Eli J. Segal
CITIZEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Inaugural Lecture by the 42nd President of the United States of America

The Honorable
William Jefferson Clinton

Monday, December 3, 2007

Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

Questions from
Jehuda Reinharz, PhD ’72
Brandeis University
President
Thank you President Reinharz and Trustees of the University. I’d also like to thank the Panderos Steel Orchestra, I thought they were great. I was listening back stage. I know we have some people from City Year in Boston here. I thank you for being here. And to Phyllis, John, Maura and all the members of the Segal family who are here, I thank you for coming.

I’d like to begin by saying Happy Hanukkah. The one thing that I was thinking as President Reinharz was speaking is that it was nice to be on the stage with a President who was not term limited. That’s not quite fair. Actually, I sort of support him.

I am profoundly honored to be here today. When I watched the video clip of Eli recounting our life together and our great campaign together in 1992, I was thinking all over again what an astonishing human being he was and what a blessing he was to my life. Always looking on the bright side of things. Always full of hope. Genuinely he loved people. He did a great deal to rescue some of the ’60s generation from the bad rap that had been put on us. You know, that we were all self-indulgent and all that stuff the other side always said about us all those years.

I mean, Eli proved you could be a liberal Democrat and make a ton of money because you knew how to start businesses and run them, which he was quite good at. He proved you could be a compassionate human being and still be smart and tough and creative enough not only to find success in business, but to turn around troubled organizations and create new and innovative ways for people to advance the public interest.

After he worked in our campaign in 1992, which was the first time we had really been able to spend extensive amounts of time together in many years, I realized that he had a quality that was relatively rare in public service, in government service, at the time. He was a genuine social entrepreneur. He could take a vision and turn it into reality, and in some ways that is the most important skill we need in America and across the world today. It’s one of the reasons that I admire my friend Bill Drayton and Ashoka so much, because they fund people who have ideas who are prepared to commit the time necessary to turn them into reality. I am thinking about it a lot now because all of you in this room, particularly the students, have a huge stake in the talks which have just begun in Bali in Indonesia to try to develop a successor to the Kyoto Climate Change Accord.

Kyoto was something that Al Gore and I worked very hard on. If you ask a lot of people, “what was the greatest tragedy coming out of Kyoto?” Most people would say that “America walked away from it. It was terrible.” And it was terrible. But it is also terrible that almost every single country that had signed the Kyoto Climate Change protocol did not meet the goal they promised to meet, because they couldn’t turn good intentions into reality. Eli Segal was a genius at turning good intentions into concrete reality. And that is the importance of this program that has been established in his honor and in his name.

AmeriCorps was a great idea. We wanted a domestic version of the Peace Corps that had the benefits of the GI Bill; to encourage people to give a year or two of their lives to their country at home, and if you do, we’ll help you go to college. But it was just an idea. We introduced an incredible unifying idea into a very polarized political climate in Washington. We had to pass legislation, which was reasonably easy to do because our party still had a majority in Congress at the time, but turning it into reality and then sustaining it once the Republicans won the Congress was altogether a different thing. By the time I left office we’d already had almost half a million people serve in AmeriCorps, more than had served in the entire 40 year history of the Peace Corps, because Eli knew how to take a great idea and make it real.

When I signed the welfare reform legislation, it was highly controversial in America, and our party, because a lot people didn’t think that we should require able-bodied people to work if they had limited skills, that they would inevitably be the last hired, the first fired and they would never earn enough money to justify giving up the benefits because most of them were parents. It was obvious that we had to have a cadre of employers who believed that poor people could perform and wanted to perform in the workplace, and that it was important for people to be able to succeed both as parents and as workers for America to make the most of its potential in the 21st century. But Eli took that idea and turned it into reality. He found 20,000 companies of all sizes to join our Welfare-to-Work program. They hired 1 million people for those companies off the welfare rolls. And when the country went into recession in 2001, it was revealed over a study that those 1 million people were actually slightly less likely to be laid off than workers as a whole; because Eli took an idea and turned it into reality. So for all of the students here, whatever your politics, that is what I wish for you.

During the last Congress, I was very proud that my wife led the legislative effort to officially change the
AmeriCorps scholarship to the Eli Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, to honor his leadership in starting the program. What I hope will happen is that people will remember the great gift that he had, because the world is awash in opportunities and challenges. Your grandchildren, for those of you who are students here, can gather at Brandeis 50 years from now for an event like this, that will turn in large measure not only on whether we are visionary enough to see our challenges as well as our opportunities but also understanding enough to make the commitment to solve those challenges. Whether we actually have the ability to take incredibly complex, difficult problems and work through them so that we change the reality of our lives and our children's futures. That is what Eli Segal could do.

You heard him tell the story of how we met in 1969. I don't know if he's here today or not, but Rick Stearns is now a federal judge, and it was a terrible mistake for me to appoint him a federal judge, because now he can't go to any political event I have in Boston. I never get to see him. He took me to this meeting at John O'Sullivan's house in Martha's Vineyard and that's how Eli and I met. I met a whole generation of young Americans who were barely older than the seniors here today, most of whom I've kept up with for my entire life. Every single one of them has lived a valuable, honorable, decent, productive life. But, of all of us, Eli was probably the best at taking a good idea and turning it into reality. So if you don't remember anything else I say today, those of you who are students here, not anything else, just remember that. We live in a world where your active citizen involvement is required, where both what you know and how you think will have to be wedded to the capacity to turn what you know and what you think should be done into real-life changes in an acceptably short time-frame.

So I want to talk about that just a little bit. How would you be like Eli 10 or 20 years from now, or even today? The 21st century world is actually quite exciting. I read the other day that as a result of the genomic research that was made possible when we finished sequencing the human genome in 2000, we've now identified the primary markers for diabetes. That's a big deal for me. One of my major projects is an effort to stop and then turn around the rising rate of childhood obesity. But we already have a very large number of children in America being born who will develop type 2 diabetes, what the American Medical Association used to call adult-onset diabetes but can't anymore so many children are developing it. We had a nine-year-old child in Harlem last year diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. So it's thrilling to me that now we have the markers primarily that show the genetic variances that make young women at high risk of breast cancer in an early point in their lives. Now we know about diabetes. I think we will soon have the main genetic markers for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

I read the other day that we have now identified a planet rotating around one of the hundred stars closest to the earth which appears to have atmospheric conditions close enough to ours that life on that planet might be possible. Alas it's still, though close, 20 million light years away. So unless some group of Brandeis students are willing to commit four or five generations of their families to space travel, we'll have to wait for them to come to us. But this is really exciting.

My last year as President, in the depths of the Amazon River, two marine life forms never before identified were discovered. The great Harvard biologist, E.O. Wilson, is trying to organize literally an encyclopedia of life so that we can measure not only the unacceptable destruction of plant and animal species on earth but so we can learn actually what's here, because we still don't know. It's a really interesting time to be alive.

This crowd is more diverse than it would have been 30 or 40 years ago. Every time I go to a meeting I see, and when I go to a political function for my wife I say, “you know, if we’d had this function 30 years ago almost everybody here would have looked like me, a bunch of grey-haired white guys in suits.” Then I always thank goodness my demographic has not been entirely erased from the crowd.

But always about half the crowd or more are women, there are always people of color there, there are people of different faiths there, and there are always many more young people now because young people are empowered to generate their own resources and to contribute them to all kinds of causes in which they believe. It is an interesting world.

But there are three massive challenges that unless they are met I think it unlikely your grandchildren would be able to meet at Brandeis 50 years from now with the same relative sense of hope and optimism and security. The first is persistent and growing inequality, in incomes, education, and health care; between the rich and poor countries, and within too many wealthy countries. The facts are well-known. Half of the world lives on less that $2 a day. One in four of all deaths on earth this year will be from AIDS, TB, malaria and infections related to dirty water. Eighty percent of the people in the last category will be children under five.
Even though we have a few people who perish from AIDS every year because their medicine doesn't work anymore, or they don't follow the regime, all four of these categories of diseases are by and large the problems of the poor. One hundred and thirty million children never go to school. At least that many go to school but they go to classrooms without trained teachers or adequate learning materials. Yet in every poor country, one year of schooling adds 10 percent to earning capacity per year for life.

That is why there is so much reaction against globalization today, so much reaction against trade because half of the world's people feel left out. India has the world's biggest middle class and over 500 million people still living on less than $2 a day. China has lifted more than 200 million people above the international line of extreme poverty in the last 16 years, but there's still hundreds of millions more. It is a significant challenge, aggravated by the projected population growth in the world, all of which is supposed to occur in countries not now able to support all the people who live there.

Within the United States it's a huge problem. We're in our sixth year of economic growth. We have six years of worker productivity increases, which means the people who are earning a salary are doing their part. But median family income, adjusted for inflation, is less than it was in 2001, and median wages have dropped about $1,000, adjusted for inflation, while the cost of all life's essentials has gone up more than the rate of inflation. The number of people without health insurance has grown 4 percent in a recovery. The percentage of workers falling below the poverty line has increased 4 percent in a recovery.

There is persistent inequality in this country. Part of it's due to education, part of it's due to changing job mix. The most important factor is that we haven't created many jobs in this decade, about 8 million since the end of the recession. During the same period, Spain, a country one-sixth our size, has created 4 million jobs, enjoyed 4 percent growth, and reduced its greenhouse gas emissions 4 percent at the same time. I'll say more about that in a minute.

The point is this is a problem in America. We have 16 percent of our people without health insurance. At any given time during a year, a third of Americans will be without health insurance, and many Americans have health insurance until they need it. If they have a particular condition, they find out all of a sudden it wasn't covered. Or there are limits on the coverage. Premiums have doubled in this decade, and over half the bankruptcies in America in this decade, over half, were caused by family health emergencies.

The cost of higher education has continued to rise and because of changes, which have recently been reversed in the Congress, thank goodness, we actually reduced our net support for helping young people to go on to college, so that last year a student who graduated in the top 25 percent of his or her high school class but was in the bottom 25 percent of family income did not have as good a chance to enter and graduate on time from a four-year university as a student who graduated in the bottom 25 percent of his or her class but was in the top 25 percent of income. If you're an American that should really bother you. Higher education is one of the few areas where we still enjoy a global comparative advantage for the future, but it has to be democratized again. It has to be made available to everyone again.

Since the 1990 census, we have known with documented, extremely detailed accuracy, that every young American who has two years or more of post high school education has a better than 50 percent chance of getting a job with a growing income. Every young American who doesn't has less than 50 percent chance of getting a job with a growing income. You should be concerned about growing inequality in your country. And you should recognize that no open economy can sustain a swelling middle class and reduce the ranks of the poor without very specific government policies, but even more important without creating a source for new jobs every five to eight years. You could repeal all of our trade agreements, unless you make it illegal for people to shop at Wal-Mart, Target and Costco, you can't stop the flow of imports into this country in some areas. If you want to do something about the trade deficit, by the way, the most important thing you do is to quit buying oil. We'll talk about that in a minute.

But this inequality problem should bother you, whatever your politics, whatever your family income, whatever you plan to do for a living. This country rests on an idea that has attracted people for over 200 years from all over the world, that you can come here and be free and develop your God-given potential, and if you do it you can find a reasonable life, educate your children and live in dignity. If we continue to have increasing inequality it will be virtually impossible to preserve the American idea, and it will be bad for us and for the world.

The second big problem we have is unsustainability, because of climate change, which I take it the whole
world now accepts as a reality. That’s I think the meaning of Al Gore finally getting the Nobel Prize for something he said for 20 years, often to ridicule. And I was delighted that it happened, but it’s real and profound and so is resource depletion. We are losing plant and animal species at the most rapid rate certainly in all human history and probably well before that. And here is the third thing: In the latest series of climate reports, it is generally conceded that in order to avoid the triggering of bio-feedback on earth, that is uncontrollable global warming, we have to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent between now and 2050, which means frankly we have to move to a post-carbon economy, and not just rich countries, but others as well. During that same period, it is estimated that the world’s population will grow from 6½ to 9 billion.

Now consider this: Most people believe that the first of our species, Homo sapiens, rose up on the African savannah somewhere around the Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania about 150,000 years ago, give or take. We wandered around in Africa for tens of thousands of years; made a boat when the oceans were 300 feet lower, which arrived first to Indonesia; and then to Australia 40,000-50,000 years ago. By 8,000 years ago, there were five distinct civilizations in the world. And I think I ought to say first that as far as we know by carbon dating the oldest village we have records of is in Jericho, 10 thousand years old. But 2,000 years later, Iraq, Egypt, China, Mexico and Peru had distinct, well-formed civilizations, and a couple of hundred years after that India.

In 1800 the world had a billion people. In 1900, it had 1.6 billion people. In 2007, 6½ billion people, and only in 43 years we’re supposed to go to 9 billion people. And as I said earlier, almost all of these people are going to be born in countries that are not now able to support their present population. That means a number of things.

Number one, unless we do something about this, the absolutely hysterical debate on illegal immigration earlier this year in Congress will have people laughing. By 2050 we’ll be begging for the problems of 2007. But the more important thing is how in the wide world are these people going to be fed? Only Brazil and Argentina significantly increased grain production. Is there anything we can do consistent with our moral values to slow this population growth down?

There is one answer that everyone should be able to agree on. If you put all the girls in the world in school and give every young woman access to the labor market in the country in which she lives, then the age of marriage and the age of child-bearing will rise. If we did it in the next couple of years it could literally shave a billion people off that [population] number, just by empowering people to make their own different life choices. But all of this will complicate the climate change.

Now let me go to what I was saying at the beginning of the talk. I thought that it was terrible that the United States got out of the Kyoto Protocol, but it’s also terrible that almost every single country that signed it failed to meet the commitment it made. Sweden did, Denmark did, the UK will and will beat its target significantly. And let’s look at what happened to them on the inequality scale. Tiny Denmark grew its economy 50 percent in the last few years with zero increase in energy and reduced its greenhouse gas emissions while growing 50 percent by going to 25 percent of electricity generated from wind; highest percentage in the world. They’ll be at 50 percent by 2025.

The United Kingdom, the European economy most like ours, will meet its Kyoto target two years early in 2010, as will Sweden and therefore they’ll be about 25 percent below by the 2012 deadline. Last year, before he became Prime Minister, Gordon Brown released a very detailed report from his office as Chancellor of the Exchequer showing in 12 of 15 categories how many jobs had been created because they took Kyoto seriously and took it as an economic opportunity, not an economic burden.

I now work with 40 cities on six continents trying to help them reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in a way that helps them economically. With the same formula we try to apply to our AIDS work, we’re going to go to high-volume, low-margin purchases of very green technologies, and then accelerate their implementations. But a lot of this stuff is not high-tech. If you look at New York, for example, the average American city, cities generate 75 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions on two percent of the land. Most cities generate 70 percent of it from buildings and the power necessary to operate them, 30 percent from transportation. The older the city is, the higher the percentage comes from buildings. In New York it’s 80 percent. If we were to green all those buildings, to put in new lights, new windows, new temperature controls, new lighting controls and simply green the roofs, it would generate millions and millions of jobs, just from efficiency.

Goldman Sachs commissioned a study a few months ago which found the following: If the US, India, China, and Russia were simply to reach Japanese levels of efficiency-no new clean energy, just efficiency-it would
reduce greenhouse gas emissions energy by 20 percent. It would take us 25 percent of the way home. So here’s the problem. Here’s the Eli Segal-worthy problem. We know this is true; and already economical with oil at $98-plus a barrel; but the markets are under-organized, under-financed, and both investors, decision-makers, who have to seek the investment, and also consumers have radically low levels of knowledge about what their options are.

This is a job for social entrepreneurs, whether they are in the private sector or they work for cities or states, or the federal governments, or they belong to non-governmental groups. This is a job Eli would love. If I were going to be President in 2009 and Eli Segal was alive and well, I would put him in charge of this. I would say, “Figure out how, whatever we decide to do with the new post-Kyoto accord, make sure we keep our word, and make sure we do it while creating jobs.”

This is something you should all be thinking about. This is not something we have an option to make a commitment on. Landfills and farm fields are full of methane gas. It’s 20 times more potent than CO2. There should never be another landfill in America. All that methane can turn into fuels that generate electricity cleanly, bio-fuels or organic fertilizers. Why aren’t we even doing it? Because we are not organized to do it. But could it be made economical, and could it be a net benefit? Of course it could. Every one of you should think about this. How are you going to deal with inequality? How are you going to deal with instability?

The third big problem we have with the modern world is the conflict between the identities we have and the identity we need. It’s an identity conflict. That is, we live in an interdependent world where we can’t escape each other, but we identify ourselves in ways, almost all of us do, which preclude us from developing a totally interdependent consciousness, from believing that whatever is special about us—our faith, our race, our culture, our politics, our skills, our gifts—are things to be celebrated and enjoyed, but in the end our common humanity matters more. The radical rejection of that can lead you to Al-Qaeda, our worst nightmare, a high-tech operation that can operate out of a cave, doesn’t need an office building, and believes everybody should be killed who does not agree with them, even their fellow Sunni Muslims. Then you move back a little bit from that and you find the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians, between the Kurds and the Turks, or the bloodiest civil conflict of the last 30 years, between Sinhalese Buddhists and the Hindu Tamils in Sri Lanka, all believing that their differences are more important than their common humanity. And you move back a little bit on the tragedy scale until you get to the extreme xenophobia that you see in some of the immigration debates.

Which is not to say that there aren’t serious issues there. There are. But the point is, all of us will have to figure out how to preserve what we think is special about our lives, and still in practical terms affirm our common humanity. It’s at the root of all these problems.

Why do people permit radical inequality in this society? They think that they and their family are more important than all those poor people walking around, even though we know that intelligence, effort and capacity are evenly distributed across the earth. Why in the wide world would anybody knowingly burn the planet up and deprive our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren, of the chance to have the life we had? Because we want to do what we want to do, and we just figured out that they are going to have to figure out how to solve it. This is a really profoundly significant issue, and something that just by living in a certain way you can help to solve. But you cannot minimize this. One of the reasons I love the Seeds of Peace program in the Middle East, because my experience is that people overcome these cavernous divides, not by talking nice, but by finding ways to be together and to act together. When we do things together, on a common goal, we get used to one another and we find out we are not half as bad as we thought we were. I honestly believe that we can’t solve the inequality problem or the sustainability problem unless we also deal with the identity issue.

Most people have all they can say grace over just raising their kids, holding on to their job, and paying their bills. They don’t have the luxury that university students do to think across the broad sweep of things. So you can have a much bigger impact than you imagine by helping other people to create the space in their minds, because they’re just as good as you are, to develop the kind of consciousness of our common humanity without which these other challenges will not be met. That’s a problem worthy of a social entrepreneur.

Now the good news is you live in a time where individual citizens working together have more power to change the world for the better with the government or on their own than ever before. America has over a million charitable foundations now, plus 355,000 religious congregations, all of which are involved in trying to do public good as private citizens. Half of those foundations were founded in this decade. There is an explosion of this going on all over the world which is why I was honored when the President mentioned our Clinton Global Initiative.
One reason it’s been so successful is that we’ve raised about $30 billion in three years for programs in 100 countries that affect over 100 million people, and many of the most important ones did not cost a lot of money. But we are riding a wave of global citizen activism.

The last thing Eli and I did together was to go to South Africa at President Mandela’s request along with Rolf Meyer, who handled the turnover from the old post-apartheid white government to the ANC, on how to create a civil society in South Africa. And we agreed when Eli was the board chairman of City Year that we would make our contribution by trying to establish a City Year program in Johannesburg, South Africa. And last summer-I try to go back every year around Mandela’s birthday-I was there and went to see the program that was probably Eli’s last great public contribution. We have over 200 black and white South Africans kids now, young people, working in the schools of Johannesburg. I visited them and they do everything from tutoring in math and science to AIDS awareness and prevention work. In the school I visited, I asked the principal, who was a very tall, courtly Boer man, who had been a school principal for 25 years, and was very proud of his South African students; I said, “You like these City Year kids?” He said, “Oh yeah, they’re great on the academics, they’re great on the AIDS stuff.” He said, “The main thing you have to understand is because this place is so poor, and we never have any athletic equipment, we had the worst soccer teams in town for decades. When the City Year kids showed up all of a sudden I had 12 coaches and we beat everybody now. And no one knows why we beat everybody. It’s because we have 12 coaches.”

I say this because, this is the last point I wish to make to you. A few weeks ago J. Craig Vener, a scientific entrepreneur who was racing the government to see who could sequence the human genome first, in a new venture released findings saying that we were wrong when the genome was sequenced and we said we were genetically 99.9 percent the same. He said that was dead wrong. We’re only 99.5 percent the same. Now if you’re a scientist, since there are 3 billion genomes this has enormous potential significance. That’s a big number. But if you’re a citizen, it doesn’t amount to a hill of beans. Let me just look around the room. Every single difference you can see between yourself and someone else—gender, race, height, weight, the whole nine yards—every difference you can see is rooted in somewhere between one tenth and a half of one percent of your genetic make up. This means that it is patently absurd that we would go around killing each other over that difference. It is patently absurd that those of us who are lucky enough to have everything we need in life and even more, that we would go around denying education or health care or a decent life to people who are just as good we are and working as hard as they can. It is patently absurd that we would walk away from the evidence of what we can do to generate actually more-balanced economic growth in poor as well as developed countries by changing the energy future of the world and instead say “we got ours, now we’re going to stay with what we’ve got.”

These are jobs for social entrepreneurs in the government, in the non-governmental sector, and in partnership. This is work worthy of the life and legacy of my friend, worthy of this great program that has been established at Brandeis in his name. More important for all of you, it’s the work you’ll have to do if you want your grandkids to be here 50 years from now. Thank you very much.
Q & A with President William J. Clinton

President Reinharz:
This question comes from Elizabeth Imber ’09, from Medfield, MA. She asks, “Mr. President, do you believe that a program of national service is realistic? How would such a program work without broad participation of young people from all walks of life?”

President Clinton:
Let me say, I think first of all it is probably not realistic from a budgetary point of view to have a mandatory national service program, but I think that the AmeriCorps program could be much larger than it is, and should be because it’s a way of giving more young people the chance to go to school, and a way to solving a lot of these problems at the grassroots level. If you just think of what would happen if we decided that we were going to make a serious effort in climate change and we were going to start with efficiency. That’s labor intensive. You have got to train hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of green-collar workers. There are lots of things to do.

So I would like to see us fund an AmeriCorps program that could operate up to a quarter million people a year. And I think you can get that many people through voluntary contributions, and I think you would get people from all walks of life. We’ve been pretty fortunate to have a pretty good mix there.

Secondly, I think that there is an effort now being made in the Congress to redefine national service in a the way that I think is good by saying to people who agree to go into public service careers that will never pay very much, “Every year you put into public service, we’ll knock 10 percent or whatever it is off of your accumulated debt.”

That’s why when I was President we solved it a different way. We offered a direct loan program that both cut the interest rates to the students and ironically cut the default rate to the government. It gave students the option of paying the loan back as a fixed percentage of their income so that there was never a disincentive to become a teacher, a police officer, a nurse or a fireman or whatever, because you knew that you were not going to be swallowed up by your loan costs.

That program saved students $9 billion dollars in our eight years; an average $1,300 in repayment cost for every $10,000 borrowed, and saved the taxpayers $4 billion because more students paid their loans back. And then it was virtually obliterated after I left office because it violated the ideology of the government that took over. It could never be true that a government could run a program more efficiently and cheaper than a subsidized private business, so they undid it. Now the Congress is about to go back that way. But even better is this proposal now alive which basically says if you go out, if you become a teacher or you become a police officer or a nurse or whatever the category of people needed, you can basically teach off all your debt. We could make the debt reduction more significant for people who go teach, let’s say, in underserved areas, who had skills that we needed more of. And I think a lot of people who might want to have a long term career in, let’s say, science, might be willing to go out and teach for three to four years high school physics or chemistry to people who never had a fully qualified physics or chemistry teacher before, if they know by doing it they can get rid of all their accumulated college debt.

By the way, this is not a new idea. The National Defense Education loans, which grew up when I was a young person, paid off a significant amount of my debt by being a professor of law, but you couldn’t do it if you were a police officer or a nurse or something else. I think people ought to be able to do that, including public school teachers. I think if you did that plus increased AmeriCorps to 200-250,000 people a year, those two things together would have a huge impact on increasing national service, and I think would draw a broadly representative segment of our population into the work.

President Reinharz:
This question comes from Rajiv Ramakrishnan ’10, whose hometown is New Delhi, and now he’s in New Jersey. He asks, “In your new book, Giving, you discuss the global poverty crisis and potential solutions and specific successes such as the Millennium Villages. What can universities as a whole do in the fight against global poverty?”

President Clinton:
Well, I think first of all we should start with this: We actually know more than we used to know about how to alleviate poverty by empowering people. We actually know pretty well how to do that. For example, we have a project in Malawi and Rwanda where we are really trying to double the per capita income of the country in
a fairly short time. We started with agriculture by making more high-quality seeds and fertilizer available at lower
cost, lowering the cost of credit, providing more agricultural diversity, and then helping to create farm markets
with affordable access while maintaining food quality. Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize last year
because of the micro-credit unit movement. I actually campaigned for him for 14 years. After he gave his speech
the Nobel Committee said, “I hope Bill Clinton will stop calling us now.”

But Yunus proved that you could loan really poor people with no assets or money, and almost 99 percent of
them will pay you back on time, with interest. So we know how to do these things.

The specific question was what can a university do? You can either try to mobilize a high percentage of your
people to work in one place, or to participate in one or two proven strategies. For example, I wrote in my book
about Kiva.org, which is one of my favorite websites because everybody can become their own micro-credit
banker. You get on the website and you find the country you want to be involved in, and for as little as $25 you
can make a micro-credit loan to someone whose picture you see, whose business is described, who explains pre-
cisely what they’re going do with the money, and then you get an update on what’s being done with your money at
least once a month on the website. When they pay you back you can either take your money back or turn around
and loan it again. So what if Brandeis became the first school in the country where over 90 percent of the students
had made at least a $25 investment in an entrepreneur on Kiva? That’s one thing you could do.

Another thing you could do is to form your own university-specific NGO, and try to get everybody, all the
students, to both give time or a very modest amount of money to it, and then, pick a country, a developing country,
and pick a goal. You’re either going to put all the kids who aren’t in school in school, or you’re going to fill the
health care gaps, or, what I would prefer to see you do, you are going to go there and prove that you don’t have to
be a rich country to make money out of fighting climate change, that a developing country can do it as well.

Meles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, told me a little over a year ago that his goal was to see the con-
tinent of Africa become the first in the world that was totally oil-free when it came to transportation. If you think
about it, you don’t need oil to get around anywhere except in an airplane. Nobody’s figured out how to lift a heavy
jet airplane off the ground and fly it long distances at fast speeds without the jet diesel fuel. It will happen, but it
hasn’t happened yet. Every time you go any place in any vehicle that uses oil in any way, it’s optional. We’re just
not organized to be in plug-in hybrid electrics. The lithium batteries I think will take care of that, and then you’ll
be getting a hundred miles to the gallon, or to have the most efficient kinds of bio-fuels. The government of Ma-
lawi recently invested with a European company, they did a joint venture to grow the Jatropha plant in Malawi and
turn it into bio-fuels. It’s much better than corn. It gets about four gallons to one and it’s like cellulosic ethanol in
America.

So what if everybody at Brandeis—you don’t have to be an engineer to do this, I tell you, this is not high tech
stuff, this is tackling the known things. What if you had an enormous percentage of the student body here organize
their own NGO and pick a country or a region of a country, negotiate the deal; they have to ask you to come, they
have to want you to come, it has got to be their plan not yours; but where you would go in with the goal of trying
to put everybody in school and proving that a clean energy future is in their economic interest, not a way to slow
them down. Those are, just off the top of my head, two different things that I would do if I were you. I’d do some-
thing that you could brand, that was yours. Put a Brandeis brand on it, because if you do that then other universities
and colleges will want to copy you.

In the springtime, by the way, we’re going to have-you mentioned the Clinton Global Initiative-we are
going to have the CGIU and we’re going to base it at Tulane in New Orleans because so much needs to be done
there. You could go there and make it a green city. And prove that everybody in America should do that. There’re
all kinds of things you can do. And we’re going to interconnect as many colleges and universities as we can on the
Internet while we do this meeting. But those are my two ideas off the top of my head. Do something you can
brand as Brandeis, where students who are proud to be here will be proud to do that, and where people can partici-
pate given whatever their level of money or time availability is. So that you can take $10 and use it effectively,
and you can take an hour a month and use it effectively, just as well as you could take a thousand dollars and peo-
ple can give five and ten hours a week to this.

President Reinharz:
This question is from Fuad Mahmood, a graduate student in our International Business School.
He comes from Dhaka, Bangladesh. He asks, “What kind of leadership initiatives are required from emerging
I think first of all people have to know they can do it. In other words, we had a kind of a self-defeating debate over Kyoto, because the justification for a lot of the members of Congress who voted against it, after we completed the negotiation, was that there was no point in our doing it if China and India and the other developing nations weren’t going to be covered because even if it required a cut in our GDP to meet our climate targets, the US and Canada, and Europe and Japan can do it. But the Chinese and the Indians would never do it, and certainly the countries coming along behind; the Indonesians, the Vietnamese, the Turks, the Mexicans, all the Latin Americans; none of them would do that. They would think it was just some big deal for us to keep them below us on the economic scale. And that is factually accurate, but not a justification for America and other countries not committing themselves. We have to be able to demonstrate that this is good economics, and then we have to devise ways for both middle-income and developing countries to understand that it can be good economics for them too, and that they can actually grow faster by skipping a whole generation of energy-use patterns and moving into the modern world. They can create more jobs in a more-decentralized and effective way.

So, that’s what I would say. We have to prove that we can do that. We have to prove it by setting a good example, and we have to prove it by helping them, which is why I am trying to work in Delhi and Mumbai in India for example, and in Beijing and Shanghai in China, and in Dhaka in Bangladesh. I mean, Bangladesh is by all standards a poor country full of self-evident geniuses, right? They’ve had 6½ to 7 percent growth for the last three or four years when there’s been nothing but political turmoil in the country. It got so bad that Yunus even briefly considered running for President of Bangladesh because everything was in such turmoil. But they were still growing 6½ to 7 percent and don’t you think that one reason is that not only the Grameen Bank, but many people who have copied it were making millions and millions of loans to poor people to become entrepreneurs and together they were raising the living standards of the country. They can do the same thing in energy.

This question comes from Rebecca Schiller ’09, from Warren, NJ. She asks, “Since leaving the White House, you’ve remained in the public eye. What do you consider to be your most-gratifying experience, since your term ended?”

I suppose I would have to say the AIDS project, and I would like to give a lot of the credit to Ira Magaziner, whom a lot of you knew, who helped us on our health program in the White House, and our e-commerce program. But he, like Eli, was a great social entrepreneur, and he put together a good group of people to provide the lowest-cost AIDS medicine in the world. We now sell it in 71 countries. We have full-blown health systems to deal with AIDS and other problems in 25 countries, and we have about 800,000 people on treatment. That’s about a third of all those who have been added to the treatment rolls since we began in 2003. We do it for approximately 10 to 15 percent of what the United States government spends to treat approximately the same number of people, so I’m really proud of that.

There are a lot of people who are alive today because of that, and I’ve seen children headed for certain death. Now, I couldn’t have done it without an enormous number of partners in and out of government. The Irish government, the Canadian government, the French government and a group called UNITAID which imposes a small airline tax for everybody flying in and out of France that goes into a fund that 19 or 20 other countries contribute to. They give me $30 million a year to buy medicine for poor children. When we started two years ago, there were only 10,000 kids in poor countries getting AIDS medicine and half a million were dying every year. Then some private, wealthy individuals gave me enough money to double that to 20,000 and I could always say “we doubled the number of kids getting treatment” in a crowd, then they’d clap, and I’d say “you shouldn’t clap, you should be ashamed that we are treating 20,000 people and half a million of these kids are dying.” So now we are up to 100,000, we’ll be up to 200,000 next year, the year after that we’ll be at universal coverage, if we can get the networks of health care delivery out there. I have to say I love all these things I do. I love the life I have now. I like being able to be a private citizen and a public servant. It’s fun. But I think that we had the biggest impact with the AIDS program.

I was in Cambodia recently, about a year and a half ago, and I saw this child who was born with AIDS and tuberculosis and was certain to die, and he was a pretty healthy 10-month-old. Then I was out doing a book-signing in California a couple of months ago and one of the volunteers at the orphanage was in the line and he gave me a
picture of this child on a tee-shirt, now another year older with long spiky hair looking great. There’s no feeling like that because if you at least give people a healthy life, even if they’re so poor, even if they don’t have a conventional education, they have a chance. At some point when you reach a point in your life, when you have more yesterdays than tomorrows, then the most important thing just becomes not seeing any child die before his or her time, not seeing any person denied the right to at least reach for their dreams, you know, the same chances that I had. And so that’s the AIDS deal, I have to say, has been the most rewarding so far.

President Reinharz:

I know your time is brief. You have a couple of more events to go to, and so the last question is my question. You said you love your life, but I’ve been really curious about the following, “Do you have any presidential aspirations? I mean being president of a university? Because if you do, I can work it out with the board of trustees, and if you don’t want to have this job I’d like to know why.”

President Clinton:

Actually that’s interesting. I’ve often wondered if there were any other jobs out there that I’d like. You know, I mean real jobs. I was briefly approached about the UN job, but it was Asia’s turn. I thought it was a bad idea, and because my wife was going to run for President I thought it was unfair. Then I thought about the World Bank, because I think it needs to be changed. I think the World Bank ought to be financing and it should be financing the world’s move to a post-carbon future. I think the World Bank could have a much bigger role than it has in the past in getting middle-income and lower-income countries to make this transition in an economically beneficial way. I thought about being a university president. It would be fun for me. I’d love it. I’d love to be in the classroom. I’d love to be around young people. One of the greatest things about my life now is that just almost everybody that works for me is much younger than I am. They keep me about half-way alert, most of the time.

But I like the life that I have now because I think when you’ve been President, what you should do is use your knowledge, experience and contacts to do things that only you can do. A lot of people can be great university presidents, and even great Secretary Generals of the UN and great heads of the World Bank, but this foundation work I do, most of the things I do I wind up doing because it’s a unique outgrowth of the life I’ve had.

People are always asking me, “Well, if Hillary wins the election, what are you going to do?” I say, “I’m going to do whatever I’m told.” But I hope whatever happens, if and I hope she’ll win, because I think it’ll be good for the country and the world. I hope that I’ll be able to continue to run this foundation because it’s good for America, and I think it’s good for the world. We’re here honoring Eli today, who was both a public servant in government and a public servant out of government. And so I would be happy to do whatever I could to help her succeed, should she be elected, because I think when you are a former President if any incumbent President asks you to do something, if in good conscience you can do it, you should do it. But I think and I hope I’ll be able to keep doing this. I like what I am doing now because it’s flexible, it’s quick, and we get high impact with minimal investment, even though we have a huge amount of money that flows through there every year now. Our administrative overhead is low, we can start something in a hurry, we can stop something in a hurry, there is no embarrassing story if I have to stand and admit that we tried this and failed because we were experimenting because we were trying. So I like this model that my foundation has and I think mobilizing all these people through the global initiative is great, and so I would respectfully decline your offer. Although, I think I would love to be a university president. When I am about to breathe my last breath, I think one of the regrets I’ll have is that I never got to be president of a great university. Thank you.