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**President to Presidents Lecture
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President, Longwood University**

*“An Expression of the American Mind”:
Citizen Leaders in the Global Marketplace*

Good afternoon. Raymond and I are both delighted to be here with you, so many of our friends and colleagues, in beautiful Williamsburg, Virginia. I truly value these times we have together and hope that you find them as beneficial as I do.

When Deno (Deno Curris, president of AASCU) called to ask if I would agree to accept this assignment, I developed a fear deep inside, a dread experienced by others in this room who have been asked to do the same – you think: *Why me?* There are so many others more accomplished, more articulate, more worthy.

Nevertheless, I want to thank you, the members and staff of AASCU, for the opportunity to speak with you today in this year’s President to Presidents Lecture.

Not only do I consider it a high personal honor to be asked to make this presentation, I also can think of no more relevant topic for us to consider than *Higher Education in the Global Marketplace*. Thank you, Carlos, for choosing this timely subject.

Five years ago, I spoke to a similar group of AASCU presidents at the 2003 AASCU Summer Conference. The theme of that meeting, *Leadership for Significance*, was intended to give us some time to consider the very complex issues of effective and transformative presidential leadership. In my talk that day, entitled “*Leadership for Significance: Values are Virtues*,” I argued that we, as individual leaders, need to know and understand our own values and permit them to inform and guide us as we seek to serve our institutions.

Now, five years later, I am back before you in a meeting designed to address an equally important and complex issue: *Higher Education in the Global Marketplace*. While separated by time and space from that afternoon in Colorado, I have come to understand that we, asked to discuss our global future, are not far from the topic discussed that day, leadership for significance.

I will therefore speak to you; President to Presidents, about what I believe is the leadership role that American higher education has to play in this new world order. We are a very diverse group of educators, representing a broad range of institutions, with differing missions. But in the final analysis, I believe that we have something very important in common: we are *American* educators, and as such are heirs to national and cultural traditions that have contributed greatly to this world and should continue to do so. I offer my thoughts to you today as an academician, a university president, a citizen and a woman who believes that we have a responsibility, an obligation to contribute to the common good of humanity, to participate in meaningful and beneficial change, to be leaders of significance.

With this thought in mind, I will avoid the more technical aspects of participating in the global marketplace, and instead seek to provide a broad context for all our thoughts and efforts, a platform that may help guide us and give us purpose as we seek to navigate the largely uncharted waters of this topic. I have entitled my remarks “*An Expression of the American Mind*”: *Citizen Leaders in the Global Marketplace*.

As a transplanted Virginian, and you know that we Virginians (transplanted or not) take our history *very* seriously, I must say: what better place to have this conversation than in Williamsburg? This very special American city has been the scene of many American conversations from its 17th century origins to our gathering today. When, in 1698, the struggling Jamestown colonists abandoned that failed location, they came here seeking the prosperity and security that the unhealthy area they left behind could not afford. Here in Williamsburg they found not only the security they sought, but also the College of William and Mary, chartered by the British Crown five years before. Over the next three centuries, Williamsburg grew into a vibrant city that, while very much part of the great changes that have swept America, has always remained mindful of its past. Just as the College of William and Mary has become one of the finest centers of liberal education in the world, so too has Williamsburg served as a gathering place for Americans aspiring to live the life of freedom and prosperity promised by this new world.

In May and June of 1776, the Virginia Convention of Delegates was meeting here in Williamsburg, then capital of Virginia, to deal with an

extremely important agenda. Their purpose was to discuss nothing less than secession from the British Empire and creation of a new nation. At the beginning of the session, George Mason, one of Virginia's wealthiest planters and delegate from Fairfax County, was given a formidable task. He was asked to draft a resolution to be submitted to the Continental Congress in which Virginia made her case for secession. Delegate Thomas Jefferson, from Albemarle County, was unable to attend this meeting because he was in Philadelphia considering the same issue with another group of men. (I am also a transplanted Philadelphian). He did, however, keep up with events in his beloved Virginia.

Here in Williamsburg, over a period of six days in May, George Mason wrote what is known as the Virginia Declaration of Rights. On June 12, 1776 it was unanimously adopted by the Convention and subsequently forwarded to Philadelphia. I would like to draw your attention to the first two articles of that resolution (it will sound familiar):

Article I. That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of

society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

Article II. That all power is vested in, and consequently derived from the people; that magistrates are their trustees and servants, and at all times amenable to them.

So here in Williamsburg a group of men took action that contributed greatly to the beginning of one of the most risky political and social experiments of all time: a new nation conceived in the notions of human dignity, personal freedom and democracy.

On July 4, 1776, when a committee charged by the Continental Congress to create a similar document finished its work, it drew heavily on Virginia's Declaration of Rights. Penned by Thomas Jefferson, edited by James Madison (more great Virginians, I must add) the Declaration of Independence set into motion a chain of events that not only changed America, but also the world. When asked to characterize

**the ideas in this document, Mr. Jefferson referred to them as simply:
“an expression of the American mind.”**

**Perhaps the most timeless and elegant “expression of the American
mind” ever written is this single sentence:**

*We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that
they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that
among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

**Universal human equality. Unalienable human rights. Life, liberty and
the pursuit of happiness. Who among us does not know these words?**

**And while we might interpret them differently, who among us does not
look to them as lofty, defining ideals? American ideals. Human ideals.**

**And so here we are, November 2008, and once again, we have the
opportunity to examine our values.**

**I believe that American higher education, as it looks to the global
marketplace, has a responsibility to take into that marketplace the**

values that define us. Not just our technology, not just the academic disciplines that will sell, but our ideals, the dreams we have attempted to make real for over 200 years. We must do this without arrogance, without hubris, and in full recognition that there are many other competing, and different, values structures in our world. As Americans, we must be prepared to put our ideas forward, subject them to the scrutiny of others, argue their merits and, when necessary, acknowledge weakness and deficiencies. As a member of the academic community, I see the global marketplace as a *marketplace of ideas* and consider it our job to educate students who are entrepreneurs of American ideals and knowledge.

Please do not think that I am here merely to wave the flag, to adopt a patriotic mantle that proclaims American ideals to be perfect. I am not. I am here to suggest that at our national core is a secular values system that humanity should know about and have access to. Ever since those individuals in Philadelphia crafted the Declaration of Independence, we have been arguing about what those values actually mean. We have claimed equality as a defining virtue, and yet American women were politically disenfranchised until 1920.

We speak about human rights, but slavery was legal until 1863.

Misogyny, segregation and institutionalized racism persisted much longer. The list goes on and on; the destruction of Native Americans and theft of their land was considered legal and ethical. Each new wave of immigrants was persecuted by those who had come before. If we look for negative examples, there are many.

And yet we have evolved. We have debated, we have fought bitterly, we have made terrible mistakes, but we have evolved to a point where our values are better realized today than any time before. Have we achieved perfection? Absolutely not, we have a tremendous amount left to do. But we continue to argue and to evolve. That is our character, our genius.

Howard Fineman, writer, reporter and Senior Washington correspondent for *Newsweek*, recently published an enlightening book dealing with this very topic: *The Thirteen American Arguments: Enduring Debates That Define and Inspire Our Country*.¹ In this work he argues that America has always been driven by its values and that they

¹ Fineman, Howard, *The Thirteen American Arguments: Enduring Debates That Define and Inspire Our Country*. New York: Random House, 2008.

lie at the heart of a series of ongoing arguments over those principles, arguments that ultimately defy resolution and are the source of our continual development. The thirteen transcending arguments range from who is a person, to who is an American, to the role of faith, to presidential power, to America's relationship with the rest of the world. Fineman makes the point that debating these questions has been the fuel of American public life and is that which defines us as a nation. He states:

“We are an Arguing Country, born in, and born to, debate. The habit of doing so – the urgent, almost neurotic need to do so – makes us unique and gives us our freedom, creativity and strength. By my count, there are thirteen arguments that comprise our public life – hence the title of this book. Rather than argue too much, which is the conventional wisdom's critique, we in fact do not argue enough, about the fundamentals. If we fail to draw strength from our argumentative nature, we risk losing what made us great and gives us hope. Our hopes are not a burden, but a blessing.”

Which is precisely my point when it comes to higher education: we in the American academy have a responsibility to advance continually the discussion of our values, not Western but human values, both at home and abroad. If Mr. Fineman is correct in his view that passionate, never ending dialogue is the fuel of our national genius, and I find much of that argument compelling, I can think of no other societal institution more central to American dialogue than higher education.

In many ways we are the intellectual center of America, and as such have a profound responsibility to foster the dialogue and debate that lie at the heart of our political, social and ethical evolution.

And, I think we have been doing a very good job. Since the founding of Harvard and William and Mary in the 17th century, higher education has been at the center of our democracy's growth and development.

Teaching, debating, learning, adapting, goading - the American academy has always been one of the vitally important societal institutions where our ideals are tested and refined.

As with the democracy we are so much a part of, American higher education is, in the broad scheme, remarkably adaptable. While I know that this may not be apparent to many of us in our daily affairs, history tells us that higher education has not only kept pace with societal change, but also has been instrumental in advancing it.

In 1996, Lawrence Levine, Professor of History at George Mason University and Margaret Byrne Professor of History emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, published a book that I would

recommend enthusiastically to all those considering the past and future of American higher education.

Entitled *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture and History*, this work convincingly refutes the right wing attacks on higher education that were so prevalent during the eighties and nineties, and are still with us today. Rejecting charges that American universities have been hijacked by leftist radicals who have corrupted the curriculum and their students, Levine makes the convincing case that American higher education has been growing, developing and adapting right along with American society. From the strict and limited classical model of the nineteenth century to the increasingly open, multicultural focus of today, American higher education has been part of a long term, very healthy developmental pattern wherein our institutions have kept pace with societal shifts and needs.

Professor Levine writes:

“The historical patterns of American higher education...have been toward increasing openness, greater inclusiveness, expanded choice, the study of the modern as well as the ancient, a concentration on American, African and Asian as well as European culture. These have not been inventions of our own time...This pattern has been the result of fundamental changes in the nature and composition of our society...The patterns of education discussed in these pages have not developed quickly or easily, and the struggle out of which they came is

not concluded. Our object should not be to end that struggle, from which much positive and lasting change has come, but to comprehend its nature and its meaning.²

While Professor Levine's book must be read in its entirety to be fully appreciated, one of his major points is especially relevant to us today.

He contends that out of our continual arguing over what truly constitutes the American identity, over what we ought to be teaching and studying, we have evolved. We have transformed ourselves and our curricula from focusing exclusively on the dominance and brilliance of Western civilization, to an academy that now is more open, more diverse, more tolerant – more multicultural - than ever before. This is not an abandonment of traditional American values – as some critics charge, but is another “expression of the American mind.”

Dr. Robert Bellah, a brilliant scholar and student of American life and culture, puts it this way in his insightful book *Habits of the Heart*:

“The university is not only a place for specialized research and the acquisition of skills. It is also a community of interpreters, including both teachers and students as they attempt to understand the past that defines

² Levine, Lawrence. *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture and History*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p.170-171.

them and engage that past in a critical dialogue about our present problems.’³

I think the time is now for American higher education to address another great challenge. As everyone in this room knows well, the economy of our country and our world is in a shambles. Who knew, when the topic of this conference was conceived, that this discussion would take place at the same time that the global marketplace is suffering its most serious setbacks since the Great Depression? Who knew that greed, arrogance and shameless profiteering had become so endemic in the American financial system that it created a devastating problem of worldwide proportions?

Well, today we know. When I’m not worrying too much about how to shepherd my own institution through this terrible time, I cannot help but think about how all this came to be. The ultimate answer seems all too frighteningly clear to me: the values that I am speaking of today, those American values that place so much emphasis on the public good,

³ Bellah, Robert et al. *Individualism and Commitment in American Life: Readings on the Themes of Habits of the Heart*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 9-10.

seem absent in the decision making processes of those most responsible for this horrific state of affairs.

Greed is a human condition that will always be with us, but when that greed becomes institutionalized in our country, when large numbers of *highly-educated*, highly-intelligent leaders make decisions to put quick profit and personal gain above the common good – above common sense - it tells me that something has gone terribly amiss.

As one who has devoted a life and career to higher education, I cannot help but come to the conclusion that we, the educational community of America, must bear some responsibility for this state of affairs. In our rush to be on the curricular cutting edge, to employ the latest technology, to raise the most money, to build the best buildings, have we forgotten something? Have we forgotten our pivotal role as one of the primary social institutions where our values are discussed, debated and ultimately made known to our graduates? In our haste to prepare our students for careers, have we forgotten to teach them about living? Have we lost our moral compass?

After much consideration of this issue, I remain convinced that higher education is fundamentally sound, that we still work tirelessly to fulfill our societal function. And yet, I also view the tragedy that is unfolding around us as another great challenge to the American academy. Just as Professor Levine has shown how we responded to the changing needs of society by becoming more diverse and more multicultural in our outlook, I would like to suggest that our current predicament presents us with an equally profound challenge: to ensure that our graduates are immersed in discussions of a values system that emphasizes global citizenship and meaningful contribution to common wellbeing. Whether through general education or within the specific discipline, at home or abroad, in large universities or small colleges, we must instill in our students an awareness of the reality that with knowledge, expertise and position comes responsibility, the responsibility to use their skills and abilities to contribute in a beneficial way to human society; not always for personal financial profit. And my friends, the responsibility to address this challenge begins with us, the leaders of the American academy.

In the past few weeks, I have had the opportunity to hear presentations from two world-renowned leaders – former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and CNN Correspondent Fareed Zakaria.

Their perspective on the new world order emphasized that we are in the midst of the most powerful societal shift in modern history. Economic, political and technological forces are producing a greater stabilization of world economies, with rising standards of living for many people across the globe and a greater and more equitable distribution of wealth among nations. And they caution America not to “close down” as the world is “opening up”. For 70 years we have been telling other people to open their doors – we cannot reverse that trend. We need to ride the wave of change, not fight it. We, the American educators, need to challenge our students and graduates to assist in the attempt to develop a common base of discourse across the globe.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to give you an example of an institution that gives me hope for the future, an institution that I believe really is “an expression of the American mind.” It is my institution,

Longwood University. It is an institution that dedicates itself to educating what we call Citizen Leaders.

Before going any further, I must first admit to bias: the concept and practice of citizen leadership is very near and dear to my heart.

Raymond and I come from family backgrounds where it was not enough merely to take from America, to enjoy the many opportunities for success that America affords; we were taught that to be an American means also to give back, to be a positive and contributing member of society. Ours were immigrant families that came here and found the dream George Mason and Thomas Jefferson wrote about. Perhaps because of that, on both a personal and professional level, I have attempted to make citizen leadership one of the defining themes of my life.

That's why I love my job! For the past 13 years, it has been my pride and pleasure to serve as president of Longwood University. I have neither the words nor the ability to tell you all that the Longwood community means to me. For the purposes of this talk, however, it will

suffice to say that Longwood University has shown me what citizen leadership really means.

When I came to Longwood all those years ago, I knew it was going to a very special institution. But what I found there exceeded my expectations: I found a college that had at its very core a cherished tradition of producing students who not only excel in their chosen fields, but also who use their talents to better our world. Founded in 1839 as the Farmville Female Seminary Association, my institution has gone through no fewer than 5 name changes in its evolution from seminary, to Normal School, to State Teachers College for Women to the co-educational, comprehensive university we are today. Over time I have come to believe that Longwood's devotion to service is directly related to its long and distinguished history of teacher education. The teacher's selfless commitment to helping others, to using learning and knowledge to enrich lives, runs very deep at my institution. It is the essence of what we are, it is our DNA.

It was no surprise then, that when crafting our first strategic plan the Longwood community coalesced around this simple mission statement:

Longwood University transforms capable men and women into citizen leaders, dedicated to serving the common good of a global society.

We went on to define citizen leader in this manner:

- **The Citizen Leader is a life-long learner possessed of a natural intelligence that has been developed and refined through rigorous participation in a learning-centered educational experience.**
- **The Citizen Leader is dedicated to the concept of societal responsibility, continually acknowledging through word and deed that each human being has a fundamental responsibility to contribute to the well-being of his or her fellows.**
- **The Citizen Leader has the ability to apply knowledge and learning in a practical *and beneficial* manner to the different situations and circumstances he or she will confront in life.**
- **The Citizen Leader has respect for democratic principles, most importantly equality, civility, tolerance, honesty and duty.**

And lastly,

- **The Citizen Leader is a catalyst for meaningful change.**

I did not dictate this mission. We did not hire consultants to craft a mission for us. We did it ourselves. Over several months the Longwood community talked, argued and debated, but in the end this simple statement of purpose emerged: we seek to produce citizen leaders dedicated to serving the common good of a global society. It was all so very natural. It was born of us.

I put this before you today not just because I am proud of my institution, but also because I believe that the Longwood mission is more than a statement of one institution's values and ideals. It is, to borrow from Mr. Jefferson's words, "an expression of the American mind." And it is "the American mind" that I believe we should focus on, both home and abroad.

As we consider all the implications of participating in an ever-expanding global marketplace, I cannot help but return to the notion that for us this global marketplace is, in many ways, a marketplace of ideas. I believe that inherent in the American tradition are some very powerful, very important ideas. I believe that concepts such as human equality, human rights, and government existing to serve the people,

deserve to be discussed in the global forum – and that we, as Americans, have a responsibility to do so. While I do not have answers to all of the many challenges that await us, I believe that to be successful we must be mindful of who and what we are as a people, and while acknowledging the wicked that we, and all people, can do, focus upon our ideals and seek to make our world a better place, to add value wherever we go in the global marketplace. Or as we at Longwood University say, “The Citizen Leader is a catalyst for meaningful change.”

A catalyst for change. This, to my mind, is the heart of America and American higher education. We do not seek to indoctrinate, we seek to analyze ideas in all their fullness and complexity. Because we are composed of human beings who do not always agree, we argue, but we insist that our arguments be meaningful, reason based and, if possible, civil. And perhaps most importantly, we do not advocate withdrawal from the world, but instead advocate never ending involvement. Even today, we do not agree on the definitions of our fundamental values, but we still seek to understand and advance them. Or, as Mr. Freeman and Professor Levine wrote, we continue to argue, we try to live our ideals.

And I think that there is no greater “expression of the American mind” than the recently completed presidential election. In this great national debate, so emblematic of our continuing argument over fundamental American values, we have seen two women, an African-American/bi-racial individual and a conservative political “maverick”, all who have viable opportunities to assume the highest leadership positions in our country.

All promised to be catalysts for change, although they differed greatly as to what that change should be. They argued, we argued, and then we voted. And now, 185 years since the Emancipation Proclamation, 40 years since Dr. King was assassinated, Barack Obama is the President-Elect of the United States. I can think of no greater proof that we are evolving, that we are progressing and that our values and ideals are still with us.

In the years ahead, I hope that we continue to argue, that we take our responsibilities seriously and that in so doing we will be catalysts for meaningful change. I hope that we all remember the words of Mr. Mason and Mr. Jefferson; that we keep in mind “We hold these truths

**to be self evident.” And, that we continue Robert Bellah’s admonition
to be eternally a “community of interpreters.”**

Thank you.