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# Pace University Centennial Kick-Off Event Featuring President William Jefferson Clinton

President William Jefferson Clinton, 42nd President of the United States of America  
*Pace University*

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**Pace University Centennial Kick-Off Event  
March 5, 2006**

The Centennial Kick-Off event featuring President William Jefferson Clinton was held on Sunday, March 5, 2006 at 2:30 p.m. at the Ann and Alfred Goldstein Health, Fitness, and Recreation Center on our Pleasantville campus.

Below are President Clinton's remarks (verbatim transcript).

BILL CLINTON:

Thank you very much. Thank you. President Caputo, Chairman Bianco. Thank you for the honorary degree and for the award. And, Dean Baczko - I love saying that. When I met Joe Baczko, neither one of us ever thought we would have so distinguished a term in front of our names. Nor, at the time, did we deserve it. (LAUGHTER) I'm very proud of that introduction, because it was given by a man I admire. I was thrilled when he came here to Pace. Joe and his wife, Kathy, who has worked with our Foundation in many ways and worked with me in the White House, have been friends of mine for more than 40 years. And I was in their wedding almost 39 years ago, which is, in and of itself, an achievement in this day and age and a great tribute to both of them, and to their wonderful son. So I thank you, Joe, for that introduction. Because this program calls for some questions to be asked and answered at the end of it, the questions that were provided, I am reliably informed, by the students -- I certainly hope that's true-- I will resist my normal penchant to get too mired in the details of policies I would like to advocate for your future and instead try to ask you to just take a little walk with me in your imagination into tomorrow. I think the most important thing that any citizen of this country or indeed any responsible citizen of the world can do today is to have a clear understanding of where we are, a vision of where we ought to go, and the values necessary to make the choices to take us there. And it's really important to understand that.

This is the 100th anniversary of Pace University. A hundred years ago in 1906, Theodore Roosevelt was the President of the United States. One of my favorite presidents. In a time which, in all of our history, most parallels the present moment. Why? Because there were two great questions: One was the economic and attendant social change going on in America as we moved from farm to factory, from rural areas to cities and to an ever more diverse population with more and more immigrants coming into our cities, looking for jobs in those factories.

And the great question was, how can we maximize the value of this incredible engine of industrial capitalism and still make America a decent place to live, where our fundamental values of family and equal opportunity and human decency to all were fulfilled. Theodore Roosevelt was the first President to have to confront that. And our whole society had to confront that.

There were people, believe it or not, who back then said that minimum hour and minimum wage laws and laws to limit the ability of factories to work ten and twelve year old kids, 12 and 14 hours a day, were unconstitutional encroachment on the property rights of the factory owners. We have come a long way.

Immigrants were living in New York City in the most abominable conditions imaginable when young Theodore Roosevelt was the police Commissioner of New York, and had to worry about whether you could even fairly enforce the law on people who were living in jungle-like conditions.

Today, we live in a different sort of global economy, but believe it or not, we were about as trade-dependant then as we are now. But we are much more interdependent with the rest of the world today, because in addition to economic interdependence our borders are more open. Our immigration is even more profound and because of information technology and the awareness that we have of what's going on everywhere in the world, we are connected in ways even more profoundly psychological than we were 100 years ago.

But we are going through the same sort of economic shift to a new sort of economy, fueled by that information technology; fueled by new barriers being broken down in science; fueled by a challenge to move from the central engine of the industrial era - the burning of fossil fuels, to generate economic opportunity.

And so we're in a new time, as we were then. And the question is again, what do we have to do as a nation, and in a larger sense, what do we have to do as a world, to take advantage of the marvelous engines of economic growth out there, in a way that spread the benefits to everybody and preserves the basic social safety net that enables families to raise their children in decency, the elderly to retire with a certain level of security, and all of us to pull together, in this society in a larger world that is growing ever more diverse in terms not only of race and ethnicity, but also religion.

The second great question to face America in 1906 was, what is our country's role in the world? Because we had become an important country. We were big geographically. We were getting more and more people. We were generating more and more wealth. And people expected us to take a role in the world's affairs. And just as now, there were two great conflicts about what we ought to do. Should we primarily be a peacemaker and a model for other countries? Or should we use our military power to try to get the results we wanted?

And we found then, as now, that on occasion we were required to do both. And in both areas we had mixed results. Sometimes we were successful and sometimes not, but 100 years ago, the major military issue was the continuation of our war with Spain and the Philippines, and the extension of our military power in our own hemisphere. And the major peace issue, for which Theodore Roosevelt became the only President to win the Nobel Peace Prize, was his role in brokering the peace between Russia and Japan in the Russo-Japanese war of 1905. Even then, the same conflicts you hear today. Do we get more out of being peacemakers, or do we get more out of throwing our weight around, were the same kind of conflicts we had 100 years ago. But today it's again more complicated. We don't have to worry today, as we did then, about warring nations that might fall out with each other and bring about what became World War I; and then bring about what became World War II; and then bring about what became the Cold War between the United States, the Soviet Union and China and our European and other allies. Today, we have to worry about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the availability of chemical, biological, or nuclear materials not only to states that might be hostile to us but might be deterred from using such weapons because we could retaliate. But terrorists groups that may not be deterred, because they can hide in mountain caves along the Afghan/Pakistani border and who knows where else across the globe.

And so once again we are called to say, "What is America's role in the world? What are our responsibilities beyond our borders?" Both to our own people and to future generations of an increasingly interdependent world.

You need to have an opinion on these things. You need to know where you think America is, and where you want it to go. And what you think should be done. What the role of government is, and what you can do as a private citizen. You need to know where America is in the world, in your own mind and where you want to go. And how you think we ought to get there. You don't have to agree with me, but if you can't answer these questions to your own satisfaction, you will be constantly frustrated as a citizen, and just as a human being. You will pick up the newspaper every day, or watch the news at night and it will look like the political equivalent of chaos theory in physics. All these different things happening that don't seem to relate one to the other unless you have in your mind these things.

So for whatever it's worth, here's what I think.

I think the fundamental characteristic of the 21st century world is not economic globalization, but interdependence. That is, economics plus immigration. Economics plus travel. Economics plus communication. Economics plus awareness of the real-life situations of people all around the world. I believe that our major obligations to the rest of the world are to try to do whatever we can to advance the cause of peace and prosperity, security and freedom and to build an interdependent world that becomes more integrated, because interdependence can be good or bad. You know that don't you? I mean, what was 9/11 but an act of global interdependence where people from another country used the forces of interdependence. They used open borders, easy travel, easy immigration, easy access to information and technology to turn three and they hoped four jet airplanes into massive chemical weapons which killed 3,000 people, including people from 70 other countries, including over 200 other Muslims who came to America looking for that integrated, cooperative future.

What's the difference between an interdependent world and an integrated world? In an interdependent world it simply means we can't escape each other. We're stuck with one another. We are caught up together, and those of us who are well-qualified, make the best of it. In an integrated world, you share

responsibilities, you share benefits, and you're able to do it because you share certain basic values. That's what I believe we should be doing. And I'll come back to what America should be doing in a minute.

How would we go about building a world that was more integrated? Well we do have to have a security policy. We can't be naïve about that. There are some people we can't convert. We have got to try to keep all of us alive, and our friends and neighbors alive, and minimize the killing and the dying. So it's important to continually modernize the military. It's important to increase our efforts to reduce the threat of chemical, biological and nuclear substances being in the wrong hands.

It's important to increase homeland security. I still really can't believe we only check five percent of our containers at all the ports in America when we've had now for four years a study saying that unless we do ten to twenty percent, there's no deterrent effect at all.

It's important to have a security policy.

The second thing it's important to do is to realize that a security policy alone will never be enough. Not for any interdependent country. Why? Because if you live in a completely interdependent environment, you cannot kill, jail, or occupy all your actual and potential enemies. And if you can't kill, jail, or occupy everybody who is or might ever be against you, you have to make a deal. That's where politics comes in.

We all talk about politics as if it's something slightly seedy. But the truth is that our Founding Fathers, that we now love to glorify, venerated honorable, principled compromise because that is the alternative to insisting that you're in possession of the absolute truth. Which means that we have to spend a lot of time and money and effort and thought, not only having a security policy, but having a policy to create more friends and fewer terrorists. More partners and fewer adversaries. And sometimes you can get a lot more with a lot less, by doing this.

And I'll just give you a few examples. Half the world's people live on less than \$2 a day. A billion people live on less than a dollar a day. Over a billion people have no access to clean water. Over two and a half billion people have no access to sanitation. A billion people will go to bed hungry tonight. Three billion people will die this year. Three million people from water-borne diseases like cholera and diarrhea. Eighty percent of them will be kids under five years old. One in four of all the deaths on earth this year will be from things people don't die of in America very much anymore, AIDS, TB, malaria, and infections related to diarrhea. These people can hardly be blamed, if they're poor and they've living in another country, if they vote for people who promise to spread the wealth, even if they're hostile to America, if we don't give them an alternative.

So in Bolivia, a cocoa farmer gets elected President. The first native person ever to be President of Bolivia. Why? Because he said he would keep the riches of the country from being plundered by international corporations that had not improved the plight of ordinary Bolivians.

In the Palestinian territories, Hamas wins an election. Even though they promised to continue, or they said they wouldn't give up terror and they wouldn't recognize Israel. Did the Palestinians all of a sudden want to destroy Israel? Here's the interesting thing. One week after the Hamas victory, there was a poll of the Palestinians, which showed the following. Seventy-three percent said they wanted Hamas to renounce violence and terror. Eighty-two percent said they wanted Hamas to make a peace agreement with Israel. Why did they vote for them? Because they're living on less than a dollar a day, and the government they had was not delivering the goods. And they were desperate and they didn't have any other alternatives. They didn't vote to return to terror. They didn't vote to give up the path of peace. They voted for somebody to clean the streets, open the schools, and give them a job and run an honest government.

We have to understand that there's a whole world out there that never saw the inside of a university. There are 130 million children in the world who never darken the door of any school. Not even a poor school with bad textbooks or inadequate maps or anything. They just don't go. And for a small amount of money, we can have a huge impact on our relationship with these people and their future by doing our part to put all the kids in the world in school.

By doing our part to get affordable AIDS medicine and prevention strategies out there to all the people who need it. And to deal with TB and malaria. And the other health challenges. The absence of water and sanitation facilities. All these things, these basic things.

Lest you think I am being naïve, there was a survey done, which I read about in the papers, in the last week or so, which showed that the only place in the Islamic world that America had made permanent gains in approval in the aftermath of our action in Iraq were in the tsunami-affected countries and in the earthquake-affected areas of Pakistan where our military and civilian workers, our religious and nonreligious private organizations, went to help people just because they were people. Because they were desperate and left behind and left out, and they needed help. And our standing in those countries rose dramatically and has stayed up over time.

Because all of a sudden people saw us as people. Because we saw them as people. Never minimize the importance of what some people call our soft power. Our ability to relate to people as human beings.  
(APPLAUSE)

And the third thing I would like to say is, we have to be more willing to work in cooperative ways with other countries. We always have to keep the right to act on our own, any country does. But our preference should be to cooperate with others. There are very few things that we can do totally successfully all by ourselves and in so far as we are seen as acting alone around the world, a lot of people will react against it because they may not trust our motives. But when we're acting with others, it works better. So I favor a whole lot of these international efforts.

Including the international effort on climate change, which I hope our government will rejoin. I think that if we walk away from joint efforts, others feel free to do so as well. And if you just take this climate change issue, if you want to talk more about that, you can ask the question later. But I don't think there's any question that if the world warms for the next 50 years at the rate of the last ten, we're going to have disastrous things occur.

We'll lose 50 feet of Manhattan Island. One of the little countries I worked so hard to help in the tsunami, the Maldives, I won't have to worry about them anymore – we'll be evacuating them. They'll be history. The waters will flood over them. We will have very disruptive events. We'll have dramatic changes in agricultural production. And millions of food refugees, a lot more wars, and trouble. All of which we'll have to pay for because we refuse to stop generating wealth by putting greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere.

Now 100 years ago, when Theodore Roosevelt was President, and for most of the 20th century, it was true that a country could not get rich, stay rich, or get richer without burning more coal and oil, and therefore warming the planet. It is not true anymore. We have with existing technology the ability to be energy efficient, and to use clean energy in a way that would make us more energy independent and that would avoid China and India getting rich in the same way we did, and literally scorching up the planet.  
(APPLAUSE)

And we have got to do it. I think we have to do those things. Security, more friends and fewer enemies, more international cooperation. I think in order to do that, brings me back to America. We have to keep making America a better place. We won't be able to have any influence on anybody else unless people still want to come here because they think we're doing something right. Besides, we have a moral obligation to our own people, to help everybody live as long and as well as they can.

This is where I'm going to forego the policy and just be summarizing. We need an economic policy that generates good new jobs every five or ten years. Otherwise we will continue to have more poverty and declining wages. Wages, average wages, have been constant in this country since 1973, except for a brief period in the four years of my second term, when we had so much job growth it tightened the labor markets, and wages rose. But there's an enormous global pressure to hold wages down. And a lot of people's wealth has gone up, because their houses are worth more. But if you want a country that continues to create good jobs, we've got to have a sensible economic policy.

I believe that includes opening the doors of college education to all young people. Preparing people, especially young people at risk, to go to college. It means that young African-American students, Hispanic students, and young women have to enter the science, technology, and engineering fields at the same rate

of white, Asian, and Middle Eastern males. If that happened in this country there would be no shortage in America of scientists, engineers and technology workers for the next 20 years. It's very important to understand that.

It means we've got to see this energy problem as the opportunity. These are our jobs for the next decade. We can produce wind energy, we can produce solar energy, we can produce existing technology, we can produce bio-fuels, we can do a ton of things that will all create jobs, millions of jobs, potentially, if we take it seriously. And we can save the planet and generate a new generation of economic activity. It's the number one economic opportunity this country faces.

And the last thing I want to say about it is, if we expect to have a modern economy and a functioning society, we cannot continue to spend almost 50 percent more than anybody else in the world spends on healthcare and get less for it. We spend 16 percent of our national income on healthcare. The next most expensive systems in the world are Canada and Switzerland. They are at 11 percent. The difference is 11 percent and 16 percent is \$700 billion a year. Almost twice the federal budget deficit. Seven hundred billion dollars a year. And we are ranked something like 37th in the overall quality of our health system. And the number of uninsured is going up.

The other problem is, we can no longer expect to maintain any kind of manufacturing or export sector if they have to bear the burden of their current and former workers with healthcare. So we're going to have to re-jigger the way it's financed, if you want to be competitive internationally. And the government will have to play a role in this.

Almost half of the difference, almost half of that \$700 billion is in purely administrative costs. Our administrative costs in healthcare, and the people here who work in healthcare will know this, are 34 percent of the system, for the providers and the payers, as opposed to 19 percent in Canada, which is the next highest I can find. Everybody else was less than that. For Medicare and Medicaid it's about three percent. I don't want to bore you with all this. You need to know this. We're talking about \$300 billion a year that you pay for every year, for two million people to go to work, in this blizzard of insurance policies and the blizzard of providers. And they fight with each other over who gets paid when.

No other country in the world throws away this kind of money. And we can't afford it if we want to compete in the global economy. We could more than insure everybody in America that doesn't have insurance if we would quit wasting so much of this money. And you have to demand that something be done about it.

And so that's what I think about America.

Now the last two points I want to make are these. The difference between now and 100 years ago, the main difference with all these big public problems, is that private citizens have more power to do public good than ever before.

100 years ago there were a few millionaires in New York who could endow art galleries or museums or something. But there was never a time like today, 100 years ago, when because of the Internet and democracy and the rise of nongovernmental organizations like my foundation or the Gates Foundation or little bitty ones all over the world, private people could do public good. You've probably done it, whether you know it or not. When the tsunami hit south Asia, one third of American households contributed, in the aggregate, over a billion dollars. Over half of them gave money over the internet.

When I went with Hillary to the state fair in New York last summer, I had just announced that former President Bush and I were raising money for Katrina. So —I have my little nephew with me, and I'm walking down the midway looking at all the games and waiting for Hillary to finish meeting with the farmers. And this lady comes out from behind one of the booths. Now she's working in a fair booth and she had her little uniform on. And she gave me \$50 bucks in cash. And she said, "This is for the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund. I hate to give you cash, but as you can see, I'm working. I don't have time to send it over the Internet." This is an inconceivable conversation for me to be having five years ago, right? This is not some high-tech billionaire from Silicon Valley. This is a woman working in a fair booth in Syracuse apologizing for giving me cash! This has revolutionized what every one of us can do. And we can't have excuses anymore.

I'm grateful for people who are in public service. I'm grateful for the mayors that are here, and I see representatives of Congress-- like Nita Lowey -- who are here. Thank you for coming. I'm glad you're here. I'm grateful that people in New York gave my wife a chance to serve in the Senate.

But you can do things on your own. And even if there came a time when everybody you wanted to get elected to everything got elected and did everything you wanted them to do, even if that magic day arrives, there will still be things that will not be addressed either because of powers of government or the operation of the market. There will be a gap into which private citizens will have to stand to do public good.

And you can do it now more than ever before. Every single one of you can.

Now the last thing I want to say is this. It's easy to give a speech about all this stuff, and very hard to live it. Because all of us have identity conflicts. If you think about how you identify yourself, I'm a Republican, a Democrat, a liberal, a conservative, a man, a woman, I'm Jewish, I'm Muslim, I'm Christian, I'm Buddhist. I'm whatever - all the identities of the world are being thrown together. And every day, we see the global economy being pitted against people's sense of personal security. Is the trade deal good or bad? Are the global economies being pitted against people's sense of national security? Should that Chinese company have been able to buy the oil company in America? Should-- the current ports controversy, that sense of global economics and national security. You see the global economics against environmental security with the global warming conflicts.

This world calls for a little humility and human kindness. We are going to get in a lot of trouble if we make decisions based on the supposition that we are in possession of the absolute truth. That, after all, is what's wrong with the terrorists.

You know, no matter how sympathetic you are with what their beef is, they don't have a right to just go out and wipe out innocent people. Why do they think they have a right to do that? Because they believe they are in possession of the absolute truth. And I believe that that is a heresy in any religion. After all-- if you believe you can be in possession of the absolute truth, and you can turn it into a political program that's absolutely true, what do you need God for?

You can laugh, but I'm serious. Whatever your faith, you think about that. All of us are taught to be humble because of our frailties, because of our imperfections. But all of a sudden like a light, we're in possession of the whole truth, and we have a right to impose it by means of violence on everybody else? That's the argument that those terrorists make. That's how they justify, otherwise how can they live with themselves?

And so we all need to recognize that we can't resolve all these identity conflicts overnight. We may make some mistakes as we go along the way. But we have to know that underneath it all, there are human beings that aren't so very different from us.

That's why the people we help in the earthquake and Pakistan and in Aceh [Banda Aceh] in Indonesia think we're okay after all. Because in that awful moment of reckoning for them, we just showed up as folks.

I spent a lot of time in Africa working on my AIDS work and economic development work. And I never ceased to be amazed at how wise and good and optimistic people are. There's actually an article today in the paper that says that Africa is the poorest continent on Earth but of all the continents on Earth, the people are more optimistic. And it may seem counterintuitive, until you just sort of grasp their profound wisdom, a glimmer of which most Americans have gotten through their knowledge of Nelson Mandela.

In the hills of the sort of north central Africa, just below the Sahara Desert, all the tribal groups, when they walk along these well-trod paths, and they meet each other, the standard greeting is this, translated into English. Someone will say, "Hello or good day." And the answer is not, "Hello, how are you?" The answer is, "I see you."

You just think about that. Next time you see somebody that looks different from you, acts different from you, walks different from you, says something you think is nuts, do you see them as people?

It's not going to be easy for us to bring our minds and our hearts to the point where we'll be wise enough to realize that a global economy is bound to fail without a sense of global social justice, without a sense of

global environmental responsibility, without a shared global security system. It will require us to keep our identities and be proud of them and yet broaden them and embrace people who are different.

It all starts by just being able to say that simple thing.

"I see you."

Thank you very much. (APPLAUSE)