

Clinton looks ahead in his Halifax speech

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In his recent speech in Halifax, Bill Clinton preferred to dwell on the present and the future – rather than reflect on former glory. Citing the positive example of former basketball great Magic Johnson, the 42nd President of the United States said he preferred to think of the present and the future. “I don’t want to waste a day regretting that I can’t do what I used to.”

The main theme of his remarks was that everyone should realize how interdependent today’s world is. With this interconnectedness, some countries are winners and some are losers. “The US and Canada have gotten a lot out of this interdependent world. We have taken the good; now, we have to take the bad.” He cited recent epidemics as examples of the bad side of our interdependence. But he then noted that the interconnectedness of the world has a good side. One of these is that the countries of the world can work together to solve tough problems like climate change.

He then spoke about how the US, as a country, is making a transition from being a country of cultural divisions to a communitarian one. He said that in the last decade, there has been “an explosion of citizen action” in his country that is reflected around the world.

With all of this as a background, he urged the audience to volunteer any expertise that they can to solve any of the world’s urgent problems. “Everybody in the world can give some skill. Today, we all have to find a way, as private citizens, to advance the public interest.” He used the rise of microcredit as a way that citizens of developed countries can assist poor countries like Afghanistan.

Clinton emphasized that while many global problems have been identified, solutions to them have not. He said that he wants to find out how to fix these problems – and exhorted the audience to do the same. “We all have to answer the how question. Every one of us has a responsibility to close the gap between where we are now – and where we should be. If we can answer the how question, we will be all right.”

After finishing his remarks, he answered questions from the day’s moderator, former New Brunswick Premier Frank McKenna. In this session, Clinton addressed issues as diverse as the Middle East peace process, his work as a UN ambassador to Haiti and the war in Iraq.

Clinton’s speech was delivered before an audience of 3,000 at Halifax’s Cunard Centre on May 28th.