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## Seven ways to save the world

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Last week, New York City was the site of save-the-world meetings at the U.N.'s World Summit seeking innovative solutions to such global problems as extreme poverty, global warming and political corruption.

As we approach the second half of the first decade of this new millennium, it is useful to examine the newest approaches to saving the world that these conferences are recommending:

### Bi-partisanship

Just a few months ago, when President Bush teamed up with his father and former President Clinton to lead the Tsunami relief effort, we were all shocked at sending this leading Democrat and Republican on a global crusade together. Bush and Clinton are now reunited in the Katrina relief effort, and no one is surprised by this bi-partisanship team; in fact, Americans will demand less polarized politics in American governance from hereon.



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Bill Clinton has been pounding the table that it is unproductive to call politicians stupid when you disagree with their ideas on social and economic issues. His Global Initiative included many leading Republicans from government and business.

### Prioritizing

Polarized politics has often been antithetical to rational priority-setting in government. The invasion of Iraq became an anti- vs. pro-war argument rather than a focus on how Iraq would function after our inevitable take-over. Furthermore, the question is now arising why the U.S. did not consider other national and global priorities before acting. The \$200 billion a year cost of being in

Iraq could have been used to reduce 70 percent of U.S. unemployment, or 100 percent of world hunger.

Katrina has become the tipping-point in requiring government to be run like a business, using cost-benefit opportunity cost and other techniques for logical decision-making.

With three billion people living on less than \$2 per day, and those in extreme poverty who exist on under \$1 per day and devoid of food, safe drinking water, medicine, electricity and hope, it is difficult to know where the help is needed first.

### Grass-roots giving

The conference required each participant who was not a country leader to commit to implementing their novel suggestion to help the world — raising pledges of \$1.2 billion. Robert Tolmach presented his on-line gift service, where instead of giving dad a tie for Christmas he can receive notice that specific financial help has been sent to a starving person.

### Monitoring

Help for the disadvantaged has often been hampered by the legitimate claim that the assistance will not reach the intended beneficiaries because of government corruption. Clinton and rock-star and global activist Bono pointed out that there are ways around corruption, such as "contingent debt relief" where the U.S. has required that the monies go directly to education, health care and economic development.

### Leveraging the free-market

The best example of leveraging the free-market to bring assistance to the needy are micro-loans, often of no more than \$100, initiated by Mohammed Yunus at the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. The world is now approaching 100 million such loans.

President Bush's address to the U.N. last week proposed that all countries end agricultural subsidies.

### Insuring

There were several creative proposals at the September meetings that involved insurance:

- Clinton proposed government insurance for investors in Palestine;
- Long island legislators are considering a flood insurance fund so that government can rebuild infrastructure after a calamity, such as from a hurricane;
- The global goals conference heard recommendations for food-shortage insurance for countries such as Ethiopia, where food aid needs vary from \$100-\$500 million a year, depending on droughts.

### Exalting the individual

The disadvantaged in America are slowly emerging from their status as mere statistics. The U.S., as the world's showcase for capitalism, must deal with the people behind the socio-economic numbers — the six million unemployed, the nine million under-employed, the 46 million below the poverty line and that number of uninsured for medical treatment. Retraining the millions who lost their occupations due to free trade agreements and the new realities of 21st century global trading has finally become a national priority — but the U.S. work week has not been shortened in 100 years and the minimum wage is far from a living wage.

### Conclusion

Bono and Clinton both worry about commitment and implementation. Bono was almost single-handedly able to get the G-8 countries to orally grant \$50 billion of debt relief, but they have not signed off on the commitment.

As we have learned from Katrina, self-protection is going to have to supplement government-protection, and individual assistance to others form a large part of save-the-world initiatives.

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