

**PHOTOCOPY
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White House Conference on

Philanthropy

10/22/99

White House Conference on Philanthropy
Opening Remarks by President Clinton and
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

The East Room
October 22, 1999

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you, and welcome to the White House. And welcome to all of those who are joining us via satellite at more than 3,000 sites around the country and through public broadcasting.

I think it's appropriate that we begin this conference on philanthropy by thanking our donors and supporters. So I want to begin by thanking the National Endowment for the Humanities, the federal agency that keeps America learning about our people and our past, and is co-hosting today's conference.

I also wish to acknowledge the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation for working with South Carolina Educational Television to bring this conference to audiences across America, via satellite and Internet. William S. White, the president and CEO of the Mott Foundation, is here with us today, as is Paul Amos, the president and CEO of South Carolina Educational TV.

While we are thanking those who have helped extend our reach beyond the walls of the White House, I also wish to mention at least a few of the many organizations that have done such great work, not only to make this broadcast available, but also to host local forums and viewings. I particularly want to recognize Dr. Bernadette Healy, the president of the American Red Cross, and Betty Beene, the president of United Way of America, who are here with us today and who have partnered to sponsor many local events across the country.

We know there are many other groups that have also been participating and helping. The Forum of Regional Associations of Grant Makers, the National Committee on Planned Giving, and the National Association of Fund-Raising Executives -- to name just a few -- who have worked hard to build a national audience for today's discussion.

I also want to thank the J. Paul Getty Trust; the Community Foundation-Silicon Valley -- whose president, Peter Hero, will be joining us later this afternoon; Jill Iscol and the Iscol Family Foundation; and Marcie Polier and the Marcie Polier Family Foundation, for their help.

And I also want finally to recognize Secretary Donna Shalala, who is head of our Combined Federal Campaign this year; and Janice LaChance, the head of the Office of Personnel Management; and my friend Paul Newman, famous for many things, including his generosity.

Now, the heroes we have just seen and admired in the video are with us in the East Room today, and I would like to ask all of you who were featured in the video that are here today to please stand so we can recognize and thank you. (Applause.)

You know, these are some of the heroes of philanthropy in America today, and they can be found -- along with others, millions others like them -- in every single community in our nation, wherever an American sees a need and acts to fill it; whenever a child sees another child without books or food at school and offers to share her own; wherever a business person takes stock of all the blessings in his or her life and bequeaths them to those with none.

You know, often the simplest acts of generosity are the most heroic. I think of the inspiring story of Oseola McCarty, who spent a lifetime washing, starching and ironing other people's clothes, living simply and frugally in Mississippi. Four years ago, she decided to use her life savings of \$150,000 to endow a scholarship fund at a nearby university. "I'm giving it away so that the children won't have to work so hard like I did," she said.

Last month, at the age of 91, Ms. McCarty passed away, but her gifts live on in the scores of students who will go to college because of her generosity.

They probably weren't even thinking about it when they made their contributions, but Esperanza Rich and Matel Dawson and Rolland Lowe -- all the American heroes we celebrate today -- have also made invaluable contributions to the strength of our democracy. I've been privileged to represent our country in many of the world's newest democracies, places where people are just beginning to understand the responsibilities and benefits of freedom. And everywhere I go, people ask me, "How has the United States been able to make its democracy work for so many years?"

So I tell them about our traditions of citizen service and philanthropy, about how our democracy thrives not just because of our free elections and our free markets, but because in that space between government and the economy, our citizens come together to help each other; to lend a hand in times of trouble; to support nonprofit organizations; and to look at how all of us can make a contribution to doing more.

Our democracy thrives because of Myrian Bodner, a Kentucky homemaker who raised a quarter of a million dollars in relief supplies to help her native Nicaragua recover from Hurricane Mitch.

We thrive because of the Reverend Ann Pearson, who gave each of her parishioners \$10 out of a small inheritance to donate to a worthy cause so that they could recognize all the creative ways each of us can find to help others.

And, literally, there are millions and millions of stories we could tell this afternoon to really in some way represent the 85 percent of all funds given to charity in America that come from individuals.

The president and I have invited you here today to find out how we can magnify and spur the philanthropic spirit of all of our citizens in the new millennium. And though philanthropy comes in many forms, we'd like to focus today's discussions on individual giving.

Many of you know that we have created a Millennium Council here at the White House to celebrate this moment in time and to lead a national effort to honor the past and imagine the future. And one important part of the council's mission is to help all Americans identify the gifts each of us can give to the future. There's no better gift our generation can give to the future than a strengthened philanthropic tradition.

There has never been a better time for philanthropy than today. We are living at a time of unprecedented prosperity. The new economy has brought new wealth to so many Americans, and my generation and the president's -- the so-called baby boomers -- stand to inherit \$12 trillion in the coming years.

Just imagine what revolutionary progress we could bring to America, how many lives we could change, if every American family increased their giving by just one percent of their income.

We could offer child care to more than six million children; we could deliver 250 million more meals to the home-bound elderly; we could guarantee Head Start to every low-income preschooler in America; we could provide shelter to four million people; we could save all the rare books in our libraries, and still have more than enough money left over to create the equivalent of the Ford Foundation each year.

But we cannot assume that any of this will come to pass, because philanthropy must be taught. So today, let us find innovative ways to cultivate the innately generous spirit of our young people. New communities of donors must be asked to participate. We have to find ways to embrace and encourage philanthropists of all races, ethnicities, and colors. New avenues of giving must be opened and explored, so we have to utilize the rich possibilities of cyberspace and the Information Age.

These are just some of the opportunities and challenges that I hope we can discuss this afternoon.

I am very pleased now to introduce someone who seven years ago called us to find new ways of extending opportunity to all Americans and requesting responsibility from all Americans so that we could create a community of all Americans. And we could not do that were it not for philanthropy, and we could not do that without leadership of the kind the president has given us. So it's a great personal pleasure for me to introduce the president of the United States.
(Applause.)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you and good afternoon. I am delighted to welcome all of you here. I thank all those who are here from our government, and all of you who have come from all over our country, and all walks of life, to this very, very important meeting.

I also want to say a special word of thanks to Hillary for yet another wonderful idea. This was a good idea, to have this conference. (Applause.) And all of you who have helped on any of these millennium projects, I think it's done us a lot of good to take time out and think about the really big issues in our society, and how we want them to play out in the years ahead. And particularly, I think this is an important issue at an important moment.

A long time ago, Alexis de Tocqueville said that charity in America was something more than simple compassion. It was a sign of good citizenship. He wrote, "Americans make great and real sacrifices to the public welfare. They hardly ever fail to lend faithful support to one another."

Today, this is a strong tradition. And the face of this tradition is changing. Philanthropy is, like our country, now more diverse as new groups seize and share opportunity in the new economy. It is more democratic, as Americans of all income levels, believe it or not, give at roughly equal levels. It is younger, as the high-tech economy creates a new generation of philanthropists.

I've got to take a little time out. Last night, I had dinner with a lot of these high-tech gurus who made allowances for the fact that I am obviously technologically challenged. (Laughter.) And we were talking about how we were all going to relate to each other and maximize the potential of the Information Age. And I started talking about this conference today and said, we've got to get more people to give. I said, I would like it if Internet usage were as dense in America as telephone usage is, if we had 98 percent penetration, everybody had an e-mail address. I think we could have a dramatic impact on education and on poverty. I think we could skip a whole generation of development. And how are we going to get this done?

So there is this guy sitting there, he's 27 years old, you know. He says, well, you know, when I got out of college, I started this company and three years later, I sold it for \$150 million and I started three others. And he said, what you need is founder stock. (Laughter.) He said, we need to go all over America and gather up founder stock and put it in a big trust to make universal the access to the Internet. He said, because you've got all these guys like me that don't know we're rich yet -- we're still living on \$30,000 and we've got all this stock. (Laughter.) So he said, that's what you need.

So I've now given you my contribution to this conference, which I learned at the foot of a 28-year-old last night. (Laughter.) So, I mean, that's encouraging to people like me who aren't young, you know? (Laughter.) We don't have to depend on the Rockefellers and the Mellons and the Carnegies or even the Paul Newmans, we can go get founders stock. (Laughter.)

I also think it's important to point out that not only the ways of giving are changing but the people -- when I saw that film I was so proud that there was a federal employee that had given every single month for 25 years. Someone obviously of modest means, doubtless a lot of other claims on her income. So I want to thank people like Mary Grayson and others who are giving. And I think we ought to think about new opportunities, or I think the buzz word is "portals," that are opening in the world of on-line philanthropy and how we can make sure that we can continue not only to increase the volume of money but to broaden the base of giving.

We'll hear today about venture philanthropists and start-up charities and other ways in which the entrepreneurial spirit is invading and energizing this field.

I would like to also point out that volunteering is another important way of giving. This week, Hillary and I celebrated the fifth anniversary of AmeriCorps. And we've already had 150,000 young people serve. And I'm very, very proud of that. (Applause.) I think that is an important thing to say. In a lot of ways, the measure of our life and our happiness is -- to paraphrase one of the many wonderful things Martin Luther King said, can be answered by the question: what are you doing for others?

So I'm encouraged by this conference, by the energy here. Some of my favorite people in all our country are out here in this audience today, people I have admired, some of you for 20 or 30 years, for all the things that I have watched you do for others. And I thank you for coming.

I am glad that the sheer volume of charitable giving is going off the charts. But I think, as we've had this phenomenal increase in wealth in our country, I would feel even better if the percentage of our national income devoted to charitable giving had gone up just a little bit. You heard Hillary say what we could do if we could just increase it by 1 percent. But going from 2 to 3 percent is a huge increase. We've been sort of stuck at 2 percent. Now, when the stock market triples, 2 percent is a lot more than it used to be. That's not real pocket change; it's real money.

But if you think about what we could do with just a little more, I think it is really worth pondering. We're having the same debate in Congress now, and I don't want to get into any kind of political dispute about that, but just let me give you an example. I very much want the United States to take the lead with the rest of the wealthy countries in alleviating the debt of the poorest countries in the world. And the Pope has asked us to do it for the millennium -- (applause.) Now, this is a campaign with a broad base: it's being spearheaded by the Pope and Bono, the lead singer for U2. (Laughter.) And even though I am not a candidate for anything anymore, I can spot a big tent when I see it. (Laughter.)

So, you know, we ought to do this. And this is just a little bit of all the money we've got. And it's just like de Tocqueville said a long time ago, this is not just charity; this is good citizenship. We take this burden off these people. If they are well governed and they are working hard, we give them a chance to be our partners and friends in a more equal and balanced way for the future.

So there are things for all of us to do. I would like to -- I would hope today that I will learn something and that we will learn something about how we can at least incrementally increase the percentage of our income we are devoting to philanthropy. I hope we will learn something, as I already said, about the ways we can do it. And I hope we will learn a little bit about whether we can all give smarter and whether we can make sure that the money we are giving is spent in the most effective possible way.

I take it we all begin by accepting that we no longer believe that there is a choice out there -- which was never a real choice -- between government meeting all of our society's needs, and

government walking away from them all and letting philanthropy do it. We have to have a better partnership, and it will work better if we do.

We need to think about, in government, whether we can do more things to generate more constructive philanthropy. The Treasury Department will meet with representatives of the nonprofit sector next month to discuss this. And I, in the meanwhile, am going to establish an inter-agency task force to strengthen our philanthropic partnership between government, nonprofit groups, and citizens; and to ask the Council of Economic Advisors to do me a study on the role of philanthropy in the American economy, and how they believe I can increase it.

By analyzing trends in charitable giving, by assessing the impact of the baby boomers' retirement, which -- it's going to be interesting to see whether it makes us more or less generous when we retire, this largest of all generations of Americans. It should make us more generous, because the kids in school are finally the first generation bigger than the baby boomers, and they need our help.

But we need to think about that. What's our message going to be to the baby boomers as they move toward retirement? What's our message going to be to people thinking about the shape of our social tensions as we double the number of people over 65 in the next 30 years? What's our message going to be to ourselves, those of us in the baby boom generation, about how our citizenship responsibilities should grow when we lay down the burdens of retirement, particularly if we've been lucky enough to have a secure way to maintain our standard of living.

This is deserving of an awful lot of thought because there is a whole bunch of us. And on the whole, those who manage to escape a career in politics are going to be better off than any generation in American history. (Laughter.) So some serious thought needs to be given to this.

Well, I've had a little fun with this today. (Laughter.) But I am really grateful to you all for being here. This is a big deal. We all know -- the truth is we're all fairly pleased with ourselves for being here because you feel better about your life when you've spent a portion of it doing something for somebody else. And you feel better about the good fortune you have financially if you spend at least a little of it giving something to someone else.

So what we want to do is to start the new millennium poised to do more and to do it better. And to give more chances to more people to participate.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 22, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON PHILANTHROPY

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1:22 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you and good afternoon. I am delighted to welcome all of you here. I thank all those who are here from our government, and all of you who have come from all over our country, and all walks of life, to this very, very important meeting.

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Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

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1:35 P.M. EDT