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" . . . a child, more than all other gifts
That earth can offer to declining man,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts,"

—William Wordsworth

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am honoured to join you here today at this International Fatherhood Conference organized by the National Planning for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership based here in Washington, D.C. As a federal Senator, a woman from Canada, I am pleased to address the subject matter of fatherhood. I believe that many here know of my work in the Parliament of Canada on behalf of fatherhood, and against its diabolical opposite, fatherlessness, my work upholding the needs of children for meaningful relationships with both their parents, both mothers and fathers. At the outset, I would like to situate myself with women who support fatherhood, and who support the entitlement of children to the love and support of both parents, both their mothers and fathers. Further, I also wish to situate myself with those who view the birth of every child as an act of God, of divine creation. Children are gifts of God.

Ladies and gentlemen, I view life as a pilgrimage, a journey of discovering God's plan for us. My journey has involved challenging radical gender feminist ideology, an ideology which has contributed enormously to the devaluation of fatherhood and of manhood in general. I believe that any diminution of fatherhood is a diminution of motherhood and a diminution of parenthood. I invite women's voices to become a chorus for fatherhood. As a woman's voice speaking for fathers, I shall begin by quoting the scriptures on fatherhood. The New Testament book Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 14 and 15, the New Jerusalem Bible tells us:

"14. This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father,

15. from whom every fatherhood, in heaven or on earth, takes its name."

In some Bibles, the word fatherhood is replaced by the word family. The King James Version, for example, states:

"14. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15. Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,"

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to cite one example of a famous father, Sir Thomas More, an extraordinary man, with an extraordinary relationship with his children. A great lawyer, a Lord Chancellor in England, Sir Thomas More was charged, tried, found guilty of treason and executed in 1535 because he morally and politically defied King Henry VIII. His unstinting devotion to his children, particularly to his daughter Margaret Roper and to his son-in-law William Roper is legendary. On his way from prison to the scaffold, Sir Thomas More met his family members. His efforts to comfort them are well known. He looked at the weeping face of his beloved daughter Margaret. She embraced him. This was a terrible moment of a most terrible ordeal. He said farewell to her and asked her not to watch him be executed. As a father, he could not bear that. He said:

" . . . This, my child, is not kind of you. You should let your dear old father die as he has always tried to live, bravely, my child. Go, my daughter, beyond the tower where I shall not see you, and you will know when a hush falls upon the people that your old father has passed beyond the voices of this weary world for ever."

Saint Sir Thomas More loved his children deeply. Most fathers feel the same. Sir Thomas More's daughter's voice was a woman's voice for fatherhood. Fathers are important in their children's lives. Misguided social policies of the last many decades have been reckless with children's lives. Misguided policies have created fatherlessness. Misguided policies in social welfare law, in family law, in divorce law,

in child welfare law, in abortion law have resulted in national problems, in our crises of father alienation and fatherlessness. Fathers, men, face courts, laws, and systems that will not hear their voices.

Ladies and gentlemen, I shall share with you 3 cases studies of men, fathers before the courts seeking to love their children. These cases are first a divorce, second a birth father challenging the adoption of his child, and third a father's tragic suicide. These are three cases among hundreds of thousands where fathers face courts that do not hear fathers' pain, their needs, their love for their children or their voices. The first is the case of *Oldfield v. Oldfield*, a 1991 Ontario Court of Justice (General Division) divorce case in which the ex-wife asked the court to allow her to move their children from Canada to France to marry her boyfriend. About the children's relationship with their father, the judge, Mr. Justice Blair, said, at paragraph 5:

"That this is a loving and caring relationship is apparent."

About the mother's wish to move the children to Europe away from their father and close to her boyfriend, her prospective husband, Mr. Justice Blair said, at paragraph 6:

"Is it 'in the best interests of the children' to make an order which effectively defeats this prospect and leaves them in the daily care of a mother who loves them dearly but who is shackled by her discontent?"

The judge ruled. The judge permitted her to move with the children to France. This case revealed the exaltation of an adult's, the mother's, personal love life, personal happiness, over the children's need for their close relationship with their father. Interestingly, the marriage to her boyfriend never ensued. Later, in 1995, in another proceeding, the same Mr. Justice Blair increased the father's already large child support payments to finance the children's trips to visit him in Canada. Certainly the term 'best interests of the child' does not mean the mother's or either parents' romantic interest. Certainly the first interest of the best interests of the child means the child's interest, its own relationship with its two parents, both its father and mother.

Ladies and gentlemen, the second case is about an adoption. The birth mother favoured adoption but the birth father opposed the adoption from the start. He offered to either marry or live with the birth mother and raise the child together with her, or failing these, he offered to raise the child himself. She, the birth mother, was adamant. She placed the child for adoption. He went to court and challenged the adoption. He won. In a British Columbia Supreme Court judgement of January 4, 2000, *British Columbia Birth Registration No.99-0733 (Re)*, Mr. Justice Paris said, at paragraph 6:

"She testified that she now feels that she made a mistake in placing the child for adoption. ... She now feels, rightly or wrongly, that the social worker from the adoption agency with whom she dealt was effectively pushing her in the direction of adoption by warning her that if she named the father his consent to the adoption would be necessary."

The judge took the child from the adoptive parents and gave the child to the natural birth father. Many men, fathers, have faced enormous legal and systemic challenges.

The third case study is the tragic suicide of a 34 year old man from British Columbia named Darrin Bruce White. He had been, as had his ex-wife, a railroad locomotive engineer. He was on disability with a disposable income of about \$1,000 per month. On March 1, 2000, the court ordered him to pay his ex-wife a total of \$2, 071 per month, being \$1,071 in child support plus \$1,000.00 for spousal support for herself, with the first payment due immediately. He was ordered to pay twice his real income on disability. He disappeared a few days later and was found dead in the woods shortly thereafter. He had hanged himself. Two weeks before he killed himself, a doctor had indicated that Mr. White was suffering from divorce related depression, cognitive impairment and an inability to concentrate, and that he was not fit to work even part-time. The doctor was obviously correct. One ponders why the court could not discover this fact. The court documents reveal marked harshness to Mr. White and also disregard for his personal emotional state and needs. His income level seemed to be the court's major concern. In the March 1, 2000 judgement, Master Baker stated, at paragraph 11:

"I must conclude that the current interruption to the defendant's income stream is temporary and of short duration."

Yet the same court defended his ex-wife's right not to be expected to work and to receive financial support payments from him, though she was also a locomotive engineer. Master Baker stated, at paragraph 5:

"It may be that the plaintiff can return to her former employment as a railroad engineer or perhaps trainman, but it is not reasonable at this time to expect a quick return to that or similar employment in the immediately foreseeable future."

This young man was overtaken by despondency. The number of suicides of fathers like this is high and climbing. This was a case of yet another father crushed by this grinding system of family law, family support payment regime. This man's feelings, like many men's feelings, were not received by the system, as money they do not have is extracted and gouged out of them. His voice is silent.

Ladies and gentlemen, I come now to the well known 1965 Moynihan Report entitled The Negro Family: The Case for National Action written for the United States Department of Labor's Office of Policy Planning and Research by Daniel Patrick Moynihan the then Assistant Secretary of Labor. The Report stated:

"At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time."

In the next paragraph, the Report continued:

"It is more difficult, however, for whites to perceive the effect that three centuries of exploitation have had on the fabric of Negro society itself. Here the consequences of the historic injustices done to Negro Americans are silent and hidden from view. But here is where the true injury has occurred . . . "

The Report cited testimony saying:

"Both as a husband and as a father the Negro male is made to feel inadequate, . . . "

and that:

"The Negro wife in this situation can easily become disgusted with her financially dependent husband, and her rejection of him further alienates the male from family life."

Moynihan's Report hit hard, declaring that:

"Negro children without fathers flounder—and fail."

Children without fathers will flounder and fail. We should dust off this Report and re-examine it.

Ladies and gentlemen, all social science tells us that fatherlessness is a major social problem as do the public opinion surveys. A 1996 Gallop Poll on fathering entitled "Fathers in America" commissioned by the National Center for Fathering based in Kansas, reveal that 79.1% of Americans agree that the most significant social problem facing America is fatherlessness and father absence. In a 1990 article entitled A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s published by the Progressive Policy Institute, social scientists Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and William A. Galston addressed the enormous social consequences of fatherlessness. They said:

"The economic consequences of a parent's absence (almost always the father's) are often accompanied by psychological consequences, which include higher than average levels of youth suicide, low intellectual and educational performance, and higher than average rates of mental illness, violence, and drug use. . . . Equally suggestive is the anecdotal evidence of the difficulties many young single mothers experience in raising their sons. The absence of fathers as models and codisciplinarians is thought to contribute to the low self-esteem, anger, violence, and peer-bonding through gang membership of many fatherless boys."

Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and William A. Galston continued:

"Nowhere is this more evident than in the long-standing and strong relationship between crime and one-parent families. . . . The relationship is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up time and time again in the literature; poverty is far from the sole determinant of crime."

The connection between family structure, fathering and the well-being of society is the burning question of the day. Governments, courts, and the law should adopt this position. In 1993, the then Senator, the same Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in an article *Defining Deviancy Down* published in the *American Scholar*, revisited his 1960's work and wrote:

"In 1965, having reached the conclusion that there would be a dramatic increase in single-parent families, I reached the further conclusion that this would in turn lead to a dramatic increase in crime. In an article in *America*, I wrote:

"From the wild Irish slums of the 19th century Eastern seaboard to the riot-torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history: a community that allows a large number of young men to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future – that community asks for and gets chaos. Crime, violence, unrest, unrestrained lashing out at the whole social structure – that is not only to be expected; it is very near to inevitable."

The inevitable, as we now know, has come to pass, . . ."

Ladies and gentlemen, many in this room work in their communities to correct this massive human problem called fatherlessness. I encourage them to persevere in bringing fathers and children together, in mending broken families. This is the work of the heart and soul of any nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the outset, I cited Ephesians. I said that in parenting and fatherhood God's divinity is joined to our humanness. I believe that parenting, fatherhood, is redemptive, as God the Father redeemed us in Jesus Christ the son, there is redemption in good fathering. Fatherhood is redemptive and regenerative because of the remedial and restorative influences of the natural and pure human relations, that is, the father-child relationship. I searched for an articulation of the redemption that is fathering and fatherhood, wishing to express the depth of the father-child bond, of the father-child attachment and affection. I found it in a woman's voice for fatherhood. I found it in fiction in a literary classic, in a 19th-century novel written by a woman, George Eliot, the pen name for Mary-Ann Evans. This novel, *Silas Marner*, is the story of the miraculous healing and redemption of Silas Marner, a weaver. Silas was a broken, closed, selfish, unhappy hermit, with a hoard of money. In his isolation, he shared nothing, neither his goods nor his being. His sad, inadequate life worsened when he was robbed of his money. One night, during a bad snowstorm, a woman and her small child struggled, on foot, on the road near Silas's cottage. Exhausted and freezing, the child's mother collapsed and died. The child, desperate, frightened and alone, crawled into Silas' cottage, and simultaneously crawled into his life. Silas took this child as his own daughter. He adopted her and named her Eppie. He viewed this child not as a burden but as a gift and a blessing. He cared for her, raised her, and loved her. This child, Eppie, transformed Silas Marner into a fulfilled and whole human being. The novelist, George Eliot, showed in fiction, in literature, that it was only by fathering and by love that Silas could shed his past wounds and failures, and be restored. In this transformation, he found meaning for his life, his redemption. George Eliot wrote:

"Silas might be seen in the sunny mid-day, . . . strolling out . . . to carry Eppie . . . till they reached some favourite bank where he could sit down, while Eppie toddled to pluck the flowers, and make remarks to the winged things that murmured happily above the bright petals., calling 'Dad-dad's' attention continually by bringing him the flowers."

About Silas's regeneration and rebirth, George Eliot continued:

"As the child's mind was growing into knowledge, his mind was growing into memory: as her life unfolded, his soul, long stupefied in a cold narrow prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness."

The novelist had Silas tell his daughter Eppie:

"If you hadn't been sent to save me, I should ha' gone to the grave in my misery."

I end now with George Eliot's most beautiful description of Silas Marner's transformation and redemption through fatherhood by the love and care of this child, Eppie and her love of him, her father. Eliot wrote:

"In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's."

I repeat, the hand of a child can lead men from the city of destruction.

Ladies and gentlemen, I urge you all to place the hands of America's children into their fathers' hands, so that God's love, the love of Jesus Christ, can do its work. I urge all women here, particularly all Black women here to take the lead in America in politics and in public affairs to uphold a new definition of womanhood, which includes the love of men and children. I urge you all to support fathering as a pressing public and social policy issue, a major political initiative, and to vindicate the entitlement of children to the love and support of both their parents, both mothers and fathers, public policy that supports fatherhood and that is father friendly. I urge you to place the hands of children into the hands of their fathers. I thank you for listening to my woman's voice for fatherhood