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PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON

PRESIDENTS' SUMMIT FOR

AMERICA'S FUTURE

INDEPENDENCE HALL, PHILADELPHIA

APRIL 28, 1997

Acknowledgments: Presidents Bush and Ford;
President Carter; Vice President Gore; Members of
Congress; First Lady Nancy Reagan; Lady Bird Johnson;
Linda Robb; Henry Cisneros; Harris Wofford.

And let me thank General Powell. After an historic
career of service in the Armed Forces, he has reenlisted in
the crusade to renew the ideal of service that has lighted
our national history -- and can now give life to many of
our best hopes. At our last meeting when he was
Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, I asked General Powell
if there was another mission that might bring him back.

He said that if there were anything, it would be to help AmeriCorps, our national service program. Now we stand at this summit for service because you have helped lead us here. Thank you for giving so much to America.

We stand before the house where America was born -
- the place where “We The People” took the first step on our centuries long journey to form a more perfect union.

On the last day of the Constitutional Convention, Ben Franklin walked out of this Hall and encountered a woman anxious to know what had happened.

She asked him, “Well Doctor, what have we got -- a monarchy or a Republic?” Franklin replied, “A Republic, if you can keep it.”

For more than 200 years, we have struggled to redeem that faith and keep this Republic. Now the challenge of a different time is ours and it requires the same effort, faith and determination it always has. For a free society truly is ours to keep, not something that will keep us if we are complacent and indifferent.

We live in one of the great moments of change in human history. We have the promise of more material progress than any other generation; but the same forces that bring that progress can pull us apart, fraying our bands of community, eroding our sense of great endeavor, leaving us isolated in our separate pursuits and narrow interests.

Our blessings as a nation must not be a temptation to be content with things as they are, or to ask only what we can do for ourselves. America has stumbled only when we fail to face frankly the problems that confront us.

My fellow citizens: The era of big government is over. But the era of big challenges is not over. Our most important challenges today are those of the heart. They must be faced be faced person by person, neighbor by neighbor, community by community.

They demand that above all else, we reach across the divides of age and race, of prejudice and class -- that we reach inside ourselves and tap the caring that is there -- that we see and that we act -- and the sum total of those individual actions will be more important to America's progress and America's soul than any piece of legislation ever passed.

We must ask more from one another, and expect more from ourselves.

The era of big government is over. But the new era of citizenship must begin.

And let it begin with each of us here, today, and with all those who join us in spirit from all across America.

Citizenship is more than paying taxes; more than going to work; more than obeying the law; more than casting a vote. For the framers, it was a pledge of life itself, of fortune and sacred honor.

For us as for them, America is an idea, not just a plot of land. And for us, citizenship is the act of service, not just an accident of birth. We must meet our challenges not through government alone, or as isolated individuals, but as a true community, all of us working together.

In this new and abundantly hopeful time, a full definition of citizenship must include the obligation to serve. We must foster a spirit of service that lasts a lifetime -- an ethic of service that is woven through the very fabric of our lives.

We need it not only to solve problems, but because service is the way we keep our more perfect union. Look around the earth; we see nations torn asunder by racial and religious and ethnic strife; we see people sharing a land and a history turning both into battlefields of almost unbelievable hatred. We have an obligation to ourselves and to the world to show how, with all our great diversity, we can live with one another.

Let us work together; let us serve together; in this new century, let us be the nation that is too busy to hate.

Government has and must continue to play its proper role. In America, the government we created right here has always been the instrument of the common will of the people. Citizen service and volunteerism are not substitutes, but extensions of that will. I pledge to you, that as long as I am President, government will do its part. But all Americans must do their part. We will work to create opportunity -- but all Americans must take responsibility.

We have made it possible for parents to take time off from work to care for their children. But it will not matter unless more caring adults step forward to give our young people the support they need to build positive futures and make good choices.

We must restore order to our streets. We must keep our children safe and teach them to obey the law. But parents, teachers and churches must be our first line of defense. We want to give every child a healthy start -- to make sure every child in this country has health care.

But our efforts will not matter if communities and citizens don't come together to open the clinics, immunize our young people and keep them away from deadly substances like cigarettes.

And we have pledged to give our children the best education in the world -- to lift standards in all our schools. But excellent schools and teachers will not be enough if all of us, especially parents, do not take an ongoing role.

We must all serve all our young people, but it is even more important to challenge them to serve America.

Volunteers alone cannot do all the work that needs to be done. In churches and charities all over America, they are giving more of themselves than ever. But many of our problems are full-time challenges -- and the solutions require full-time effort. And young people, above all others, have the energy and time to devote themselves to such service. Before they have their own families, the young can make a unique contribution to the family of America.

Of all the causes I have championed during my time as president, none makes me prouder than our national service initiative, AmeriCorps.

When I first ran for President, I believed that America could only reach its full potential if more of us understood the value of working together. Just as the G.I. Bill provided a powerful incentive to serve, we created AmeriCorps as a way to give today's young people a way to improve their lives in return for improving the life of their country.

Since the creation of AmeriCorps, 50,000 young people have earned college tuition by serving their communities -- working with non-profit groups to rehabilitate housing, protect our environment, immunize poor children, and help young people learn to read.

And we know that the benefits of service compound; service leads to more service. A typical AmeriCorps member trains or recruits a dozen or more volunteers.

I saw what it all can mean again last week in North Dakota. I saw the Red River, swollen and overflowing its banks, submerging entire towns and miles of farmland. I saw the battle against the flood -- and against despair. I was stirred by the men, women and children who piled sandbags high to protect their homes. I was moved by the thousands who came from Minnesota and South Dakota to help. I was honored to meet the AmeriCorps members who were braving the murky waters.

And I was prouder still to know that a month from now, after the waters recede and the volunteers return to their jobs, the AmeriCorps members will still be there -- in the thick of the struggle to return life to normal, and then in the daily, ongoing, unheralded efforts to make life better.

Today, as we seek to build a country ablaze with civic spirit, AmeriCorps can be a spark that lights the fire. I challenge every charity, every religious group, every community group here today: If you hire young people to do a year of full-time service, we'll give them an AmeriCorps scholarship.

Put them to work as teachers, as mentors, as team leaders to help lead and train your armies of volunteers -- and we'll give them the chance to earn their way through college and launch a lifetime of service. Match our commitment, and we will be able to give 50,000 more young people this opportunity. This is how every member of the renowned Teach for America program currently gets help for college. With this dramatic expansion, by the year I leave office, we will have given more young people the chance to serve in AmeriCorps than have served in the entire 40-year history of the Peace Corps.

Beyond this, we must challenge every young American to serve in some way.

We must challenge them to enter the service callings -- like teaching and police work -- for a few years or for a lifetime. Today, we are announcing that we will triple the number of young people who can earn four years of college by agreeing to serve at least four years in the Police Corps.

And I want to issue a special challenge to the best and brightest students in America: commit yourselves to becoming teachers where you are desperately needed -- in our central cities.

Here in Philadelphia and in cities across the country, there are classrooms full of children whose God-given talents will go to waste if no one shows up to teach them or stays long enough to make a difference in their lives.

We must make it easier for college students and recent graduates to take time off for service. Today, I am proposing legislation that will allow any young person with a college loan to take a year off to serve without increasing the amount they owe. I call on Congress to pass this legislation so more of our young people can fulfill their obligation to give something back.

Our nation's young people are brimming with energy, and we know they want to serve. They simply need to be asked. It is up to us to ask them. [*USA Today survey*] I call on every high school in America to follow the lead of the State of Maryland and make service a graduation requirement -- and give students real opportunities to serve.

Today we have heard stirring words. But the success of this day and this summit will be whether it produces stirring deeds as well. We will be judged not by what we say today but by what we do in the days and months to come. It is up to you:

Go back to your communities and give light to young people who cannot see the promise of America.

Go back to your communities and teach our children right from wrong, and resolve that not one more generation will grow up on the streets.

Go back to your communities organize new ways for people to give back, so that this becomes a true season of service across the nation.

Don't just live in your communities -- give new life to them. What you do may not make headlines, but to the student who learns to read, the infant whose health is saved, the family who receives help when all seems hopeless, it will be more important than any decision ever made at any summit meeting ever held. There is no nobler work than to put a smile on the face of a hungry child.

There are many people on this podium with eminent titles. Senator. Vice-President. General. Governor. President.

But I know that I speak for every one us here, that the most important title we bear is the one we share with everyone here and across this great nation -- and that is the title of citizen. Let us honor that title by pledging today to renew the sense of duty that was born in this place more than 200 years ago. Remember, this is our Republic. Service is the way we keep it.

Thank you and God bless you all.

**PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
PRESIDENTS' SUMMIT FOR
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INDEPENDENCE HALL, PHILADELPHIA
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Thank you and God bless you all.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS AT SUMMIT FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE
CEO BRUNCH

Monday, April 28, 1997

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Acknowledgements: President Bush; President Ford; General Powell; Harris Wofford; Ray Chambers; Habitat for Humanity Chairman Millard Fuller; AT&T CEO Bob Allen; Novartis CEO Douglas Watson; United Airlines CEO Jerry Greenwald; Executive Director of Summit Stuart Shapiro (for all his hard work to make the Summit a success).

- 2 -

I'm sure all of you will agree that this morning's ceremony at Independence Hall was a remarkable moment -- returning to the birthplace of our democracy, and rededicating ourselves to the democracy and shared responsibility that have always sustained our republic. But we are here to celebrate action as well as ideals.

To me, the most moving experience of this Summit has been yesterday's clean-up of Germantown Road -- with people of all ages and all walks of life working together, shoulder to shoulder, to make this city a better place for our children.

The people in this room have joined that call to action, with concrete commitments that will make a world of difference to our children -- providing mentoring and job training, donating books and helping our children learn to read, offering free immunizations and free eye care, adopting schools and rebuilding playgrounds, and even helping families move from welfare to work.

I know that the power of your example will inspire many more commitments and good works.

But at the end of the day, what matters as much as the amount of commitments we make is the spirit in which we make them. To truly fulfill our role as citizens, we must commit not only to goals and targets and dollar figures -- but also to each other.

That is why the work of this Summit runs so much deeper than any one goal we can meet, or any one cause that can be waged and won. Until the idea of service becomes a constant commitment, an everyday part of our lives and businesses, America will never achieve its full promise.

That is what I hope will emerge from the Summit, and from your example. When a child gets the eye care that lets them open a book and open a whole world of learning, then America gains another child who can make the most of their life, and give something back to us all.

When we connect senior citizens with children, to serve as tutors and positive role models, we learn that everyone has a role to play, no matter how young or old.

This is not about charity or philanthropy -- it's about community. It's about our ongoing obligations to one another.

We need to recognize that the biggest obstacle to becoming one America is seeing ourselves as one America. That is the commitment we seek -- it is the commitment you have begun to make -- and it is the commitment our citizenship demands of all of us.

I urge you: encourage other companies, non-profits and civic groups to do as you have done, and make the kinds of commitments you have made. Encourage your own employees to serve -- perhaps by giving them time off to perform acts of service, especially those that benefit our children.

There is one other act of service that I urge you to consider, and it is one that will do an enormous amount to help our children. Now that we have enacted landmark welfare reform, requiring the responsibility of work, the rest of us have a responsibility to see that the jobs are there, so people can leave welfare and become permanent members of the workforce.

The federal government will do its share, hiring at least 10,000 people off welfare into available jobs in the government. Now I challenge every employer, every religious congregation, every non-profit -- especially those who may have criticized the old welfare system -- now that we've torn it down, do your part.

Give someone on welfare the chance to go to work. There is no better way to serve our children than by ensuring that their parents have a job.

I am pleased that we are joined by Eli Segal, who served with great distinction as the first CEO of our Corporation for National Service, and is now leading our national effort to marshal America's businesses, large and small, to create jobs so that people can move from welfare to work.

He understands better than anyone that citizenship carries opportunity, but also responsibility. By hiring people off welfare, we can create more of both.

For all of us, this Summit must be a beginning, not an end. This is a time of great promise for our country. But it is up to us to turn that promise into reality. You're doing your part, standing as the points of light President Bush so eloquently envisioned. Now let's build on your example, and shine that light of service and citizenship all across America.