

**The Ohio State University Commencement  
Columbus, Ohio  
June 10, 2007**

**PRESIDENT CLINTON:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam President, Senator Glenn, Chancellor Fingerhut, members of the board.

I thank you all so much for inviting me here on this beautiful day and for giving me the honorary degree. I must say, when I read the biographies of the others who got degrees, I thought I was in pretty good company for an old politician. I was very moved when I walked into this stadium. I have seen it my whole life, ever since I got a television, but I've never been inside it before. People started cheering. I was so happy. And then I heard one man say, "Who is that tall, gray-haired guy blocking my view of Archie Griffin?" [*Laughter*].

You know, when I was a young man, I loved football, but I was in the band. [*Applause*]. And I love the Wind Symphony. They really did a wonderful job today. But I know The Ohio State University's band is called "The Best Damn Band in the Land." [*Applause*]. I think that since that's its actual name, God will forgive me for uttering that word on Sunday. It's a brass band, so they don't take saxophone players. I was wondering if, when I was 17, I had been given a music scholarship to play in that band, I might have come to Ohio State instead of Georgetown, and I might be here not as former President of the United States, but as President of High Street. [*Laughter*]. But you're stuck with what you have.

I congratulate you on the completion of your journey at a great university. I thank your teachers, counselors, mentors, friends, relatives, especially your parents, and all those who helped to bring you to this day. This is mostly a day of celebration, and I find we're lucky, 20 years from our graduation, if we can even remember who spoke there, much less what they said. But I would like to ask you to take a few moments on this glorious day to think about the future, to think about what has to happen for your children to be here 25 years from now and for your grandchildren to have the chance to be here 50 years from now.

Ohio State was born because people cared about your future. The history of the university says that the legislature authorized it in 1870, but it was made possible by one of the most remarkable acts in American history. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Land Grant Act setting aside land in every state to create a public university open to all people without regard to income. Let me just remind you what a truly astonishing thing this was. In 1862, we were in middle of the Civil War, and things were going terribly for the Union. There was no better than a 50-50 chance that the nation could be even preserved, and yet the Congress and the President were gambling on the future. And what they did in the middle of the Civil War, with an uncertain outcome, brought all of the graduates, all their families, all their friends, all of us who are sitting here to this

place today. We can do no less. No matter what's going on in your life or the life of the nation, all of us have to take some time to think about tomorrow and all the tomorrows that will bring our children and our grandchildren to the point where we are now. How will you do that?

First, it is necessary to understand the promise and peril of the 21st century world, an age of unprecedented interdependence for good or ill. Interdependence simply means we can't escape each other. A lot of it is exciting: all the trade, travel, immigration, diversity, and exploding knowledge. Knowledge is doubling every five years, much of it coming to being because of collaborative efforts across national lines. Just in the past couple weeks, I have read that scientists have looked into the vast universe and found a planet orbiting one of the 100 stars closest to our solar system which appears to have atmospheric conditions so similar to ours that it may be possible that life exists on it. Alas, even though it's close, it's far. It's still 20 million light years away, beyond the reach of any normal lifespan. That is, unless John Glenn, who is immortal, is prepared to go back up in space again to check it out. *[Applause]*. Otherwise, we'll just have to wait for them to come to us.

A couple days later, I learned that in the biological sciences, as a result of the sequencing of the human genome, we've identified the two genetic markers that seem to be high predictors of diabetes. And that's very important to me as an American citizen, because a new study just came out predicting as many as one in three children born in this decade may develop diabetes. Anything we do to reform health care and finally provide coverage to everybody will be undermined unless we can keep ourselves healthier. So this is a very exciting time with all this knowledge coming on.

But interdependence also means we share common vulnerabilities to terror, to weapons of mass destruction, to diseases like avian influenza, to the rampant inequalities in the world, to all the political conflicts rooted in religious and ethnic identities, to climate change, and to the less-noticed but equally profound depletion of our resources all over the world, from soil and water to plant and animal species to oil itself. We can't escape one another's challenges.

And if you were perplexed, infuriated, or cheering as the Congress debated this immigration reform bill over the last couple of weeks, just wait a while. The population of the world is projected to grow from 6.5 to 9 billion people in the next 43 years, and almost all of them will be born in countries that today cannot support all the people who live there. So there will be a great mad rush in your lifetime of people running around, trying to find someplace where they can plant roots, make a living, and raise a family.

How would you like to change this interdependent world? It's been good to you. Otherwise, you wouldn't be here at Ohio State about to claim a degree from the largest public institution of higher education in America, with all of its academic laurels. But how would you like to change it?

First of all, we have to make it more like the crowds that come here to watch the Ohio State football games. I'm serious. Think about it. People that come here to watch football are bound together by supporting this team. They're from all different races. They come from all over the world in their roots. They have all different incomes. They do all different kinds of things for a living. They worship God in different ways, or not, as is their choice. But they come here because they have something in common. That is the great challenge for the entire world, to create communities locally, nationally, and globally that share the opportunity to participate, a responsibility for success of the outcome, and have a genuine sense of belonging.

I could talk to you all day about what needs to be done. Do we have security challenges? Yes. Do we have the possibility that a nuclear weapon could go off? Yes. Is global warming a horrible problem? Absolutely. Do we know what we're going to do when we run out of oil? No. Is Darfur a travesty? Yes. Does it bother me that we still, after three years of intense effort, don't give medicine to all the poor people in the world who need it to deal with AIDS, TB, malaria, and infections related to dirty water? They claim one-fourth of all the lives on earth every year. Yes, that bothers me.

But all these problems are rooted in one larger question. The answer to that question will determine whether your children and grandchildren will be able to come here, 25 or 50 years hence, in an increasingly interdependent, crowded, clashing world. The question is: which matters more, our interesting differences or our common humanity? And what are you supposed to do about it?

All over the world, people are answering the question in the right way. In America, there are over a million charitable organizations, twice as many as there were in 2000. We have doubled the number in this decade, and they're full of people from all walks of life who try to help people at home and abroad. They do it because they believe what they have in common is more important than our differences. When I became President, there were none of these nongovernmental groups in China. Now there are 280,000 registered with the government, and probably twice as many not registered. There are more than a half million in India. There were none when I became President in Russia. Now there are 400,000, so many that the President there has tried to restrain them. I wish he wouldn't do it, but it's a high-class problem. Better to have citizens who want to do things than not.

This whole tradition of service is older than our republic in America. Benjamin Franklin organized the first volunteer fire department 40 years before the Declaration of Independence was issued. But still, last year we only gave away two percent of our national income. We have to practice what we preach. It will be hard for you. University graduates who go to wonderful places that are diverse, where people open their minds, almost never have any overt discrimination against people on the basis of race or religion or orientation. The great trap is believing that people you don't see are different from you.

As a nonscientist, the most interesting finding to me of the international effort to sequence the human genome was this: our bodies, each of us with about 3 billion of those genomes, are 99.9 percent the same. Just look around this audience today. Some 60-year-olds, like me, are white-headed; others have no gray hair. I resent it. [Laughter]. Every difference you can see in another person, a different color of skin or eyes, whether you're tall or short, every difference is due to less than one-tenth of one percent of your genetic makeup, and yet almost every one of us spends more than 90 percent of our lives obsessing about that one-tenth of one percent that makes us different. [Applause].

The key to your children and grandchildren being here is both making the most of that one tenth of one percent and never forgetting the other 99.9. One of the most rewarding things that I have ever done in my life is the work I've done with former President Bush on the aid for Katrina and the tsunami victims. We've had the best time in the world. We still argue about politics, but we laugh about it when we do. And I can't help it. I just love the guy. I don't see why I need to dislike him to disagree with him. That's a very tiny example of what the world needs more of today. [Applause].

If you look at the problems between the Israelis and Palestinians, conflict between the Shi'a and the Sunni in Iraq, if you look anywhere in the world, when you come down to it, the people spurring the conflict have decided their differences are more important than what they have in common. Look at what happened on May 8th in Northern Ireland, where the longest civil conflict in European history was resolved in the land of my ancestors. How did it happen? It happened because people in both communities decided what they had in common dwarfed the differences that still remained between them.

So when you look ahead to your life, I'm convinced that we can deal with climate change and that it won't be an economic problem, it will spark the biggest boom we ever had. You want to bring back manufacturing in Ohio? Give us a clean, energy independent future and it will create manufacturing jobs in Ohio, and all kinds of other jobs. [Applause]. We can turn the tide on AIDS, TB, and malaria. We can find the answer to avian influenza before it infects large numbers of human beings. We will eventually deal with Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, all the other neurological problems we face. But in the end, it will come to naught unless we believe that our common humanity is more important than our interesting differences. The Land Grant Act in the middle of the Civil War, the bloodiest conflict over our differences in our history, was a bet on the future of our more perfect Union.

In one of the places I work in Africa, in the central Highlands, where almost everybody walks and nearly nobody can ride a vehicle, when people meet each other on the path, one says, "Hello, how are you, good morning." The answer is not, "I'm fine, how are you," or "Hello." The answer in English is, "I see you." Think of that. Think of all the people who we don't see. When we leave this grand place today, somebody's going to have to come in here and dismantle this stage and clean up after us. A lot of them feel they are never seen by anybody. Think about all those people around the world who we don't want to resort to violence and be mean and hateful, who think their children will never get a good education, never have a chance to have a better life, never have a chance

to build the stable things we take for granted. Think about the people in America who have not had a raise in this last recovery, where unbelievably enough, we've had an increase in poverty among working people and an increase in people losing their health insurance. We have to see each other because, in an interdependent world, we really can't succeed without each other. That will be your great challenge. All other things will be dealt with if we think and feel and act as if our common future is our common future. *[Applause]*.

That's what happened in 1862, and that's what I wish for you in a bright and glorious tomorrow. Thank you and God bless you. *[Applause]*.

**PRESIDENT HOLBROOK:** Thank you, President Clinton, for your thoughtful, wonderful, and inspiring words to our graduates. You have truly made this a very memorable commencement. Let's do one more round of applause for President Clinton.

*[Applause]*.