

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

**Americorps Fifth Anniversary
Celebration, South Lawn
10/20/99**

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 20, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT AMERICORPS FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

South Lawn Tent

2:55 P.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House for the fifth anniversary celebration of AmeriCorps. And I am so pleased to see all of you here. We apologize for the delay. The weather delayed a lot of people, we just got our last guests in and seated. And we're so grateful that all of you could make it here for this very important celebration.

It was an idea, but it became a reality five years ago when the first AmeriCorps members stood on the White House lawn and really became the embodiment of a cherished idea of the President and so many others throughout our country: the idea that America's young people were not cynics or slackers; they were instead idealists and patriots, and among the greatest American generations we have had. (Applause.) The idea that young people did want to be part of something bigger than themselves, to take responsibility and make a difference in their communities.

We only needed to find a way to unleash that potential. And national service -- giving more Americans the opportunity to serve their communities and to earn money for their own college educations -- was one of the reasons that my husband ran for President. It remains one of his proudest achievements, and today we can see why. In just five years, 150,000 Americans have joined AmeriCorps. (Applause.) These AmeriCorps members have helped to immunize more than 1 million people; taught, tutored or mentored 4.4 million children; built some 11,000 homes; and have truly led our nation in a true season of service.

All across the country, I have seen AmeriCorps in action. And I've met some extraordinary people -- people like Loc Truong, who came to America as a refugee from Vietnam and joined AmeriCorps to mentor at-risk teenagers so that he could give something back to the country that had helped his family in their neediest hours. Or Ashley Dumas, who, after graduating from college taught GED classes and provided child care in a shelter for single mothers in South Boston. Or Colin Yost, who taught needy families how to conserve energy and

prevent lead poisoning in Portland, Oregon and used his AmeriCorps award to help pay for law school.

In short, the young people of AmeriCorps are getting things done. But even more than getting things done, they are strengthening our democracy and building our society so that it continues into the 21st century as strong as ever. You know, in America, citizenship has always meant more than paying taxes, more than going to work, more than obeying the law. Citizenship is built on the belief that we are all responsible for one another, that we meet our challenges, not through government alone or as isolated individuals, but as a true community working together.

Over the years, I've been to many countries where I've had the privilege of representing the United States -- places where people are just beginning to understand the benefits and responsibilities of freedom. And wherever they go I'm asked, how has America made it work for so many years. And I tell them about citizen service, and I tell them about AmeriCorps, how the young people in AmeriCorps are learning firsthand the power of civic action.

They see playgrounds controlled by drug dealers or neighborhoods devastated by tornadoes. And rather than throwing up their hands in despair, or waiting for someone else to take care of things, they roll up their sleeves and get to work -- because they know they can help.

And they're learning that much more unites us than divides us. By serving together, suburban teenagers next to young kids from the inner city next to kids who grew up on farms, AmeriCorps members are learning that what matters is not your politics or the color of your skin, but your ability to get things done and get along with one another. It doesn't matter whether you're a Republican or a Democrat or an independent, from California or Maine or Florida. If you can hammer a nail or teach a child to spell, you have the kind of open heart and extended hand that AmeriCorps needs.

So I thank all of you for helping to rekindle the spirit of democracy. And particularly to the AmeriCorps members who are here with us today, and the new members who will be sworn in at the end of the ceremony, you truly do represent the spirit of citizenship and service that has always made America unique. And we are grateful for your willingness to serve.

In order to take the message of AmeriCorps far beyond the confines of this tent or the White House, or the Congress, or the specific places where you work, we've been very fortunate to have created some videos that we'll be running on TV to educate more Americans about AmeriCorps. Because one of AmeriCorps's great strength is that it's not just a government program, but it's a partnership, with states and localities, with not-for-profits and community organizations, and with private sector donors.

And a year ago, a group of those private sector donors, friends of AmeriCorps, joined together to see what they could do to make sure that this celebration really counted in making AmeriCorps part of the American fabric of our lives. That group was led by Eli Segal, Alan Solomont and Dan Dutko. Sadly, our friend, Dan Dutko, died in a tragic accident this

summer. We miss his wisdom, his energy and his commitment to this cause. But I know he is here with us in spirit.

The Anniversary Committee has partnered with Yahoo to develop a new website celebrating AmeriCorps, and the ads we are about to see are the result of their work with GSD&M from Austin, Texas; and Peter Hart and Associates from here in Washington. These ads feature what I think is the perfect slogan for AmeriCorps -- "Taking Responsibility Personally" -- because that is what every AmeriCorps member does every single day. I hope you'll pay attention to these ads and I hope you'll see them often on your TV screens and I hope they will spread the word about what AmeriCorps means.

Let's look at them now.

(The videos were shown.)

MRS. CLINTON: I'm hoping that by the end of the ceremony we'll have the sound working and we maybe can show those again, because I think that the message of the ads is one that truly does represent what all of you have done.

The next young man who will be speaking -- actually speaking -- is going to express in words better than any of us can what it has meant to be part of AmeriCorps. And it is an honor to introduce Andre Crisp -- (applause) -- a young man with a great deal of courage, hard work and spirit, who is literally changing the world and transforming his own life through AmeriCorps. (Applause.)

* * * * *

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Andre, thanks to you no one has to wonder about what AmeriCorps's all about. I thank you for your introduction. I thank you for your service to AmeriCorps and your country. And I thank you for the power of your example. And I hope, maybe more than anyone else who speaks today, your voice and your story will be told out of this great anniversary meeting.

I want to thank all the other people here who helped to make this day possible. I want to thank Deb Jospin for her leadership; Senator Harris Wofford; Eli Segal for what he did to help us get started -- (applause) -- and all of them. Let's give them all a hand. (Applause.)

I want to thank Hillary for always believing in this, and for taking it on as a personal goal that we would do something about the fact that when we had 100,000 people in AmeriCorps, and everybody who knew about it loved it, but most people didn't know about it, she decided she would change that. And Eli, and Alan Solomont, and our friend Dan Dutko and others agreed to help. And I thank her for her passionate support during these years when we believed in AmeriCorps when it was just sort of an idea. And she has done a wonderful job. Thank you. (Applause.)

I want to thank the members of Congress who are here, who were here: Senator Specter, Congressman Quinn and Congressman Payne, three who represent the bipartisan

support that we have enjoyed. I thank James Lee Witt, Jack Lew, Janice LaChance and others in the administration who have helped us. I want to thank our presenters, whom I will introduce in just a moment; General Colin Powell, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, Sargent Shriver and the Governor of Utah, Mike Leavitt, for being here. And I want to thank the Howard University Choir. They're going to sing for us and with us in a few moments.

You know, it seems impossible to me that it was five years ago on the North Lawn of the White House that we led the first class of AmeriCorps members in the AmeriCorps pledge. It wasn't very long before that that I had the privilege of signing the legislation creating AmeriCorps with the same pen that President Kennedy had used to sign the legislation creating the Peace Corps.

I always believed that you would elevate the cause of citizen service in America, that you would make America a better place. But on that day five years ago, AmeriCorps was still just an idea with a good plan, built on the remarkable path-breaking efforts of Sargent Shriver with the Peace Corps and VISTA; built on the remarkable service corps I had seen in Boston and Los Angeles and San Antonio, and other cities; championed by some of the most thoughtful and passionate citizens of both parties; energized by -- even then -- 20,000 young people who were raring to give something to their country, and wanted to be part of AmeriCorps.

But still it was just an incandescent idea. Today we celebrate -- thanks to you and your predecessors -- a glowing success. AmeriCorps members are living up to the highest obligations of our citizenship. They are creating opportunities for others, taking responsibility for themselves, and fostering a community of all Americans. They are our best builders, building that bridge to the new century.

You can see it in the way their optimism inspires others to also lend a hand and volunteer in their communities. You can see it in the remarkable teamwork and camaraderie that I have personally witnessed and felt, all over this country, in so many different activities. You can see it in the way they work together across the lines that would normally divide AmeriCorps members, and eliminate the alienation that too many of our young people experience today.

You can see kids who went to Ivy League schools and kids who dropped out of high school working side by side, serving together, giving together, and treating each other as equals, proving that Dr. King's dream of a beloved community is alive and well in the hearts and lives of the AmeriCorps volunteers.

I could just give you one illustration among thousands. On his very first day as an AmeriCorps member in a small town in southern West Virginia, Scott Finn heard that local residents had a dream of cleaning up a boarded-up old schoolhouse and turning it into a community center. The school had no electricity; it had no running water. It was a complete wreck, inside and out, an eyesore and a place that invited drugs and crime and mischief.

So Scott, fresh out of Harvard -- a long way from a little town in West Virginia -- put together a team of volunteers and sparked a new determination to get things done. They hauled water out of a nearby creek to mop the floors. They negotiated a lease. They raised

\$50,000 in grant money. And today that sorry old school is a beautiful new community center, with a lending library, a gym and a safe playground. That's AmeriCorps at its best. (Applause.)

That new community center is a meeting place for dances, for gospel concerts, for after-school programs and a Boy Scout troop. It's a tremendous source of community pride. Scott is one of the 21 remarkable AmeriCorps members and alumni who will receive one of our All-AmeriCorps awards. They'll all be introduced later. But I just wanted you to think about that.

When AmeriCorps members like Scott first took their pledge, they promised -- and I quote -- "to carry this commitment with me, this year and beyond." Today we will help them fulfill the second part of that pledge, for today I'm asking the Corporation for National Service to develop a new initiative to connect former AmeriCorps members with service opportunities wherever they live -- Habitat for Humanity, the Red Cross, the Boys and Girls Clubs, America's Promise, the Points of Light Foundation, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, the United Way, the National Mentoring Partnership. They've all signed on to help, all to use the incredible experience and commitment of our former AmeriCorps members.

Like returned Peace Corps volunteers and military veterans, those of you who are AmeriCorps members and alums represent an enormous national pool of know-how and can-do. You are already 150,000 strong and growing stronger. I hope soon we'll be adding 100,000 new members to your ranks every single year. (Applause.)

There is no question that you are now an indispensable force for change in America. After years of fights over funding and purpose in AmeriCorps, peace is breaking out all over in Washington. (Laughter.) A major factor lifting AmeriCorps out of the realm of partisan politics here is the support of people and leaders and especially governors of both parties, like Governor Leavitt, out in the country who have seen firsthand how AmeriCorps members are setting off chain reactions of civic involvement, civic progress and civic pride.

In state after state, in community after community, AmeriCorps volunteers prove daily they're one of the best and smartest investments our country ever made. They're showing us here in Washington what you can do when you stop talking past one another and start working with each other. Right now, in the middle of this battle over the budget, we need more reminders like this.

Today, I had the honor of signing the budget for VA and HUD, for the EPA, for the National Science foundations -- programs to help the homeless, to give housing vouchers to empower the poor, programs for our empowerment zones, that the Vice President has led; and for the first step in my New Markets Initiative, to give investors in this country the same incentives to invest in poor communities in America, where many of you work, that we give them today to invest in poor communities in Latin America and Asia and Africa. This is important. (Applause.)

I hope this is just the beginning, and that we will do the same when it comes to the education of our children. AmeriCorps volunteers have been in the forefront of a lot of our

education efforts, and I hope that the spirit you bring will infect the spirit of our deliberations here. We know that our children can have a good future if we work together across party lines the way you do.

Let me just say, before I introduce the distinguished Americans who will present the All-AmeriCorps Awards, once again how profoundly grateful I am to every person here who has helped to lift AmeriCorps beyond the pale of a partisan political fight. I especially thank those who had genuine reservations five years ago and didn't have the follow through and the courage and the openness to take an honest look at AmeriCorps in action and to help us to improve some of our actions, which we also did.

Most of all, I want to express my gratitude to the AmeriCorps members and their leaders throughout this country who have lived up to their pledge and so much more. By taking your responsibility personally, as the advertising campaign says, you are breathing new life into our old, old democracy, sparking a new patriotism among a new generation of Americans -- a patriotism of the home front rooted in the knowledge that our nation's strength and security, and our individual possibilities are all determined in no small measure by whether all of us have a chance to live up to our God-given potential.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. (Applause.)

I'm going to introduce our four presenters and they, in turn, will come to the microphone and do their jobs.

From the moment her husband was struck down on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, Coretta Scott King determined that it was up to her to keep the dream alive. Despite her grief, she got on a plane for Memphis to address the same striking sanitation workers her husband had gone there to help. She told them, we are going to continue this work to make all people truly free.

She has done that in every possible way: by leading marches and giving impassioned speeches for racial justice, human rights; an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation; by founding the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change; by leading the efforts to create a national holiday in her husband's memory; and by helping to turn that holiday into a day of service, not a day of rest. There is no one in America who is better suited to present the All-AmeriCorps Common Ground Award, and we welcome her here today. (Applause.)

Sargent Shriver often describes himself as a lucky man, having been graced with the remarkable and wonderful family he has. I might say, the rest of us think he's lucky because, among other things, he's the youngest and healthiest man his age on the face of the planet. (Laughter.)

But our luck is just as profound, for America has never in its long history had a more compassionate and passionate man more devoted to public service. He was the founder of the Peace Corps and the VISTA. He served the Navy in World War II, created Head Start and

the Job Corps, and Legal Services. He led the Special Olympics, served as Ambassador to France, led the Chicago Board of Education; fostered civil rights early, when it wasn't so popular; and economic opportunity for the poor, all growing out of his profound religious faith and his deep patriotism.

On top of all that, he is one of the most warm and genuinely unassuming people you will ever meet. We are honored to have him here today to present the All-AmeriCorps Award for strengthening communities. One of the greatest public servants in the history of the United States, Sargent Shriver. (Applause.)

Whenever I speak about Mike Leavitt, the governor of Utah and the new Chairman of the National Governors' Association -- one of the most popular leaders in Utah history -- I am reluctant to say anything nice about him because his state is so Republican I'm afraid I'll hurt him and knock him down a peg or two back home if it gets out that I'm bragging on him. (Laughter.) But his complete commitment to service and his generous support of AmeriCorps is one of the reasons that we are where we are today, with the breadth and depth of support for this program.

Two years ago, at a rally with General Powell, Governor Leavitt helped to launch Utah's Promise, a statewide effort to mobilize all the citizens of that state to action. Already it is yielding remarkable results -- increasing literacy; creating new service teams; recruiting and training more caring foster parents, a big issue for Hillary and for me.

Governor Leavitt has been a great champion of Utah's schoolchildren, reducing class size, increasing teacher pay, equipping Utah's classrooms for the 21st century. It is only fitting that he present the All-AmeriCorps Award for leadership, because he is truly an All-American leader.

Thank you, Governor Leavitt. (Applause.)

And, finally, General Colin Powell. In 1993, General Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the architect of America's victory in Desert Storm, retired from his extraordinary military career. I was one of many Presidents who benefited immensely by his service.

But that was just the first act in Colin Powell's remarkable life of service. He has gone on to serve our country as the leader of America's Promise, his national crusade to give every child the nurturing and support he or she needs, and to give every young person the opportunity to serve. Already, General Powell and his troops, including many AmeriCorps members, have touched the lives of millions of children.

General Powell used to say in a characteristically modest way that he was, first and foremost, an infantryman. Ladies and gentlemen, I begin by introducing you to the infantryman who is leading the charge toward America's Promise, General Colin Powell. (Applause.)

* * * * *

THE PRESIDENT: Now, I think our presenters did a wonderful job. Let's give them all a hand again. They were great. We thank them for their time. (Applause.)

I want to leave you with this thought, and then ask the new class to stand and join me in the AmeriCorps promise. And then we will hear from and sing with the Howard University Choir in "America The Beautiful."

When you leave here today and you remember how you felt, and you remember the stories of the people we honored, I want you to think of the future you would like to build for America and the 21st century. I want you to think about what you'd like this country and this world to be like when your children are your age, when your grandchildren are your age.

If I ask you to write down what you think the new century will hold, depending on your background, you might say, well, we're going to finally solve all the mysteries of the human gene -- which is true -- and then mothers will go home from the hospital with their newborn babies with a little map of their future and it will tell you, individualized, what kind of food your children should eat, what kind of exercise regimes they should have, what they should avoid, how you can maximize the quality of their lives.

Or if you're into computers, you might talk about the next generation of the Internet and how, in no time at all, the number of Internet users will be as dense as the number of telephone users in America; and how the Internet might allow children in the poorest villages of the world to skip a whole generation of educational and economic development. Or you might think about how these two things will join together, and we'll be able to put little digital, electronic impulses in various parts of people's bodies that will help them overcome paralysis, and have medical miracles.

MORE

Or if you're interested in outer space, you might say you look forward to the discovering of billions of new galaxies, and finding out what's really in those big black holes in outer space.

Isn't it interesting -- when you think about all this modern, exciting stuff, the most sweeping discoveries the world has ever known -- don't you think it's interesting that the biggest problems we have in this country, and throughout this world, relate not to some modern problem -- although there are modern problems, like sophisticated weapons -- but they're rooted in the oldest, most primitive problem of human societies: We're still afraid of people who are different from us, who look different from us, who act different from us, who have different views about how to worship God or live their lives.

That's why AmeriCorps is so important. For all the things I've been involved in all these years as President, all the things I've worked to do, I really believe -- looking toward the

future -- if every young person has a chance to be a good citizen -- and we don't give up on anybody, we'll always give them a chance to come back, here. We had a lot of comeback kids here today, talking -- and if America can remain committed to building one America across all the lines that divide us, recognizing that our differences make life more exciting, but what's important is our common humanity -- if those two things can prevail, more than any modern discovery, you'll be proud of the America your children and grandchildren have.

That's why AmeriCorps matters, and why I'm so grateful to you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Now, I want to ask the newest class of AmeriCorps volunteers to stand up and repeat the oath after me. Raise your right hand.

"I will get things done for America to make our people safer, smarter and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Faced with apathy, I will take action. Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground. Faced with adversity, I will persevere. I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond. I am an AmeriCorps member. And I will get things done."

Congratulations. (Applause.)

Now, I would like to ask you, in advance, to give a warm round of applause to the Howard University Choir. They've waited through this whole thing to sing "America The Beautiful" with us. Thank you and God bless you. (Applause.)

END 3:58 P.M. EDT