



**Dr. Corina Norrbom**  
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**“Is it good  
for the  
children?”**



## **Dr. Corina Norrbom**

**Dr. Corina Norrbom speaking to the 2008 Wittenberg-Birnamwood High School graduating class.**

**Her address establishes a core reference point for evaluating healthcare and environmental decisions.**



## **“Is it good for the children?”**

Let me begin by saying: Congratulations to you, the 2008 graduates of Wittenberg-Birnamwood High School.

I would like to borrow from a wise pediatrician that I met in medical school. During his first lecture he began by saying:

“Whenever you are faced with decisions in life, ask yourself, ‘Is it good for the children?’ and if you can say yes, you have found the right answer.”

Initially his statement did not seem very profound, after all, I thought, he is a pediatrician; I hope he values what is good for children. As I spent more time with him, however, it dawned on me that he was not merely trying to teach us about taking care of children on the pediatric ward, but rather, he was referring to our lives in general. His question had broad, universal application.



## **“Is it good for the children...”**

If we think about our environment it is easy to imagine how the decisions we make today will affect future generations. The sources of energy we choose to use and how efficiently they are utilized can affect CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, air and water quality, preservation of ecosystems, and yes, even world peace.

We have the technology right now to increase fuel standards to 40 MPG. If that standard were phased in by 2012, in four short years we would save 15 times more oil than the entire Artic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is likely to produce over a 50 year period. Put another way, for every mile per gallon increase in average fuel economy, we can save approximately 300,000 barrels of oil per day.



## **“Is it good for the children...?”**

What about healthcare? The United States spends far more per capita on healthcare than any other country in the world, yet over the past several decades we have consistently fallen in international rankings of life expectancy and other health measures. Currently the U.S. ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> among nations in life expectancy. Therefore, we rank behind every European country, Canada, Israel, Japan and more. There are definitely other factors, such as nutrition and lifestyle issues, that contribute to our country's falling rank, but what these and pretty much all other developed nations have in common is a nationalized health system.

I often hear people talk about our healthcare system as being the best in the world. For some, this may be true. But for the 47 million uninsured, as well as the millions of Americans who are underinsured, the system fails. To put the situation into perspective, without a change in the system, sixteen percent of you graduates will not have access to the so-called best healthcare system in the world.



Every day I see patients who must decide whether to buy their food or their medicine. This is unacceptable in the wealthiest nation in the world. We may disagree on how to go about solving the problems that face us in healthcare, but hopefully we can agree that it would be “good for the children” to have access to appropriate healthcare.

There are major decisions to be made about healthcare, the environment, and many other issues that will affect you and your children, and your children’s children. Although we are often not in a position to directly make those decisions, those whom we elect, from our president down to our local school board, will be making decisions that hopefully are good for the children. While we live in the present, we must also think about the future and act to improve it for ourselves, the other people in the world, and for all future generations.



Remember that one person can make a difference. At times, you may be discouraged or feel overwhelmed because what you face may seem insurmountable. But just think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's dream, or Susan B. Anthony's successful fight for women's suffrage, or the compassion of Mother Theresa to inspire you.

Create a vision bigger than yourself.

Talk. Voice your opinion. There may be other people who share your vision.

Listen. There may be other viewpoints to consider.

Be active. Vote. Volunteer. Speak out. Be a public servant.



Congratulations, graduates. You have reached the crossroad. You are no longer the children, and you now have the opportunity as adults to ask yourselves,

**“Is it good for the children?”**

Best of luck to all of you,

Dr. Corina Norrbom