

June 10 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

back to health. If every company in America followed this example, half of all our workers would have this important benefit for their families.

There are further steps we should take right away to help more parents balance work and family. Again, I call on Congress to extend the benefits of family and medical leave to employees of smaller companies, so we can reach another 12 million American families. And I urge Congress to pass my comprehensive long-term care initiative, which includes a \$3,000 tax credit to meet the growing needs of the elderly and their families.

At the dawn of the last century, Theodore Roosevelt said, "The greatest prizes of life are

those connected to the home." Today, more than a century later, our families still are our most valued treasures. That's why I think no American should ever have to choose between the job they need and the parent or child they love. The actions we take today will help to ensure that they won't have to make that choice.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:25 p.m. on June 9 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 10. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 9 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Commencement Address at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota June 10, 2000

Thank you very much, President Lewis. It's nice to be around someone who is not terminated. *[Laughter]* To the trustees and faculty members, including your longtime faculty member and now your United States Senator, Senator Paul Wellstone. It's nice to see you and Sheila. Thank you for being here, both of you.

I congratulate Bruno Nettel and George Dixon on their degrees, and I thank the Carleton community for making me welcome. I congratulate the student speakers, Katy and Sachin and Faisal. They were really, really, I thought, very good. I'm glad there was some break between when they spoke and when I had to speak. *[Laughter]* Maybe you won't remember how good they were, and I'll be able to get through this. *[Laughter]*

I want to congratulate all the members of the class of 2000, your families, and your friends, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to share this with you.

I've been hearing about Carleton for years. I have a staff member and adviser, Tom Freedman, who is here with me today, class of '85, and his college roommate, John Harris, who—he's on the other side in Washington. He writes for the Washington Post. They're both here, over here to the left. So there is life after college, and they have proved it.

And they told me about the motto, "You are part of Carleton, and Carleton is part of you." They also told me that Carleton is my kind of place, a school that celebrates diversity, a school whose students and faculty exemplify excellence without elitism, a school where the president of the college gets to sing like Elvis. *[Laughter]*

I'm also very proud that someone painted my portrait on the water tower, and I thank you for that. Now, I heard it wasn't the greatest likeness in the world, but I still kind of wish you hadn't painted it over. *[Laughter]*

I also got a souvenir from my stay here, and I want to show it to you. Thank you. And someone asked me if I would give this fellow a ride on Air Force One, to sort of add to the legend, you know? *[Laughter]* And I thought, why not? He looks more like me than that guy on the water tower did. I think I'll do that. *[Laughter]*

I do want to say I love the message that Faisal and Sachin gave about building on our common humanity, and I wrote down what I thought was the best line from Katy Beebe's talk, "Use clichés like they were meant to be used." I think that's pretty good, because we all have them. *[Laughter]*

The truth is, I have been paying attention now to graduations for quite some time. And you are graduating at a time which is different.

Yes, there are a lot of common elements in this ceremony. Yes, there are a lot of common elements in your feelings. Yes, you're a remarkably diverse group. I could tell that just by shaking hands with you and exchanging a few words. One of you even asked me to change a Government policy. [Laughter] Good job. You have to ask Senator Wellstone. It's an act of Congress now. I can't change it. [Laughter]

But the truth is, this year marked more than a millennial turning of the calendar. This country and the world have entered an era that is different, in the way we work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world.

For us, it's a time of unparalleled promise. We have the strongest economy we've ever had and the longest expansion in history, the lowest minority unemployment rate ever recorded. And yet, it's also a time of increasing social cohesion: the poverty rate at a 20-year low; the welfare rolls at a 32-year low; the crime rate at a 25-year low. It is—in my lifetime, anyway—the only time we have ever had at once so much economic prosperity and social progress and at the same time so little internal crisis or external threat to our existence. We have an opportunity to shape a world, therefore, that is more free and more decent than ever before.

I can't help noting that this is the one-year anniversary of the day when the Serbian troops accepted NATO's terms and began to withdraw from Kosovo,* and we reversed the tide of ethnic cleansing and religious cleansing that was present when almost a million people were driven from their homes. We still have 5,500 Americans there with troops from 39 nations. Almost all of the refugees have gone home. They're going to the polls for the first time in history this fall. So I'm very proud of that.

But it shows that it's a very different world. Not so many years ago, it would have been unthinkable that America would be part of a multinational force deployed just to stop people from being murdered or uprooted because of their race or ethnic background or religion, and I'm glad we did it.

The world is moving to the beat of two great forces: globalization and the revolution and knowledge of information technology, the biological, environmental, and material sciences. And our whole pulse is quickening with all this new discovery and interaction.

* White House correction.

I have worked very hard to prepare this country for the 21st century, and now it belongs to you, and it's up to you to decide what to do with it. I hope very much that you will use this moment to deal with the big challenges and the big opportunities that are still out there for us: to bring prosperity to people and places that are still poor and haven't been caught up in this recovery; to end child poverty and give all our children access to a good education; to give families the time and tools they need to balance their work at home and their work at work; to deal with the challenge of the aging of America; to reverse the tide of climate change; to put a human face on a global economy; to maximize the potential of science and technology and minimize its new risks; to build one America across all the lines that divide us; and to build a world where the forces of peace and prosperity and humanity are stronger than the old demons of war and disease and poverty.

Now, you have a chance to do that, in no small measure because you spent the last 4 years here. And I want to talk just very briefly today about one specific subject, our common obligation to give all young people the chance you've had to develop the abilities, the understanding, the feelings, the outlook that you have developed here in your years at Carleton.

It's important because in the world we live in, it's the only way to guarantee our Founders' dreams of opportunity for all, so it's important individually. But from my point of view, it's even more important because unless we can more generally spread the benefits of education, your generation will not be able to build a future of your dreams.

Two centuries ago, opportunity meant having a chance to carve out a farm on the forest frontier. A century ago, it meant a chance to work in a factory with reasonably decent conditions and give your children a chance to get a high school education. Today, opportunity requires the constant ability to learn and relearn, to master new tools and new technologies, to think broadly, to adjust quickly, to put things in context. It means every American needs more than a high school education. It means a college education is not a luxury.

In the coming years, the number of new jobs requiring at least a bachelor's degree will grow twice as fast—more than twice as fast—as those that don't. The three fastest growing occupations

require at least a bachelor's degree, and their pay, of course, is much better than average.

So I have a simple message today, which is that our country cannot afford to leave any students behind simply because they can't afford to pay for college.

I came from a family where nobody had ever gone to college before, and yet, from the time I was a little boy, I never had any doubt I was going, because that's what my family told me I was going to do. And thanks to my family and scholarships and loans and jobs, I got opportunities that eluded all my parents' generation and, unfortunately, eluded all too many of my contemporaries in high school. When I became President, I was determined to do what I could to give every student that chance. I am well aware, if it hadn't been for that chance that I had so long ago now, to go to school, I wouldn't be standing here today.

So, what does it mean to give every young person the chance to go to college? First, we have to begin at the beginning. We've worked on education reforms to make sure all of our kids start school ready to learn, finish high school ready to succeed. We've expanded early childhood education; supported higher standards, more choice, and greater accountability for results in our schools; extra help for kids who need it, from after-school to summer school to mentoring programs; new efforts to attract talented teachers, reduce class size, modernize classrooms, connect all of them to the Internet. That's the first part of this.

But the second thing we've tried to do is to open the doors of college to every American. In 1993 we created something called the Direct Student Loan Program. It has lowered the cost of all borrowing and all loan programs and saved America's students, in lower interest costs and charges, \$9 billion over 7 years. That program also allows students to pay back their loans as a percentage of their income.

In 7 years, we expanded Pell grants more than 40 percent and increased the work-study program so that now a million young college students are in work-study. On a thousand campuses, a lot of them are earning money by teaching young children to read in elementary schools. AmeriCorps is now giving 150,000 young people a chance to earn money for college and serving in their communities. Education IRA's now let families put savings in

IRA's and then withdraw them for college expenses tax-free.

We created the \$1,500 HOPE scholarship tax credit to make the first 2 years of college as universal as high school and to help families afford the last 2 years, as well as graduate school and job training. We set out to launch a lifetime learning tax credit which provides a 20 percent credit against tuition and fees. Now, this year alone—those things were done in '97—well over 10 million Americans will use HOPE scholarships and lifetime learning credits to open the doors of college and opportunity.

In the past 7 years, most of which we spent trying to get rid of the deficit, America has more than doubled college aid, the greatest expansion since the GI bill 50 years ago. It has proved to be a great investment. Today, coincident with this speech, I am releasing a report which demonstrates that as student aid has increased, so has college attendance, now to record levels. Fully two-thirds of our high graduates go straight to college. That's an all-time high. And for the first time in history, a majority of young African-Americans are enrolling in higher education.

The report also documents what you already know: The value of a college education in sheer economic terms is going up. The earnings gap between those who have a degree and those who don't is growing dramatically. Over the course of a career, a person with a bachelor's degree will earn, on average, \$600,000 more than a person who has a high school diploma. The return on a college investment is now nearly double the stock market's historical rate of return.

Now, this report, on balance, is good news. But it has some sobering information. With all the new financial aid and even though the rise in tuition costs have slowed over the past few years, most families still have to stretch to pay the college bills. Over the past 20 years, the cost of college has quadrupled. I'll bet there are a lot of parents here who have taken second mortgages or second jobs to help pay those tuition bills.

So I'd like to do one other thing in this area before I go, and I hope the Congress will do it this year. I would like to build on the success of the HOPE scholarship and the lifetime learning credits with a \$30 billion college opportunity tax cut. It would allow families, whether they're in the 15 percent or the 28 percent tax bracket,

to claim a tax deduction worth up to \$2,800 for up to \$10,000 in college tuition costs. It would make a big difference to a lot of families in this audience today, and I think it ought to be done.

Again I say, I know it's important for individual opportunity, but we have to recognize that we're living in a time when investment in human capital is even more important than investment in physical capital. This would be some of the best money this country ever spent.

I also hope we'll do more this year to help young people out there who are still, believe it or not, unaware of how important and how possible college is. Maybe nobody is pushing them to take the classes they need, or they don't know how to get the financial aid. I have asked, and I ask again, the Congress to work with us to expand our initiatives, called GEAR UP and TRIO, to reach out to students as early as the sixth grade to give them the dream that they can go to college and to determine to do what it takes to succeed once they get there.

Now, if we do these things, we can provide more students with the support they need, give more families the relief they need, give our economy the skilled work force we all need, and give our Nation more active, informed citizens. At long last, we've got the money to do it. The only question is whether we have the vision and will to do it. We owe it to your generation to do that.

Think about this. A hundred years from now, the Carleton class of 2100 will be sitting where you are. They'll look up at this podium, and perhaps they'll see a President reflecting on the 21st century, the good old days. I hope that he or she can say that we began this century in the right way.

I offer all of you my congratulations for the challenges you've conquered, the projects you've completed, the goals you've reached. You should be very proud. And as you embark here, I hope you'll never forget one other thing, implicit in what all other speakers have said. All your individual lives will unfold in the context of community, your local community, your national community, and increasingly, the global community. If you want to make the most of your own lives, you have to give something to all of your communities.

As the years pass, I am convinced that your generation will be judged most, and you will tend to judge yourselves most, on the ways in which, large and small, you give something back to the whole. If you do that, then you will be more than leaders in arts and science, business and industry. You will be great citizens of our Nation and the world.

I honestly believe the next 50 years can bring the greatest period of peace, prosperity, and humanity the world has ever known. It depends upon whether we do the right thing for the future and whether we understand that our common humanity is far, far more important than all the things that divide us.

May Carleton always be with you. Good luck, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:38 a.m. in the Bald Spot Quad. In his remarks, he referred to Carleton College president Stephen R. Lewis, Jr., honorary degree recipients Bruno Nettel and George H. Dixon, and students Katherine Beebe, Sachin Patel, and Faisal Mohyuddin; and Senator Paul Wellstone's wife, Sheila.

Remarks in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on the Death of President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria and an Exchange With Reporters

June 10, 2000

The President. As all of you know, I received word not very long ago of President Asad's death in Syria today. I was very saddened by it, and I want to offer my condolences to his son, his family, and to the people of Syria.

You know, over the last 7 years, I had the occasion to meet with President Asad many times, and I believe I got to know him well. And while we had our disagreements, I always respected him because I felt that he was open and straightforward with me and because I felt