago, hardly thought to be a hotbed of fuzzy thinking and liberal thought, he did a study, and he concluded that if we had universal pre-kindergarten, we would close by 50% the achievement gap between white and black children. Just with that early investment, children will stay in school longer, they'll do better. Let's make that one of our priorities.

Second, once our children start school, we have to provide early mentoring and support to keep them on the path to success. It is not enough to give young men of color a chance to succeed, if then after they've started down this long and difficult path we step off of it. We need to be holding hands moving forward together.

We know that many young men drop out of school. Did you know that a child in America drops out of school every 29 seconds? Many don't make it through high

school, some don't make it through junior high school. That's why, as President, I will expand programs like GEAR UP that intervene in middle school to provide mentoring and tutoring.

I want college visits to help young people understand this can be part of their future. Programs like the Hillside Work Scholarship Connection -- created with the help of the Rochester Urban League in Rochester, New York -- that develops individualized college and career success plans for middle school students and gives these students a job. Gives them a job after school, during vacations because they have to be exposed to the culture of work and learn all those habits and that discipline. And it has proven to be a great success. I also want to see schools like Eagle Academy in New York, in the Bronx.

I was honored to help start this Charter School with the one hundred black men in New York. I think David Banks, who was the principal, is here. We need a thousand of Eagle Academies for young men of color, where they feel accepted, supported, mentored and helped. I want to use a mentorship model that will reach an additional one million students.

My Administration will provide \$100 million over five years to establish internship opportunities that will match students with businesses, with unions, with non-profits like the Urban League to provide the training they need to thrive in professional environments.

This isn't just a chance to enrich our children. It's not a corporate charity program. We have to give both sides of the equation -- the young men and the employer -- a chance to discover and develop each other, and to have then, an opportunity waiting for that young person.

The third part of my agenda involves building comprehensive, community-based programs to reach out to young people who are failing to thrive. Programs that don't just keep them from falling through the cracks -- but actually start filling in the cracks.

I'm going to ask our mayors and other local leaders to gather with representatives from across the community to develop such programs.

Now, that might mean creating one-stop youth centers like those in Baltimore and Los Angeles where case managers work to connect young people with tutoring, job training, and other support services. It might mean strengthening alternative education and Career Academies, apprenticeships and skills training.

I had a visit from the New York Auto Dealers a year or two ago. They said, "Senator, we have 600 jobs that we can't get filled for auto-mechanics. These are jobs in New York starting at \$50,000. Where do we go to find such people?"

Well, to their credit, they started a school. But we need to have more partnerships like that. I'm talking about programs that give young people the skills and confidence they need to compete for the high-tech 21st century jobs, because one of the reasons those auto mechanic jobs are harder to fill is because you have to know about computers. It's no longer a low skill job; it's a high skill job with a very good salary.

Programs like Focus Hope in Detroit that train young people to fill the 16,000 machinist jobs opening up each year in that city. Programs like Year Up that give young people the skills to land good financial services jobs in downtown Providence, Rhode Island.

Programs that train students for new, renewable energy "green collar" jobs. YouthBuild, which have been putting our young people to work -- they're beginning to train young people to do this and I have a program that will create 50,000 jobs of people that can't be outsourced. If we're going to start getting serious about alternative energy and do things like solar, somebody's got to climb up there and put that solar panel on the roof. We're going to create millions of jobs if we do this right and a lot of them will be in the inner cities.

We also need to make sure our young people can get these jobs in the first place. Yes there are problems because of low education and low skills, lack of mentoring and

networks. But let's be frank here. Some of those problems that stand in the way of young people and jobs is because of discrimination, plain and simple.

Which brings me to my fourth point. A recent study showed that when employers were presented -- I'm almost done, Mark. But you know I'm just fired up about this you can't stop me now. A recent study showed that when employers were presented with similarly qualified white and black applicants, they were twice as likely to hire the white applicants. They even hired white applicants with criminal records at the same or higher rates than black applicants.

So we're going to get back to a Justice Department and a Civil Rights Division that actually enforces the laws. And finally, we have got to tackle two remaining problems. First, how do we help these young men be responsible fathers? We've got to reverse President Bush's dramatic cuts in child support enforcement. We've got to make sure that every dollar goes to the children who need it.

We've got to make sure that the young men have the money to pay the child support which means raising the minimum wage again. And we have to confront the devastating impact of the criminal justice system. The brutal revolving door has already claimed so many young lives. And I want to have a second chance program that really focuses on how we're going to keep our young people out of the criminal justice system, and how we're going to rehabilitate them and give them a new chance when they come out.

So, I know this is not going to be easy, but I am up for it if you are. I am confident and optimistic we can make this happen together. Now there will be all the naysayers who say, "Oh my goodness we can't do it. Politics is so hard." Well, we can't listen to them James Baldwin once said, "Those who say it can't be done are usually interrupted by those who are doing it."

And so we got to get about the business of doing it. Let me tell you that if we work together, if we elect a president who cares passionately about our young people, understands what it will take to make the Opportunity Compact real in their lives, we're going to see change in America. I want to be your partner. I look forward to working with you. Let's go out and make it happen.

Thank you all, and God bless you.