

ANNOUNCER: Honored guests, please welcome to the stage United States Senator from Louisiana Mary Landrieu. (Applause.)

SENATOR MARY LANDRIEU (D-LA): Thank you all very much for the invitation to speak for just a few minutes this afternoon in advance of an extraordinary panel that will be joining me in just a moment.

And I know that we're just part of a two-day, really, extraordinary effort and focus and among dozens of people presenting ideas and thoughts on this call to survival. I want to begin by thanking Georgetown University and particularly Dean Lancaster for her leadership in this area.

I also want to acknowledge – and I'm so sorry that I missed her personally, but Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who is not only a wonderful leader for our nation but for the world, and a former colleague and dear friend who I've worked with for many years and would follow her through hot coals. This isn't exactly hot coals, but I would follow her through them.

I want to say a special thank you for his leadership to Tony Lake. UNICEF, of course, is one of the leading sponsors of this event and look forward to visiting with him before I leave to go back to the Hill. I was very relieved actually to get out of the committee. I've been stuck in appropriations since 10:00 this morning.

After going through some mindless and some interesting amendments, I just looked at the chairman and said, I'm out of here, I've got to go to Georgetown. So I'm really happy to be here. I think the committee is still going on through one of our marathon sessions. But I left my proxy in good hands.

I wanted to come and just share a few thoughts with you all. Let me also recognize of course our USAID administrator, Raj Shah, who's doing a phenomenal job in refocusing USAID. And I agree with him on so many of his initiatives and thank him for his intelligence, his energy and his deep commitment to our work. And Johnny Isakson was here who works very closely with me on many of these issues.

I just wanted to add a thought that I couldn't agree more that every child in this world deserves a fifth birthday. I'd also like to add that I think they deserve a family to celebrate the birthday with. When I think of a 5-year-old, I guess I just never think of them by themselves. Maybe as the oldest of nine children, my mother had nine of us – my mother and father had nine of us – (laughter) – in 11 years. So my mom was pregnant for just about a decade. And I'm the oldest of that group.

And so when I think about what I looked like at 5 – and what each one of my brothers and sisters looked like at 5; what my children look like at 5 – I just really don't see them by themselves. I see them with their siblings or I see them in the arms of their parents or being held by an adult, because even as health as a 5-year-old could be, they're just not anywhere near being able to survive on their own.

I mean, it's difficult for 21-year-olds – (chuckles) – in the world. Trust me, I've got a 20-year-old and he's nowhere near that launch that I'm really looking forward to and his father as well. So you know, we know these things.

So one thing I'd like to challenge our community – and it's really an extraordinary community of experts in this room – is to think about how we take this graph that is beautifully illustrated in our material and take that green line and move it down to zero where whether it's in India or Ethiopia or in any country of the world that every single child that can live until 5 – preventable deaths, we're trying to eliminate – actually gets to sing happy birthday in whatever language they're singing, whatever religious philosophy they are enjoying.

And 70 percent of the world self-identifies themselves as part of some faith-based community – that they can sing happy birthday within the arms of a loving family. And I think we have to do a much better job thinking about as we immunize children, as we provide the mosquito nets, as we think about access to other health and preventive measures, that we also try to think can children be prevented from being separated from their birth parents.

If they are separated from birth parents, how can we as a world community connect them to an extended family member that will raise them as if their own. And if there are no extended family members able and willing, then how do we take that 1-year-old, that 2-year-old, that 3-year-old, that 4-year-old and connect them to a family that will support them for the rest of their life?

One of my questions to this group would be: When is anyone too old to need a family? I mean, don't we all need a family to belong to? There've been a number of studies that I will not go over in great detail. But one of my favorite professors from Harvard, Dr. Jack Shonkoff, have a beautiful presentation just recently here in Washington.

He is the lead sponsor of cutting-edge research that shows that young children that do not have nurturing experiences early on – prenatal for sure but after birth – experience what he calls toxic stress.

If an infant cries for hours and no one ever picks them up or if an infant cries from hunger and no one ever feeds them, these things have a direct impact on the development or non-development of their brain and their physical – their physical development. Its constant, toxic stress in an infant is debilitating – and for young children.

And this new research should guide – the science of this should guide our efforts to not just feed a child and immunize a child, but to make sure that every child by the age of 5 has some arms comforting them. It could be a mother, a father, a responsible adult. And I challenge all of us, whether it's UNICEF, the U.S. government, the government of Ethiopia, India or all the other organizations represented here, to think about, yes, every child deserves a fifth birthday.

But every 5-year-old deserves a family to celebrate that birthday with. And where are – where are our efforts to prevent abandonment, to reconnect children to families either through an

extended family, a domestic adoption – and yes, even an international adoption. So for the panelists that are coming up here in the role of civil society and faith communities –

I know that Kay Warren and her husband Rick Warren of Saddleback Church; I know that the Christian Alliance on Orphans is very focused on this issue – that children, you know, can't raise themselves.

And governments, while we do a pretty good job on many things not only here in the United States but around the world, raising children is not one of them. Children need to be raised preferably with their birth siblings, with their birth families, but if not, in the protective care of a family or a family-like setting, not in institutions, not in amorphous community care. I never understood what community care means.

I don't know in community care. It is a family or a stable permanent adult relationship. Children don't need a new adult reading to them every night. They need the same adult or they need the same caregiver. I don't know if any one of us would have grown up having a new person walk into your life every day, a new person feeding you, a new person reading to you. It's the same caregiver.

That is what is important to human development. So let's get on with that business. I know that the Christian Alliance for Orphans and others are working hard on this. I think the combination and conclusion of our faith-based community with our governments and this initiative, and again, helping every child to live to be 5 and then have a family to celebrate that birthday with. God bless you all. Thank you so much. (Applause.)