

Flex Scholars Event
5/11/98

**HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FLEX SCHOLARS EVENT
THE WHITE HOUSE
MAY 11, 1998**

Good morning. It's a great pleasure to join USIA Director Joseph Duffey and Ambassador Morningstar in welcoming to the White House our important guests today: our Future Leaders Exchange Scholars, as well as the students from the School Linkage Group. I also want to welcome the many host families who have traveled from across the country to be with us today. Without your willingness to open up your homes -- and your hearts -- to these young people, these wonderful exchange programs would not exist.

I want to thank Joe Duffey for his strong support of these programs at USIA -- and Ambassador Dick Morningstar -- who I've traveled with so often, and who I know has such a passionate interest in these international exchanges. Thanks to the support and guidance of leaders like yourselves, the FLEX program has provided the opportunity for thousands of students from the new independent states to come to America every year -- to live with American families, attend American schools -- and to deepen their understanding of American culture and society.

As some of the students here may know, I recently met with some of your colleagues in Tashkent, Uzbekistan -- as part of my trip through central Asia last November. And I was thrilled to have the opportunity to talk to them about their experiences here in the US, and how that experience changed their lives. And now, I'm so pleased to have the opportunity to meet all of you -- a few days before you return to your families and communities back home.

These programs yield such immeasurable rewards. I already know how much your American host families -- and your fellow students -- have benefitted from having you among them. They've learned about your language and culture and customs. But most of all -- you've reminded them -- and all of us -- about something that is too easily forgotten: that freedom is an extraordinary blessing. And democracy is a gift that we should never take for granted.

I hope that your time in our country, in turn, has renewed your commitment to democracy. We know that the FLEX alumni are a well organized and increasingly visible part of the youth movement in your countries -- and that you will continue to strengthen that leadership of the future. I also hope that your experience here in the United States has underscored for you the fact that the work of democracy is never over. It requires a constant commitment on the part of its citizens. We've spent more than two centuries as a democracy -- and we in the United States are still trying to get it right.

I know that tomorrow you will be volunteering at the Capital Area Community Food Bank. It will be through volunteer efforts like these -- back in your own local communities -- that you will be involved in as you help build a strong civil society, and in the process, a more democratic and caring community.

All of the young people here today share an extraordinary opportunity to help shape the future directions of your countries. You are the next generation of leaders -- here in the United States, as well as in the new independent states. Thanks to these exchange programs, you are learning the lessons of democracy from each other, in very real and immediate ways.

You're learning another valuable lessons as well. That while our nations are very different in so many ways -- the challenges that young people face, whether they live in Washington, DC or Tashkent, Uzbekistan -- are really very similar. Issues like gun control, and the importance of improving the educational system, and women's rights -- are challenges that we all face -- and that must be addressed through open debate, and local advocacy, by people of all ages and backgrounds.

I want to recognize some of the participants here today who are involved in the school linkages program at Bethesda Chevy Chase (BCC) high school -- which has maintained a successful student exchange program with a high school in Moscow for more than ten years. I'm glad that a student and a teacher from BCC are with us today.

And I'm looking forward to hearing from Shukhart Sadyrov -- a FLEX scholar who will tell us about his experience here in the United States, and what it has meant to him.

Before I introduce Director Duffey, I want to thank each one of the students here today -- not only for what you have done over the past year in your host communities -- but for what you will do in the years ahead, as you help lead your own countries toward greater democracy and freedom. Let's never forget how much we can learn from each other, and how important friendships are to building a better world.

And now, it's my pleasure to introduce to the USIA Director Joe Duffey.

[After speaking program, HRC concludes event.]

Thank you all very much. I'm sorry I have to leave for New York now, but Ambassador Morningstar and Joe Duffey are happy to stay and take your questions. You are then invited to a reception in the State Dining Room. Thank you so much for coming.

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