

PERSPECTIVES

KATHLEEN HOWER

Meeting the global challenge

By now many of us have heard of Bill Clinton's admirable new Global Initiative. Major news outlets and programs such as Jon Stewart's Daily Show have featured the initiative, which addresses global warming, poverty alleviation, global health challenges, and religious and racial reconciliation by bringing together leaders from various fields. As Mr. Clinton told Mr. Stewart, "You can't come to this conference unless you commit to actually do something in one of these four areas."

To illustrate how easy it is to make a difference, Mr. Clinton mentioned Dr. Bruce Charash, who has begun to collect surplus hospital equipment and distribute it to developing nations. It's a great idea and addresses problems of global health, poverty and overfull landfills.

I applaud Mr. Clinton for championing the recovery of surplus medical materials for use in hospitals serving the poor overseas, but the idea is not new. For 17 years, hospitals in the Pittsburgh area have donated surplus supplies and equipment to Global Links, a Pittsburgh-based medical aid organization. The arrangement has kept thousands of tons of supplies from needlessly ending up in area landfills while saving lives and improving health care around the world.

Since Global Links was founded in 1989, a few similar recovery organizations have arisen around the country, but Pittsburgh continues to be at the forefront of these

efforts. Last year, the director of the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization came to Pittsburgh to honor the city and Global Links for its leadership in recovering surplus materials for use overseas.

In 2005, Global Links received more than 100 tons of donated medical supplies, equipment and furnishings. Including donations of medications from Mylan Pharmaceuticals Inc., Global Links has provided more than \$13 million worth of medical aid to hospitals serving the poorest people in Latin America and throughout the developing world.

A central goal of Mr. Clinton's initiative is to challenge private-sector leaders to make a real difference in the targeted areas. In that spirit, I commit Global Links to do all we can to make sure that hospital surplus supplies in this city are not needlessly thrown away.

As Mr. Clinton pointed out, we may never be able to close the gap between what is and what ought to be, but private citizens have more power to do good than ever before. We invite local hospital administrators, medical personnel and interested citizens to join us in meeting Mr. Clinton's challenge by continuing to make Pittsburgh's medical community a model of environmental and humanitarian responsibility.

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