



**Commentary
For
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**Presented by Rachael Todd
Miss Florida 2009**

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I have just returned from competing in the Miss America pageant in Las Vegas.

What an amazing experience to have met so many incredible women from every corner of the country and to have achieved all that I have thus far. I could not be more thankful for the opportunities that I have been given.

Now that I am home I am ready to continue actively spreading my message through our state. My personal mission is to be an advocate for the homeless. I am steadfastly compelled by the principle I learned from my family: to give unconditionally to the service of others, especially those who live in more unfortunate conditions than my own.

My family runs a nonprofit organization -- The HOPE Foundation in Central Florida, which assists families in crisis and works to prevent them from becoming homeless. Through my work with HOPE I have become passionate about changing the way America thinks about the poor and homeless. This has become my personal platform and life goal: the end of homelessness in America.

As the economy around us continues to take a downward turn we see more and more people falling through the cracks for the first time in their lives. Overwhelming healthcare costs and job loss are the 2 leading causes of bankruptcy and homelessness today. As a result people end up living on the streets, in tent cities, or in their cars. Families are the fastest growing population of homelessness, and account for 52% of the total population.

We have for so long been providing temporary solutions. At one time or another, we have all given our time at a soup kitchen, or homeless shelter. We feel as though these should be enough, but these band-aids are no longer the answer. We have been managing the problem, instead of solving it.

Housing First -- When permanent housing is attained homeless families are given the most precious gift: Stability. Permanent housing allows them to focus on every other aspect of their lives and offers a launching pad to independence.

I do believe the end of homelessness is possible, I do believe no one wants to be homeless and I know that the end of this problem begins with each of us deciding today, to stop thinking about those in need as lower than ourselves.

My goal is to inspire people of all ages and get them involved in affecting change, to find their passion and challenge them to DO something about it. I have a desire to increase awareness about homelessness issues because ultimately we have to realize -- it's not about ourselves, but about those around us.

I'm Miss Florida, Rachael Todd and ending homelessness matters!