



Everything New Orleans

# The Times-Picayune

## Clinton rallies students to improve world

**N.O. must recover, ex-president says**

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**By John Pope**  
Staff writer

Surrounded by cheers from the thousands who packed a Tulane University field house Saturday, former President Clinton delivered the central theme of a daylong conference of college activists: Everyone can do something, no matter how small, to help change the world.

Because humanity is tied together by technology, "we can blow each other up," Clinton said, "but it also means we can lift each other up in ways we never thought possible."

Clinton's late-afternoon speech in Fogelman Arena closed out a day during which about 700 students from six continents, as well as 30 college presidents, discussed projects they have devised to help their societies in ways big and small.

A Tulane team, for instance, is working to build a network of neighborhood health clinics, and three Loyola students have set up a bank to make low-interest loans. Rice University students have made backpacks of medical equipment for doctors in sub-Saharan Africa, and Brown University has expanded its program to help Dillard University recover from about \$400 million in Katrina-related damage.

"Stories of others who have effected change in their areas have inspired us," said Eyrum Adadevoh, a political science major at the University of Florida who joined Clinton on the stage during the closing ceremony.

"I think I speak for all of us when I say, 'Mr. President, you can expect wonderful things from our generation.'" she said.

Clinton, in turn, praised the students, who were chosen for the meeting based on their plans of action.

"We believe you are pioneers in the new generation of philanthropy," he said. "You are finding new and innovative ways to give. . . . With the glimpses of the staggering potential of who you are and what you can achieve, I think the future can be very bright indeed."

Katrina recovery touted

An important part of the future must be the recovery of New Orleans, Clinton said to more cheers from the 4,000 spectators.

"It doesn't matter if you've never been here," he said. "It is inconceivable that this country would not want the rebuilding of this place, not only in a way that preserves its historic past, but also to ensure its future."

Clinton said earlier in the day that the nation's next president should create a White House staff

position to coordinate Katrina recovery.

Though he praised what Donald Powell has accomplished as President Bush's Gulf Coast recovery coordinator, Clinton said during a news conference that the multifaceted rebuilding effort requires "a full-time staff person in the White House who has to answer every day to the president and a chief of staff."

"All of this would be better done if there were a federal coordinator . . . and a sustained effort to make sure that government agencies are operating functionally," he said.

Clinton was echoing a theme of the presidential campaign of his wife, Sen. Hillary Clinton. Sen. Barack Obama, who is competing with her for the Democratic nomination, also has said he would appoint an official within the White House to oversee the recovery. Sen. John McCain, who will be the Republican nominee, hasn't spelled out a proposal.

'A great test'

Clinton long has been passionate about his ties to New Orleans. Along with former President Bush, he has pumped hundreds of thousands of dollars into the region's recovery, much of it for local colleges and universities through the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund.

"This is important to us! Shout it from the rooftops!" he said at the news conference. "We're not going to let you feel adrift out there."

During his speech at Tulane, Clinton said the restoration and strengthening of New Orleans amount to nothing less than "a great test of our national character."

The conference will conclude today when the participants are scheduled to join actor Brad Pitt in the Lower 9th Ward to prepare for the groundbreaking of his Make It Right house-building program.

The weekend's events were organized by the Clinton Global Initiative, a nonpartisan project of the former president's foundation. Participants focused on four broad areas: alleviating poverty, improving public health, energy and climate change, and human rights and peace.

Clinton has said he got the idea for the conference after witnessing social activism in colleges around the country. When his organization decided to put on a conference at a campus, he said New Orleans was the only choice.

Blakely, Honoré speak

The ceremony in Fogelman Arena was the only part of the conference that was open to the public, though reporters were allowed into other events.

For the rest of the day, participants swapped ideas about their initiatives and heard from individuals such as New Orleans recovery director Ed Blakely; retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, who coordinated military relief efforts in New Orleans after the storm; James Carville, the Democratic strategist who was instrumental in getting Clinton to the White House; and Ruth Simmons, a Dillard graduate who is Brown University's president.

During a panel discussion, Blakely said recovery goes far beyond replacing buildings and repairing roads.

"This is a laboratory, not just on rebuilding but on social change as well," he said.

If New Orleans is to overcome the effects of Katrina, panelists said, residents will have to be better educated, live in sustainable houses and learn basic survival skills such as first aid and disaster preparedness.

"We live in the new normal, where disasters can happen," Honoré said.

"What happened in New Orleans can happen in many cities around here," he said. "The difference you can make is to help rebuild a culture of preparedness. I want to empower you as college students to learn first aid" and get course credit for it.

"That's what we're going to do, Americans," he said to whoops and applause in a jammed Dixon Hall. "We're going to act locally."

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John Pope can be reached at [jpop@timespicayune.com](mailto:jpop@timespicayune.com) or (504) 826-3317.

Former President Clinton's speech Saturday in Tulane's Fogelman Arena caps off a daylong gathering of college activists from around the world. [3941992]