Former President Clinton gives a speech on April 21, 2015 at Georgetown University. After his speech President Clinton answers pre-written questions from students read to him by a faculty member sitting on the stage with him.

The video recording of this event is on the C-SPAN website:

<http://www.c-span.org/video/?325513-1/bill-clinton-address-georgetown-university-public-service>

In the transcript the faculty member asking the questions is “Q”, and President Clinton is “C.” Audience responses are identified with “A.”

The excerpt starts at 1:03:48. Length of pauses are approximate.

Q: uh Mister President (0.2) u:hm (0.4) thuh stu:dents have submitted some really (0.2) excellent questions I think very stimulating. (0.3) .h but thuh first one is uh soft ba:ll (0.8) and uhm (0.2) tch I can’t let you talk too lo:ng >on (that.)< (0.4) because >we gotta-< (0.8) it- it’s going to be great fun I think but (0.2) there’s some other good ones coming along. (0.2) tch it’s thuh teacher in me. cha! ha (0.2) .h what did going to Georgetown mean to you? (0.4) how did it influence your purpose?

(1.0)

C: well I’ll try to give you uh short answer because (2.5) .h I think I told this before but (0.3) when I wrote my autobiography m-h-y: editor made me take out twenty pages that I wrote about ºGeorgetown.º

(0.2)

A: ((Audience laughter))=

C: =and there’s still uh lot in there about °it.° (0.5) an’ he said you can’t possibly remember all these people. (0.4) and all these teachers and >everything he said< but I do. (2.0) it- (2.0) it had uh profound impact on me first of all becau:se (3.0) tch I met people from all over thuh world!, (2.0) both my: teachers and my: uh fellow students (0.2) that I would have never met otherwise you know and I- and our class our class?, was thee only: graduating class in I think in American history (0.2) that produced three presidents of three countries. (0.3) tch when I became president my classmate Alberto (Christiani) was thuh president of El Salvador, (0.2) when I left office (0.4) my classmate Gloria (Macapagal) Arroyo was thuh president of thuh Philippines?, and thuh whole time I was there?, (0.5) our classmate (Turkey Faso) was head of thuh Saudi version of thuh CIA, (0.3) later ambassador to thee United States ambassador to thuh United Kingdom so I I was here with fascinating people. (0.3) I was here at uh fascinating ti:me. (3.5) tch but it affected (0.5) me mostly becau:se of thee: uh- (1.0) of thuh teachers I had. (3.0) a:nd thu:h people I went to school with and thuh conversations we had about- (0.4) what- was going on in ou:r classes and thuh debates we had >an it-< it was very different (than/from) now. .h we did not have in my class we did not have in thuh school of foreign service (0.2) .h an elector- an elective course (0.2) until thuh second semester of our junior year. (0.4) uh bi:g controversy

(0.4)

A: ((some audience laughter))

C: but I lo:ved it ih and (0.4) it- (0.5) I- I doubt very seriously if I ever would have become (0.2) president (0.2) had I not come to Georgetown. (0.2) .h and I am certain I would not have done (0.2) whatever good I did do I would have done less well if I hadn’t been here.

(1.5)

Q: Thank you. (0.2) .h this is from (Daria Labrasova)?, uh sophomore in thuh college? (0.4) tch sort of two=f- two pronged. where do you see this generation of young adults going? (0.5) in what way is our path going to be different than before.

(3.0)

C: .h eh- what has happened in technology, (3.5) to this day will look like child’s play. (3.0) over thuh next twenty to thirty years. (1.0) .h I think most of you will live to be ninety years old or more! (0.3) unless so:me accident befalls you or you have (0.4) an environmentally caused cancer we don’t know how to treat yet. (0.8) tch I think tha:t uh (1.0) you will live in uh time whe:re (3.5) tch thee: uh thuh technological revolution wi:ll extend into artificial intelligence and we’ll be able to do things we never imagined being able to do before. (0.2) .h I think thuh combination of nanotechnology improvements and (0.2) .h thee:: continuing plumbing of thuh mysteries of thuh genome?, (1.5) will lead us to have affordable:? (0.2) four times uh yea:r?, (0.4) uh (0.3) health exams that will- basically involve going into uh canister and being scanned .h and I think: one of thuh biggest debates in .h medicine within twenty years will be: for example: (0.1) .h since we all have cancerous cells rooting around in our body all thuh time and most of them are just destroyed by thuh- .h operations of our body one of thuh great questions will be (0.2) now that we can see this submicroscopic tumor?, .h should we zap it out now or wait till later? (0.4) I mean your life will be dramatically: different. .h u:h I believe that you will be given one (0.2) final chance to figure out how to avoid thuh calam- thuh most calamitous consequences of: .h climate change?, and I think it will be there will be even more economically beneficial ways to do it?, (1.5) than there are now. (0.2) I think you’ll have to worry uh lot about water I think California is uh canary in thuh coal mine. (0.4) I think that will be uh big issue. I think you’ll have to worry about (0.2) how to feed?, (0.5) uh u:h uh planet of nine billion people if we actually go that (far). (0.2) if we modernize enough in .h thuh developing world we may stop at eight m- billion because thuh one thing that- (0.3) that (0.2) across a:ll religions and cultures that- (0.4) slo::ws thuh birth rate (0.2) i:s (0.2) thee: uh- education of women and thee economic development of thuh poor. (1.0) tch so:: (0.2) I think you’ll live in an exciting time. tch I think tha:t (2.0) it is unlikely that thes:e (0.3) ideologically driven conflicts we’re having now with (0.3) nonstate actors (0.3) will be fully resolved. (1.5) tch I hope and pra:y (0.2) that we will leave behind uh system where we can (0.4) .h say with some confidence that we can keep really big bad things from happening. (1.5) that’s why this negotiation with Iran is so important. (2.0) maybe for reasons that uh- haven’t been much in thuh press. (0.4) (uh) for exa:mple: (1.5) if they get uh bo:mb? then there’s four or five (0.2) Arab countries that can afford one. (0.5) you got six more people with nuclear capacity?, (0.3) they’re expensive to build, maintain and very expensive to secure, .h and if you’re going to have uh bomb that you can use!, you’ve got to have excess fissile material. (0.5) tch a:nd that’s what you’ll have to watch. (0.2) (you go) what about theh excess (0.2) because any country that uses uh big bomb knows that it can be annihilated. (0.8) tch bu:t that fissile material?, it’s I consider it uh minor miracle of thuh modern world (0.2) that thuh fissile stocks of: Pakistan as far as we know!, even though Mister Kahn gave all thuh- nuclear technology to North Korea and others- as far as we know, (0.2) their materials have not been stolen?, sold or given away. (0.4) so I think you’ll have to worry about all of ºthat.º (0.2) but I- s- I believe that (0.4) .h you’ll live longer have more options .h and you wi:ll (2.0) we will probably not have fully resolved (0.4) thuh problem between growing productivity and adequate employment. (2.0) tch but I do think we’ll do uh better job (0.2) by thuh time (0.3) .h you know you’re eh- (0.2) raising your own kids and living your own lives I think we will do uh better job i:n .h (0.2) tch figuring out how to fairly more fairly apportion (0.2) thuh wealth that we are creating. (0.2) I think there will be more shared prosperity. .h but what nobody can really tell you is whether .h we’ve entered uh period where thuh technological changes are so rapid that we won’t be able to create enough (0.2) employment in uh conventional sense for forty hours uh week (0.5) to keep thuh populace employed. and so we’ll have to think about some if that happens! we’ll have to >think about some< (0.2) radical?, (2.0) changes in thee arrangement of la:bor (0.4) and capital that (Carlos Limb) said thee other day, (0.6) he’s pretty smart!, (0.3) that he thought (0.3) at some time in this new century (0.2) .h we would maybe be down to uh three day work week just because of thuh- breathtaking increases in productivity. (0.6) if so::? have at it, (0.2) have uh lot of fun with your leisure time.

(.)

A: ((quiet audience [laughter)) ]

Q: [(ha ha ha)] ha ha

C: and don’t forget to serve.

(0.2)

A: ((laughs))

Q: .h this may be thee easiest question or thuh toughest. (0.4) what was your most difficult decision as president or otherwise? (0.8) (we/you) can pass on that if you want.

(0.2)

C: thuh ones that I had to make?

(0.2)

Q: yes

(3.0)

C: well interestingly enough they weren’t thuh ones that were thuh most (.) politically unpopular. (3.0) >like I said< (0.2) eighty percent of thuh people were against what I did in Mexico. ih easy decision. (0.2) seventy four percent of thuh people were against my: (0.2) first act: (0.2) in theh international arena as president which was to put together uh big aid package for Russia (0.2) because they were then so poo:r in ninety three they couldn’t even afford to bring their soldiers home from thuh- (0.2) Baltic States. (0.4) u::h uh majority was against (0.2) what I did i:n Bosnia when we started. (2.0) tch thuh most difficult decision (2.5) whh! (0.2) we::re (5.0) my version of uh- (Mbeki) and thee aids crisis. (0.2) fi:rst (.) I had prom- I- I ran for president because (0.2) I thought trickle down economics was wrong. we had uh robust economic (0.2) u::h climate for most of thuh nineteen eighties (0.4) and ordinary people weren’t benerfitting from it at all. (2.0) poverty had gone up?, (0.4) u::h (3.0) wages were stagnant. (0.4) and I wanted to give thuh middle class uh tax cut and right before I- (0.2) uh was elected (0.2) the:h government said oh by thuh way we: (0.2) thuh deficit’s going to be twice as big as we told you it was. (0.4) oh by thuh way

(0.2)

A: ((quiet audience laughter))=

C: =so I had two choices I could play it like it didn’t happen and just go ahead and- present my original plan, or g- or go back to thuh core strategy which was to get America growing again?, .h we had to bring interests rates down! because keep in mind we had uh normal economy that is inflation (0.2) interest rates were (0.5) getting hi:gh?, (0.5) a:nd it was gonna- drive (0.5) and they were higher?, (0.3) than inflation. (0.3) so my gamble was if I could get interest rates down there would be this huge amount of private investment .h which would over come thuh contractionary impact .h of thee economic plan I presented .h which called for both spending cuts and tax increases. (0.2) bu:t (0.4) I hated to give up something that I really wanted to provide (0.2) tch and I had to choose tha:t?, (0.2) or doubling thee earned income tax credit. (1.0) which benefited primarily lo:wer income workers who had children. .h and I just don’t think (0.2) uh society as rich as ours should allow anybody .h to have kids in thuh house, and work full time, and still be in poverty. I just think that’s wrong. (0.3) so I did it. but it wasn’t- so then all I hea:rd (.) for two years were he broke his promise on thuh middle class tax cut. thee interest rates declines were worth twenty two hundred dollars for thee average family .h in lower (0.2) tch mortgage rates, college loan rates, home mortgage rates and credit card rates. (0.5) tch a:nd, when we passed thuh balanced budget bill we also pa-h-ssed! thuh middle class tax cut. .h but it just- (0.4) tch that was uh hard decision. .h uhm it was hard for me NOT to act alo:ne in Bosnia. (0.8) we all knew what Serbia was doing in Bosnia?, (0.4) a:nd I sent my then Secretary of State Warren Christopher around to Eu:rope and (0.4) asked them to uh (0.6) tch help and .h they didn’t want to do it and thuh- uh thousand reasons why (0.3) tch and I decided I shouldn’t do that because it wouldn’t be sustainable! (0.3) beh- and I- thuh Europeans had to buy in they had to o:wn (0.2) thuh fact that if they wanted uh Europe that was united, democratic, .h and it- free for thuh first time in history (0.6) thuh Balkans were going to be part of it. (0.5) tch and so: I waited until we could get (0.2) uh unified response. (0.2) but it was uh painful wait uh lot of people died on that wait. (2.0) tch and u:hm (0.2) some of thuh decisions that I: (0.2) regret most! were not hard. (0.3) but were wrong! like- I- we didn’t even talk seriously about (0.2) tch whether we should send troops to Rwanda, (0.2) .h tch because (1.5) thuh public was exhausted with what happened at Black Hawk down, (0.4) a:nd u:h and and Somal- Somalia?, and because we were involved in Bosnia?, and that (0.2) was much more in thuh news!, (0.3) and frankly we didn’t have any idea! they could kill ten percent of thuh country in ninety days with machetes!, (1.5) essentially. (0.2) tch so: (0.6) tch so sometimes thuh things you regret most were not hard at thuh time but (0.2) they should have been uh little harder. (0.2) I’ll always regret we didn’t have uh lo:ng drawn out (0.2) debate on it we didn’t even really discuss it. (0.2) and I’ve spent my life trying to make it up to thuh Rwandans and I’m about to get there I think. (0.2) I’m working at it.

(2.5)

Q: uh (0.2) here’s uh question I- wanted to ask. (0.2) early on you committed yourself to public service. (0.4) and you outlined your fundamental purpose. (0.4) uh vocational commitment like that (0.5) tch did you ever go through uh ti:me?, (3.0) when you really questioned it to say what- what am I doing here u:h and (0.2) tempted to withdraw?

(3.0)

C: you mean just to give it up?

(0.2)

Q: public service yeah.

(0.2)

C: well I did uh couple times when I was governor I was governor for uh long

time.=

A: =Yep.

(0.8)

C: tch at least I proved I can hold down uh job!,

A: ((audience laughs))

C: but I you know I- (0.2) I served uh very long time and u:h thuh- people of my native state were good enough to elect me five times. (0.5) based on recent events I don’t know if I could win again! down there.

A: ((Audience laughter))

[uhm but ] uhm (1.0) tch so there were times when I just got burned out

A: [Audience laughter]

C: you know (0.4) but (3.0) I never wanted- (0.5) I’d always: find something new to do (3.0) tch and I tell people one of thuh reasons I love being in public life it was like (0.2) peeling an onion that had no end there was always another layer (it) was always something new always something interesting there was always (0.2) something to engage thee imagination and to (0.2) stretch your capacities (0.4) so:: (2.0) I didn’t. (0.8) and when uh (0.5) tch (2.2) when thuh- g- uh- congress and thuh press and all were all hot on that Whitewater business and- I realized I knew it was not on thuh level (I knew) there was nothing to it I- and that there couldn’t have been I- invested in uh land deal and lost money.

(0.2)

A: ((some audience laughter))

C: chunh! (0.2) thee guy later went into thee ess and el business and failed it was thuh smallest S and L but- failure in thuh country and I didn’t ever borrow any money from them it was uh who:le it was uh made up deal! it was heart breaking to me (0.2) to see otherwise sensible people (2.0) treat it like it was something. (0.4) tch but it never made me want to quit. (0.3) I was u:h (5.0) rai:sed uh I had an unu:sual upbringing but I was raised not to quit. (0.2) we’re not big on quittin’ in my fa=heh=mily. .h you may have noticed that.

(0.2)

A: ((Audience [laughs))]

C: [thee uh ]

Q: ((laughs))

C: and uh

Q: ((laughs))

C: so: it was a:wful (0.2) but I learned to kind of just wall it off! (1.2) and I think (0.4) you know I- I- I also felt maybe that was maybe this was arrogant and I shouldn’t have felt that way, (1.0) but if- I spent uh lot of time when I was president reading thuh history (0.3) of other presidencies including not well known presidents. (0.8) .h and I’m (0.7) realized tha:t thuh succe:ss (2.0) tch of uh given president (1.0) is (1.0) it’s: (0.2) first determined by thuh times in which you live. (0.2) I mean Washington was either was going to be uh great president or uh flop depending on whether he tried to be uh king, or he gave us uh democracy. he made thuh right decision. (0.6) therefo:re even though government had no where near thuh range of (0.2) things to do that it does now, he was aye very great president. (2.0) and he made really good decisions. (0.2) on thuh big things. (1.5) Lincoln became president when thuh whole question was whether thuh union would survive or not. uh lot of people thought it wouldn’t! (1.0) uh lot of people thought thuh south had more talented generals, (0.2) a:nd tha:t we wouldn’t hang around! (0.2) thuh union wouldn’t hang around long enough to- do it. he was: (0.4) and (0.2) Roosevelt had thuh depression and world war two!, (0.2) tch but (0.2) it also depends on whether thee .h ski:lls and thuh psycho:logy (0.2) of uh person in uh given leadership position this is not just politics. (0.2) actually fit well with! thuh challenges of that particular moment. (0.3) .h and when I read thuh- thuh- all those histories of thuh lesser known presidents I realized .h some of them we:re really well suited to: govern when they did, (0.2) and others might have been quite successful had they had governed at another time but not then! (0.3) like if you: I’ll just give you an example that uh lot of people think .nhh! Franklin Pierce was one of thuh worst presidents we ever had. (2.0) a:nd u:h (2.0) if you measure that because he was: (0.8) elected uh right before thuh civil war!, and he couldn’t stop thuh country’s drift toward wa:r and he couldn’t figure out how to stop thuh spread of slavery and he couldn’t do this he couldn’t do that .h that’s absolutely true. (0.7) tch but he was an immensely successfu:l soldier in thuh Mexican war?, he was uh successful member of Congress and went home and became governor of New Hampshire (0.2) only other governor of uh small state (0.2) to be elected president. ((Video stopped here))