

UNIVIS/25/MB

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Thank you, thank you. Thank you very much, President Kirwan, for that introduction. It is a great honor and pleasure for me to be here at this great university. I want to thank the members of the Board of Regents who helped guide this system. I want to congratulate the other honorary degree recipients, and thank the administrators, faculty, and all who are gathered here at this celebration.

But mostly, I want to recognize two groups: first, the parents and other relatives and friends of all those who are graduating today (applause). Because of the diversity of this great university, I know that in this arena today are many proud mothers and fathers and husbands and wives and others who are seeing their graduates and knowing of the sacrifices that it took to bring them to this day.

I also particularly want to thank the class of 1996, Thank you (applause). Thank you for welcoming me to your campus. This is a place I have long associated with academic excellence and public service, not to mention basketball and women's lacrosse. (applause) Because it happened so recently I feel compelled to congratulate the lacrosse team for lifting Maryland again to the national championship. (applause) Now I don't know how many team members or how many graduates have touched the Testudo the Terrapin's nose in the last year or two, but I must say that having heard of his rather miraculous effects, I intend to seek him out myself for some good luck someday. (applause)

I also want to thank my friend, Bill Galston, who brought his considerable talent from this university to the White House to help the President formulate domestic policy. He worked particularly on the issue of national service.

And I am grateful, as is the President, for the role this university has played in promoting national service, both by hosting the first National Service Summit, and by serving as a site for the National Demonstration Program for National Service, and through the programs offered by the Center for Political Leadership and Participation. This campus truly deserves the title as a place of scholarship and service, and I commend all of you who have participated in programs of service during your time here.

You are graduating in a time of great transition and yet enormous opportunity and possibility for our country and out world. My husband often calls this the "Age of Possibility." The possibilities for progress that accompany any period of momentous change -- just look at the world around us: a new global economy

is taking shape that offers Americans the potential of greater prosperity but also the risks and challenges of stiffer competition. New technology is bringing the world closer together, changing the way we communicate and do business. But also we have to be reminded that virtual reality will never substitute for human connections and relationships (applause).

Many of us in this arena have lived through the changes in families, as families are transformed, often sending both parents, mothers and fathers alike, outside the home to find a job and earn a living. Posing the critical question of "who is minding our children and who is supposed to do what within our most intimate relationships?"

Yes, the world around us is changing from the most intimate of our homes to the world far beyond our borders. Communism has given way to capitalism, tyranny to democracy, closed markets to free trade. All of which is forcing us to redefine how we think about ourselves, and how we intend to meet the challenges that come to all of us in our lives.

Now it is no surprise that during a time of great change, many of us yearn for simple answers. We find it easier to slap labels or retreat into ideology in a way of thinking about and framing our responsibilities and responses. We know that sifting out and sorting our competing ideas and values is a very difficult task. As the forces of his history and technology literally change the face of human civilization, one of the greatest dangers we see around the world is that yearning, that seizing upon the answers, pat generalizations, and stereotypes.

Now sometimes it can be difficult for us to come to grips with the very many conflicting values we are called upon to sort out. But falling back on labels is the easy way out. You know the kinds of stereotypes that I'm talking about:

- If you are under 25, you're an apathetic Generation Xer.
- If you're over 40, you're a self-indulgent baby-boomer,
- If you're a liberal, you're a bleeding heart,
- And if you're a conservative, you have no heart.
- And if you're the current sitting President, you're all of the above, depending on what day it is. (applause)
- And if you're the wife of the current sitting President, well, you just better make sure your hair is in place. (laughter, applause)

Yet the truth is that one of the greatest gifts your education has given you is to see that there is no single label that applies to any of us. Our world is too complicated for that. So

now is no time to go back on America's historic commitment to public education. (applause)

I have learned that more than 60 percent of this campus' students receive some form of scholarship or financial aid. That is the best investment any state or country can make. (applause) It is not only an investment in each of you, it is an investment in your ability to learn to solve problems and adapt to new circumstances, to enlarge your understanding of the world and your sense of responsibility toward others.

Yes, we do have to reform and change. We have to always make it better. But let us never close the doors on access to college education to any student who wishes to work hard and take responsibilities solely for financial reasons (applause).

For more than two centuries here in America we have faced the challenges each generation does, in order to build a more perfect union. And today we are doing the same, whether it is expanding opportunities for education or protecting our environment, or making our streets safe for our children.

The debate in our political system between liberals and conservatives, progressives and populists, Democrats and Republicans, should not be about whether we govern ourselves, but how. Not whether we need public programs, but what kind. Not whether we should pursue national goals, but by what means we should employ to build the kind of future that will offer opportunity to all.

Now much of what will determine our future happens out of the political arena of electoral politics. It happens in our families and our workplaces and our schools and our religious communities.

But that does not mean that we can do without politics and government. Politics is about more than pundits and pollsters, just as government is about more than buildings and bureaucrats. Whenever anybody asks me, as they frequently do, "How can you stand being involved in politics?" I always ask, "Are you married? Do you have a family? Do you belong to a church, a school, a sports team or a civic group?"

Politics with a small "P" is the process that brings us together peaceably to work toward common ends. We do not always get our way. We do not always see the decision we would have made alone being the one that is chosen. But the process itself is valuable.

Because we have found through all of our differences throughout history that by working through politics with a small "P" as well as our electoral arena, that far more often than not, Americans do make the right choices. Yes, we can bash, as we do in America,

those who believe government is the solution to every social ill.

And we can bash those who believe that every government power should be curbed. We can reject political extremes, and in fact should. But I ask just one thing: don't reject politics and government in the process. In a democracy, that is us. And to turn our backs on how we do solve our problems because we get turned off by what we see as politics, or we get discouraged because government does not do all that it should right, that is a cop-out.

Government and politics are not perfect. They consist, after all, of human beings. They may even be boring. Max Weber once said that politics is "a strong and slow boring of hard boards." I often say that it's just a boring boring of hard boards. Because sometimes the progress seems so little in comparison to the issues we face. But our founders understood that. The system was devised so that sometimes it would be boring. It would force people to think and rethink the choices that they faced.

We are a better country today because generations before us did that. They paid the price to establish a stable, democratic government that protects our rights and expands opportunities like education. We are grateful for those generations who through our political process and system of government devised the GI Bill and social security and Medicare and other tools of responsibility for those willing to work hard and be responsible themselves in pursuit of the American dream.

Whenever I hear people here at home complain about government, I am reminded of those I have met in my travels overseas. I've met people who have endured torture and exile and jail, who have seen family members assassinated because they fought for the freedom and system we take for granted. Some of us here cannot imagine how grateful others are today around the world for the leadership this country has given and the example we set.

I remember meeting a young Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal who had walked ten hours from a remote village to catch a bus so she could meet me in Katmandu. She told me she loved her experience in the Peace Corps. She had been living in a house with no running water or electricity, working at a school where nearly all the students were boys, since most girls were still denied schooling and often married by the age of twelve or thirteen.

But she missed her family and her friends. And she also missed those blessings of daily life we take for granted. Things like safe drinking water and food that we can eat all year round, that you can not worry about eating and getting sick. Free public schools for both boys and girls. Warm baths and electricity, during the day or the night. Paved roads, cars, and phones that work.

Now these may seem like trivial examples of what our government and our people have accomplished together. But they represent the larger spirit of politics, government, and democracy that have enabled us to solve problems and make progress together.

I thought of that again when I was recently in Bosnia with my daughter. I met with civilians -- Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, in Tuzla. And they sat in a circle and told me about what their lives had been like during four years of war and ethnic violence. Doctors and nurses related how they had kept rudimentary facilities open despite being bombed daily. I heard from mothers and fathers who had lost children and wives who had not seen their husbands since they had been dragged away.

There was bewilderment in their voices and pain in their eyes as they tried to explain how such horror and tragedy could have occurred, how politics and government had broken down. How they were moved to hate neighbors with whom they had lived peacefully for generations. And yet they also expressed great hope that the United States and the world was at least giving them a chance to establish a lasting peace and resume some semblance of normal life.

Then I visited with our soldiers in Tuzla and at two outposts, Camp Alisha and Camp Bedrock. And I wish every American could have been with me. After hearing how politics and propaganda had turned people against one another, I saw before me a real model of what we value and have built here at home. I saw American democracy in action. There they were, men and women, black white and brown, Christian, Muslim, and Jew, kids from farm and cities and suburbs. All there representing us, serving in the cause of peace.

But maybe as important as separating the combatants was the example they gave as to how we have worked out our differences. How people of different backgrounds and beliefs can work together for a common enterprise.

It reminded me so forcefully that despite our imperfections and flaws, we have a system of government and politics that has endured. It is rooted in values and understands the imperfections of human beings. It believes in the ideals of education of service to our fellow man.

So my hope and my challenge is that as you go forth from this campus, you do so as active, committed citizens, who understand that you too have a stake in our government and in our political system.

Now I can just imagine some of you saying to yourselves, "Oh, come on, Mrs. Clinton. Really I've got to pay off those student loans. I've got to find a job. I want to fall in love. I want to start a family. How can I add any more obligations?"

what we must do is look back at the values, and the ideals, and the traditions that have gotten us this far and develop a coherent vision of what our common destiny requires of all of us.

Anytime there is a period of transition and change as volatile as this one, many people believe that the world is coming to an end, that civilization has reached rock bottom. A thousand years ago, at the turn of another millennium, many people thought that the world as they knew it was over. And yet look at what has happened in the last thousand years, with advances in medicine, and science, and industry, and great strides toward peace and prosperity and progress in basic human understanding.

Thinking back just a century we can see that many pundits and scholars at that time were noting that there were so many divisions and so many vast dislocations that we weren't sure what would happen. We have the beginning of industrialization and immigration and the movement from farm to city.

And again, three uncertainties were unleashed, not dissimilar from what we feel today: fear of rapid change fueled a sentimental fervor for simpler times, just like today. Populist politics raised valuable concerns about economic exploitation and political corruption, but also unleashed extreme reaction that gave rise to racism and ethnocentrism and isolationism.

But then look at what happened next: reactionaries and extremists did not triumph. Instead a progressive political consensus was achieved that addressed genuine concerns about economic and political equality. A new spirit of progress won out over hate and intolerance, and fostered a new politics of inclusion. The result was that Americans of all political stripes, Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, whatever they called themselves, began to think differently about what politics and government could do.

Progressive politics at the turn of the century, under the leadership of people like Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and others who followed, they were able to see a vision of the future and what it would take to overcome a great depression and to sustain economic growth.

Franklin Roosevelt, many historians argued, saved capitalism, because of his vision about what it would take for people to feel part of the economy and our political system. Opportunities were extended to women and minorities. Our environment was seen as a great resource. We saw much occurring that went beyond ideology or political description.

And of course we know that one of the great accomplishments has been the investments we've made in education. Our public education system, from kindergarten to the university, is one of the greatest reasons we have the democracy we have today. (applause) And all of us have a stake in supporting this system;

But I think being a citizen is just part of the price we pay for living here in this democracy. You have to give it your best shot. Yes, work hard. Love your family. Cherish your children. Make time for your neighbors, your communities. But know that you are a steward of democracy.

Each of us has a role to play. We cannot dismiss it as someone else's responsibility. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Human progress never rolls on the wheels of inevitability. The time is always ripe to do right."

You may never run for office. You may never marry someone who runs for office. But I hope whatever you choose to do, you will take the time and put forth the effort to make it clear to all of us who love this country that America's best years are ahead. That just as every other generation met its challenges, we will do the same.

I know that if we do that and enter into this new century and millennium with that American spirit of confidence and optimism, that a hundred years from now, someone will be standing on this campus, probably in a new arena, talking about the challenges that we confront then as well. And they will look back and say, "Once again, in a time of great change and turmoil, Americans who value what we inherited made the right choices for themselves and their future."

Thank you and God speed as you go forth into the world.