

MEGAN RAINES
STATEMENT
DURING ROUND TABLE
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION
UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY
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It is an honor to be asked to speak in this round table, particularly in recognition of International Women's Day. International Women's Day was first celebrated in New York City in 1909. It was organized by the Socialist Party of America in acknowledgement of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union Strike that had taken place the year before. Thereafter it was held annually, primarily to recognize women's economic, political, and social achievements.

Last October I had the opportunity to participate in the 2015 Utah International Women of the Mountains Conference at UVU. Much like International Women's Day, it was truly a celebration of women's economic, political, and social achievements, with particular attention to the challenges that women face, and the advantages that women enjoy in mountainous regions. As the moderator for the Heritage and Family Values Panel, I particularly enjoyed working with two women, Wendy Jyang, of Liahona International Services, and Carolina Allen of an organization called Big Ocean Women. Both took their agendas-- sustaining and defending mothers across the globe, and spoke before the United Nations. As a student here at UVU, I have been researching women's issues as well, and forming an agenda of my own.

Women and children are words so closely associated that a google search--women and children--pulls up 1 billion, 470 million results in .42 seconds. Unfortunately, the first results that follow include the words: *in crisis, homeless shelter, hospital, rape crisis center, and empowering women and children*. In contrast a google search of-- men and children-- resulted in 400 million fewer suggested sites. Scrolling through 8 pages, turned up 50 or so movie titles, a half a dozen articles on why you shouldn't date a man with kids, a salaciously intriguing article that I had previously visited entitled "16 astonishing photos of evil people taken when they were children," but no discussion of men and children in crisis, no men and children's homeless shelters, no men and children hospitals, and no discussions of men and children's empowerment.

Organizations that support fathers definitely exist. They can be found by adjusting your search. But in 2016 the words-- men and children--- probably elicit thoughts about baseball games and campouts --not crisis intervention. In many cases, the crisis is caused by abuse--so excluding an abusive parent of either gender is necessary. But that is not always the case. In many cases the crisis is actually caused by absenteeism. My research will focus specifically on the potential benefits of mandated paternal involvement after divorce, where abuse and mental illness have not been factors in the separation, but where a father has been excluded or has voluntarily disengaged from his parental role and duties.

A growing body of research shows that children need fathers in their lives; to maintain healthy self-esteem and self-confidence; to maintain the mental well-being that they need to succeed; and to avoid the poverty cycles that too often result, when a single parent is left to manage all the facets of physical parenting alone. Currently, Utah divorce and child-custody laws mandate a certain level of financial support, but do nothing to mandate the kind of emotional, and physical support from divorcing spouses that would truly empower women and children.

Have decades of hyper-focus on empowering “women and children” in crisis-- actually excused or excluded men from their responsibilities to their children, breeding absenteeism? Have women been too willing to take on too much crisis-mode responsibility because the current legal system does nothing to hold both parents accountable for raising their children? We are all familiar with the slogan “It’s a child not a choice...” Why should that injunction apply only to pregnant women? At what point do we say, “it’s 2016 and if it’s all the same to you, I’m tired of crisis mode. Here are some responsibilities that legally belong to you.” My intention is to raise awareness about the need for laws that give women time to make the kinds of economic, political, and social achievements that International Women’s Day wants to celebrate. I hope mandated parental responsibility would be a win-win-win, situation for women, men, and children.