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COOL [Campus Outreach Opportunity League] Conference on Student Community Service, Illinois

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Keynote Address of Eli Segal,  
Assistant to the President and  
Director, White House Office of National Service  
to the 1993 COOL Conference  
on Student Community Service

Orientation  
Community voice  
meaningful action  
reflection  
evaluation

Shirley Ma  
Nancy Wolfe  
~~Kristin Pearl~~  
Stanley Levy

Thank you for that introduction, and thank you all  
for your warm welcome.

"Friends"

First time out of D.C. other than Rutgers since we took office.

I realize that while you are here in Illinois talking  
about service, many of your ~~friends~~ classmates are  
spending their Spring Break on Florida beaches. I'm  
reminded of what Mark Twain said when he was asked  
where he'd like to go when he died. He said that while  
he'd choose heaven for its climate, he would choose  
Champaign, <sup>Certainly</sup> with hell besides,  
hell for conversation. Well, ~~think~~ <sup>Florida</sup> the company here is  
well worth missing out on a little sunshine.

Hillary

It is a special honor for me to be able to speak to all of you because I know that each of you have already participated in community service, and that each of you ~~are~~<sup>is</sup> here because service is an important

part of your life. I know with COOL I'm preaching to the choir. You're teaching kids to read. You're providing shelter to the needy. You're doing environmental audits. In hundreds of ways, large & small you're making a difference.

I find myself making a lot of speeches these days. Before each one, I usually try to find out in advance the names and stories of the people in the audience who are most actively engaged in service. Then, during my speech -- and much to their embarrassment - - I ask those two or three people to stand up and be honored for their service.



My cup runneth over today; all of you deserve the recognition I normally give to a few. ~~But I don't think~~ that your being here together should obscure the contribution that each of you makes in your own communities. So I ask for everyone here who is engaged in service to stand. I applaud you, the President applauds you, and I ask that you applaud each other.

Throughout his long campaign, Bill Clinton was energized by people like you -- young people who are renewing our national spirit. He knows and appreciates all that you are doing in our communities, and for our country. As President, he is not asking you to endorse a Clinton policy for national service. Instead, he would like to become part of your efforts, and help build on what you have already accomplished.

*Carville - economy stupid - nat'l service  
Movement starts*

President Clinton is personally and permanently committed to this effort. You need look no further than his Inaugural Address, in which he ~~told each of us that "you too must play your part in our renewal."~~ challenged a new generation of young Americans to a season of service [and] to act on your idealism. <sup>x</sup>

2. This challenge is already backed up by action, as the President's economic stimulus program contains a request for fifteen million dollars for a summer service program, which I will describe later today. The bill containing this funding has passed the House and is pending before the Senate.

Knowing President Clinton's commitment to national service, you should be asking yourself, who the heck is Eli Segal? When President Kennedy founded the Peace Corps, he entrusted it to his brother-in-law, Sargeant Shriver. Shriver insisted that the main reason for his appointment was that he would be easy to fire if the Peace Corps did not work out. I admit, I will be easy to fire too. I am not a former Governor, or big donor to the party. I'm not even from Arkansas.

All Bill Clinton and I share is a long history -- <sup>almost</sup> ~~over~~  
twenty-five years now -- of being friends and caring  
about and working on the same issues. <sup>of hearing the challenge of another young President that we could do better.</sup> During that  
time, I have been a businessman in Massachusetts. <sup>done 2 things: tried to elect - (middle) & Done well in only one.</sup> I  
have never been in government before, and I propose  
to run the Office of National Service in a very different  
way from what we have learned to expect from federal  
programs.

First, unlike most Washington bureaucrats, I want  
as little power as possible. Instead, I want to empower  
you and the communities you serve. The service  
programs that work are community-designed and  
community-based. I promise to listen and learn about  
what is needed and how it can be provided.

Do you know what they say is the difference between a Democrat and a Republican? Picture a man drowning fifty feet offshore. A Republican would throw him twenty-five feet of rope and tell him to swim the rest of the way because it would be good for his character. The Democrat would throw him a hundred feet of rope and then run off looking for more people to save.

There's a lot of truth in that, and I will do everything I can to avoid the twin extremes of callousness, on the one hand, and overinvolvement on the other. The last twelve years have proven that even a thousand points of light leave a lot of people in the dark. But I must also admit that the programs of the 1960s and 70s proved that Washington does not have all the answers either.

Only the American people as a whole can tackle the social problems of our country. We in Washington plan to help target the human needs to be addressed, and then let the spirit and genius of people all over the nation -- people like you -- design ways to meet those challenges.

I also promise you that the Office of National Service will be committed to results -- not rhetoric. The final measure of any service is real change in the lives of those we serve. ~~Good intentions without productive actions are a luxury we cannot afford.~~

I know that listening, and empowering others, and insisting upon results, are all part of the COOL message. I promise to adopt these principles in all that we do in the Office of National Service.

Having made these promises, I now ask for your  
help. No one except you can make national service  
work. As Robert Kennedy explained a generation ago;  
"it is the young people who must take the lead . . .

[Change] demands the qualities of youth: not of a time  
of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a  
quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage  
over timidity, [and] of the appetite for adventure over  
the love of ease."

I've seen this in my own office, where half the  
staff is under 25. They remind me every day -- and  
sometimes very directly -- how much I can learn from  
them. Kate Frucher / ... ~~Young People for Nat'l Service~~

I've also asked one of them -- Kate Frucher -- to  
join me + stay tomorrow. She's already started working  
with Y People for Nat'l Service.

I ask for your help against the cynics, who will insist that Americans aren't willing to renew their commitment to each other. This kind of skepticism <sup>great</sup> greets every new challenge. The formation of the Peace Corps was called a "juvenile experiment" by former President Eisenhower. We have already heard that our proposals are too large, and that they'll cost too much. We've also been told that our proposals are too small, and won't make enough of a difference. This is inside stuff & I hope, like me, you would buy it. I can't tell. And all of this comes before we have even proposed legislation. <sup>!!</sup>

you know many times we've been told that our legislation is DBA - even before we <sup>introduce</sup> ~~propose~~ it!

But you already know about doubters and cynics -  
- you've seen them in your classes and dormitories.  
They include students who simply don't understand  
why you wake up early to help at a homeless shelter,  
or miss dinner so that you can serve one at a soup  
kitchen. Each of you has chosen commitment and  
community over comfort. We need for you take that  
message to a country that is ready for new challenges.

For too long, our government has lagged behind the willingness of citizens to serve. Could I see, by a show of hands, how many of you have plans to do full-time community service this summer? Of ~~the~~ rest of you, how many are unable to serve because of a lack of ~~opportunities~~ to do so? How many of you are unable to serve because you need to make as much money as a possible to pay for college?

We want to help you -- and thousands more like you -- pursue your commitment to service. While we are still working on a blueprint of a larger national service program, President Clinton has already proposed to make this summer a summer of service.

~~As I mentioned,~~ we're halfway to obtaining funding for such a program.

In anticipation of Congress' approval, we are already accepting applications for community service programs to organize this summer of service. These programs will be partnerships between college and community organizations, based in four to ten population centers across the nation. The services to be provided must be targeted to helping youth at risk, through programs in four broad areas: health, education, environmental protection, and public safety. Let me give you a few examples of what this kind of service might mean.

When it comes to health care, children are needlessly at risk. It is shocking and unacceptable that only half of all American two-year olds are adequately vaccinated. While it takes health care professionals to give the shots, summer volunteers could help find children and educate parents.

In the area of education, there is a tremendous need for young people who can tutor children and lead literacy activities.

Such extra help over the summer can make a huge difference in a child's performance at school in the Fall -- and in all the years that follow.

Children are also at environmental risk, and need people like you to identify hazards such as lead paint, and to reclaim their playgrounds from debris and drug dealers.

And our children need people like you who can show them an alternative to gangs and violence.

We are already accepting statements of interest from young people who would like to serve this summer. We will be able to take about one thousand, and are focussing on people from 17 to 25 years old. They will be chosen locally, with special attention to diversity and to identifying people who are potential leaders in the national service movement.

In other words, we're looking for people like you.  
If you know that you would like to be considered,  
please drop me a card at the White House. Or better  
yet, go over my head to the President. <sup>+ give us your summer address.</sup> We ~~will~~ send  
you information about the programs in your area as  
soon as they are chosen, and tell you how you can  
apply directly to them. I cannot promise that you will  
be selected, but I promise that you will be considered,  
and that we will use your desire to serve as proof that  
America's students are willing to lead America's  
renewal.

The thousand chosen volunteers will begin their summer with an intensive leadership training program. They will then return to community service organizations for at least eight weeks of work. Their pay will be minimum wage, but with a \$1000 education benefit that may be used for college or training or to help pay off existing college loans. At the end of the summer, they will be brought together again for a youth service summit. President Clinton and I will be there -- not to give speeches but to listen to those who have served. We will learn what worked, and what didn't work, and use that knowledge to help build a national program.

It is our hope that some participants will want to serve again, and we will provide them with placement services. We hope that other participants will be inspired to design innovative new programs to fight community problems. We will provide grants to that kind of public entrepreneur.

We hope that this summer of service is just a beginning. Although our program for National Service is still on the drawing boards, I would like to share its outlines with you. I hope you will listen with an eye to improving on it.

The first part of President Clinton's plan is designed to help you pay back the loans it takes to finance a college education. You and your parents have made many sacrifices, and ~~most~~<sup>many</sup> of you are already under staggering amounts of debt. Once you are out of school, repayment of these loans is based upon how much you owe, rather than how much you can afford to pay. This system pressures you to take the highest-paying job available, even if you would find another job more rewarding.

This is a system in need of dramatic reform.

Under President Clinton's plan, <sup>which we hope to introduce later this Spring</sup> students will be able to borrow the money they need for college and pay it off as a small percentage of their income over time. This will allow people like you to choose jobs that you find rewarding, even if they pay a lot less money.

But, better yet, we will also give <sup>young people</sup> ~~you~~ an opportunity to help ~~you~~ pay for part of <sup>their</sup> ~~your~~ education through national service. Before, during, and after college, students will be eligible to serve for a year or two in return for an educational benefit that will reduce outstanding loans or help pay for college or training. Participants will also receive a small living allowance and health care benefits.

We hope to start this program with 25,000 people in the first year, and have it grow to over 100,000 in 1997. To give you some perspective, this will involve six times as many people as ever served in the Peace Corps.

But #s are misleading. More than anything else, I pledge to you a national service initiative rooted in quality. And that's ~~that's what we have planned so far~~ but why I want to listen now.

~~promise to listen~~. I would at least like to get a rough

sense of your views on two of the tough issues we

face in trying to put together a legislative program. So with apologies to Ross Perot, "I'm all ears."

First, we need to decide how to allocate whatever funds we can get Congress to appropriate. Some argue that our appropriation should fund service by as many people as possible, even though that means that each participant will get less money towards their education. Others argue that we must provide a substantial education benefit, even though that limits the number of people who can be part of the program. What do you think? Let me hear you applaud first if you favor a larger program with a smaller individual benefit. Now let me hear the applause of those who think the benefit <sup>should</sup> ~~has to~~ be large, even if that shrinks the program.

These are not easy decisions. Let's do the same thing with the level of benefits paid to college graduates and non-graduates. Some argue that the benefit should be larger for college graduates, since they will have special skills that are of increased value to our communities. Others argue that the benefits should be the same for everyone who serves, regardless of educational attainment. Who believes in different benefits for differently skilled people? Who believes in equal benefits for all?

Whatever ~~the~~ policy differential we need to resolve, we need ~~you~~ you. Just before the President <sup>was inaugurated + suit days after he</sup> called me in January, I did what you're going to do tomorrow morning: I did a telephone with City Year. At that time I asked -- no, I insisted of Ake Brown -- regular receipt card for the service community. If we're going to make service the leading ethic of America, we need to be held to a high standard.

somewhat this chubby 50 year old could use a lot more of.

~~Although our time is limited today, I want you to~~  
know that President Clinton and I want to hear from  
you. Please write to either of us at the White House.  
Let us know when we do something right, and when  
we do something wrong, and what we should do next.  
You are our eyes and ears in your communities, and  
we need your input.

~~That's what we need~~

In closing, let me tell you what I hope we will  
accomplish together. <sup>your country</sup> ~~First of all, we will~~ <sup>really</sup> accomplish  
<sup>Nat'l service at its core is about 7 simple ideas. The first is</sup> ~~that America needs you. The second is that you need~~ <sup>your country.</sup> ~~your country.~~ <sup>America needs you to</sup> accomplish  
identifiable results in particular communities. By the  
<sup>with your help</sup> end of this summer, we will have begun to keep a tally  
of what national service can accomplish for America.  
We will know how many children we have immunized,  
and how many trash-filled lots have become parks.

Secondly, and less concretely, <sup>not if service will</sup> ~~we can~~ we can renew our national spirit. When President Clinton speaks of service, he likes to quote Martin Luther King's words that "everyone can be great because everyone can serve."

These words do not mean simply that the seeds of greatness are within each of us as individuals -- although that certainly is true. They also mean that greatness through service is not a scarce commodity -- that great people, unlike great scientists or great basketball players, are not measured by the distance between themselves and ordinary people. Great people are measured by the lack of distance between themselves and others.

America needs this spirit of community. Writing in 1839, deTocqueville said that Americans' "habits of the heart" were what made our free institutions possible. Today, in a United States that has grown a hundredfold in size, complexity, and diversity, we must nurture those habits by serving alongside, and listening to, people of different backgrounds and experiences. This feeling of connection to others -- and the actions that back it up -- are our only defenses against the fragmentation and isolation that would make large-scale democracy impossible.

Let me end, as I began, by thanking you for your  
service, and telling you how much it matters. I can  
add little to the words Robert Kennedy brought to  
South Africa in 1966. He said "each time a man  
stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of  
others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a  
tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a  
million different centers of energy and daring, those  
ripples build a current that can sweep down the  
mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Thank you again for letting me be here with you  
today. You are an inspiring group, and I know that  
together, there is nothing we cannot do.