

Changing the World One Commitment at a Time

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No power on Earth can stop an idea whose time has come.

– Victor Hugo

You don't have time to be starstruck. Yet we are struck, not by a performance in front of the camera but by the dedication to a cause (like Petra Nemcova whose organization [Happy Hearts Fund](#) has rebuilt 55 schools in communities devastated by disaster). And you don't have time to be handcuffed by the overwhelming statistics that dominate the challenges we face, but instead we are set free by the power of ideas and the collaboration needed to solve those problems. It's where you come to learn (or be reminded) that all you need is something we've always had – the power to act.

In fact, when you walk through the doors of the [Clinton Global Initiative](#) – President Clinton's annual meeting to build a better world - it's like you've landed on another planet where as a rule barriers are dissolved, opportunities are seized, and cooperation is prized. Seven years ago, President Clinton captured lightning in a bottle. He created an event that inspires action and harnesses commitment. It's why Judith Rodin, the president of [Rockefeller Foundation](#) said at a previous CGI meeting, "Partnership is the new leadership," and why Governor Hickenlooper (Colo.) said, "Collaboration is the new competition." It's our clumsy way of describing how President Clinton and his Clinton Global Initiative have transformed how we work together to change the world and turn ideas into action. On Wednesday, President Obama put it simply: "CGI was an idea whose time had come." And now that idea, this remarkable event, has helped hundreds of millions of lives in 200 countries around the world.

For me, this is the same place four years ago where a side conversation with Brad Pitt, President Clinton, Tom Darden and Bill McDonough about rebuilding a neighborhood in the 9th Ward led to the creation of [Make It Right](#) and what is now the highest concentration of LEED Platinum homes in the world. But this isn't just the marketplace for collaboration and ideas. It's the marketplace for execution.

And it has been amazing to see the tremendous focus on green building grow over the years. It truly is a testament to [President Clinton](#), who is showing the world that green building is an idea whose time has come.

Anywhere you go, the story is the same: green buildings save energy, save people money and fuel job creation. And I was honored when President Clinton asked me last year to chair CGI's Scaling Sustainable Building Action Network to further cultivate CGI commitments in this space.

Apparently, he's been asking a lot of people to get involved. And we know President Clinton has friends in high places. Here's what one of his friends said during this year's conference: "Earlier this year, I announced a Better Buildings Initiative to rehire construction workers to make our buildings more energy efficient," said President Obama on Wednesday at CGI. "And I asked President Clinton and my Jobs Council to challenge private companies to join us. In June, at CGI America, we announced a commitment to upgrade 300 million square feet of space, from military housing to college campuses. Some of these projects are breaking ground this month, putting people to work right now. Later this year, we'll announce more commitments that will create jobs, while saving billions for businesses on energy bills and cutting down on our pollution." How amazing – President Clinton and President Obama teaming up to accelerate green building!

And this year at CGI we heard more bold commitments, such as:

- A commitment by OVG, a Dutch real estate firm, to create the Global Climate Change Real Estate Fund, a billion dollar fund to support the development of sustainable buildings.
- A commitment by NRDC, in partnership with Johnson Controls Inc., Jones Lang LaSalle, and Goldman Sachs, to create a three-year project to grow demand for green buildouts in commercial tenant spaces.
- A commitment by the AFL-CIO and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), in collaboration with CGI and Center for American Progress (CAP), to work with fund managers to re-invest up to \$10 billion in pension assets of working families into energy efficient infrastructure and energy efficient buildings as an opportunity to create hundreds of thousands of jobs for Americans, develop new industries in the United States, enhance our country's global competitiveness and reduce global warming pollution.
- A commitment by AEG to build the first carbon neutral stadium, Farmers Field, a 72,000-seat, downtown Los Angeles football stadium and event center.

And we incubated several other ideas, like a Green Schools Fund, a Guide for Green Stadiums, a Governors' Roundtable on Resiliency, and the list goes on.

These commitments are simple but profound things. They embody our will to act, our ability to do good. And each commitment takes us closer to the goal of a better world, and, as President Clinton says, "gives us hope for our shared future."

One of our commitments this year – something that gives me hope for the future – is [Project Haiti](#).

Two years ago, President Clinton invited me to travel with him on a mission to Haiti to see how the country was grappling with various economic challenges. Despite some of the country's pressing problems, the people were happy, welcoming and warm. And I was touched by their spirit – resilient and generous. Less than a year after that trip, Haiti was hit by the catastrophic earthquake of 2010 that killed more than 315,000 people and affected the entire country. I was crushed. We immediately began working to help. We worked with the Clinton Foundation to help raise money for the recovery effort. And we partnered with Architects for Humanity and the American Institute of Architects to fund an architect in the country to assist in the short and long-term rebuilding. But I was aching to do more.

So, together with HOK, Lend Lease and Adaptive Building Solutions, USGBC committed to building a LEED Platinum orphanage and children's center in the Del Mas neighborhood of Port au Prince. The Project Haiti: Orphanage & Children's Center will provide critical health and emotional services for Haitian orphans, and serve as a visible and replicable model of green, sustainable, resilient building practices. The project, which will be completed next year, will also offer nutrition services, healthcare including rehydration and vaccination services, counseling for parents including family planning services and a life-plan evaluation, education and skill development, and a comprehensive residential program.

I've always said that the work we do in buildings is about people and about making their lives better. This building is my commitment to live up to that ideal. The Project Haiti commitment will provide a safe, comfortable and nurturing environment for dozens of children in Haiti that need it most. Still, we must do more.

The world needs more commitments.

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