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# Excerpts of Governor Bill Clinton's Address to the Arkansas Academy of Sciences

Bill Clinton

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# to
# The Arkansas Academy of Science

Editor's Note: *Governor Clinton graciously accepted the Academy's invitation to speak at the Banquet this year. A portion of the Governor's speech, which has special meaning to each of us in the scientific community, follows.*

They (the legislature). . ., along with me, dealt with a number of issues which were fundamentally scientific in nature and, because of those issues and the judgments I had to make, . . . I would like to talk with you in a general way . . . about the complex and important relationship between the sciences and politics.

I signed a bill this year to regulate strip mining in Arkansas more comprehensively, a bill to regulate the installation of hazardous landfills or landfills to accommodate hazardous chemicals, a bill to regulate the extraction from the ground of brine, a bill which had strong pharmacological overtones dealing with the question of to what extent optometrists could apply prescription drugs in screening and evaluation of patients, and many other bills of various scientific natures. Throughout, . . .laymen, including the governor. . .had to make. . .decisions about how this society would conduct its business in very uncertain, complicated and, on occasion, profoundly dangerous areas.

I suppose almost everyone who has had any sort of an education in these matters has discarded in his, or her, own mind the notion that the scientific method in any given area can produce an opinion which is TRUE, or that there is a completely objective and obvious answer to all these dilemmas. I can see that, and I don't think that is the problem. Although there is still . . . (a) lot of blind faith that people in general, and politicians in particular, accord to scientific judgments which are made for them by experts who they happen to rely on. Whether it is in the area of nuclear energy or the production of hazardous chemicals . . . we, more or less, . . . understand that we don't expect you to be the next thing to God as scientists . . . . On the other hand, we don't want to go off the deep end as many people have, I think, and just decide that you can get any kind of scientific advice you want, as long as you've got the money to pay for it.

There is a crying need in government, particularly in the environmental and energy areas, for an incredible amount of scientific knowledge that can, at least, be placed at the disposal of those who have the public interest, in a larger sense, at heart, but who have no way, on their own, not only of getting the information, but of understanding it if they had it, unless it is explained to them; and then, who need some advice, but who must maintain the final decision-making authority.

What we need, I think, is public officials who are more secure in their decision-making process; that also have much more access to scientific information than we've had in the past. Now we've got a project going in Arkansas that will provide more scientific and technological information to the governor's office and another one which will provide more such information to the legislative branch . . . I think there is a growing awareness on the part of people in politics that we need to know more, that we need to have more information. I think there is a growing healthy skepticism about information which is provided to us from others (non-scientists).

And I am here tonight to tell you that, as politicians go, I've had the benefit of a fairly good education and I've tried to use it to develop my mind as well as I could, and I've tried to use it to maintain a fair degree of humility, in an intellectual sense, about all the things that I do not know. And I am telling you that we need a lot of knowledge and a lot of perspective that we don't have. We need also to know that there are people involved in the sciences who are interested in the public interest, in the larger sense, and who are interested not only in telling us about the systems and the imperatives that dominate our lives now in the context of this nuclear crisis or that hazardous materials crisis, but who also really believe that the major function of science in all-areas is discovery, still. And that we have to free ourselves of some of the systems, imperatives, and ideas that we are living under, if we are going to solve the problems that we have before us.

And so, I would say to all of you, wherever you are from, and whatever you are doing, I would take it as an act of citizenship and as a personal favor if, through this organization, through your departments and the various universities or on a personal basis, if you were willing in the context of a particular crisis or problem, or on a general basis, to give me the benefit of your ideas, your opinions, your knowledge, and your explanations. I would be . . . grateful to have it because we are going into a time when people like me who haven't been trained in the areas that you have been trained in are going to have to make decisions that affect the rest of this country and the rest of the people in this state in areas that only you have been trained in. I suppose the first step is to know what we don't know, so I come here pleading ignorance and asking for help. But also asking, even though we recognize that there is no absolute truth, that science still be deployed primarily in the public interest in the larger sense, without regard to the short term profit or advancement of a few.