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President's Volunteer Action Awards 4/21/93

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**Remarks of Eli Segal
The President's Volunteer Action Awards Dinner
April 21, 1993**

Thank you for that introduction, and thank you all for your warm welcome. I am honored to be in such distinguished company tonight. Since I've become Director of the Office of National Service, I've spoken to Congressmen, and Senators, and reporters. I am very glad to be able to address a group simply as friends.

This is a special group because you -- and especially those we honor tonight -- demonstrate that our country is one of both remarkable diversity and shared purpose. We celebrate tonight the fact that the ideal of service is alive in people in every corner of the nation, in every time of life, and in every walk of life.

This commitment to service runs deep in our national character. It was on this very day, thirty-two years ago, that President Kennedy announced that the first Peace Corps project would be to help build roads in Tanzania. His vision of Americans serving others inspired a generation that including many of you, and me, and President Clinton.

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 don't think that's the reason I was hired, but one can't ever be sure.

I do know that Bill Clinton and I share a long history -- over twenty-five years now -- of being friends and caring about and working on the same issues.

During that time, I have done two things: I have been a businessman in Massachusetts and have tried -- seven times -- to elect a Democratic President. I've done well in only one of those roles.

I have never been in government before, and I promise to run the Office of National Service in a way that is very different from what we have come to expect from a federal program.



Unlike most Washington bureaucrats, I want as little power as possible. The real energy and genius of America is found in people like those we honor tonight. No federal mandate could have called forth their initiative and drive. And no federal blueprint could have built the kind of innovative programs they you have developed.

But there are ways in which the federal government can help magnify and multiply efforts such efforts. And as early as next week we hope to introduce legislation that will do just that. Our bill will focus on three basic ideals: opportunity, responsibility, and community.

Like President Kennedy's Peace Corps legislation, our National Service Act will unleash our nation's greatest natural resource -- the idealism and energy of our young people. Like President Roosevelt's G.I. Bill, our National Service Act will reward those who serve their country by providing them with educational opportunity. But unlike the initiatives of the past, our National Service Act will focus not on the world's problems, but on helping our own communities.

Under the Act, students will be able to earn educational benefits through a year or more of service. This new policy -- and other reforms in the student loan system -- will expand access to education and job training. As importantly, it will focus our young people on the simple fact that citizenship involves responsibilities as well as benefits.

The young people in this program will ^{be} _^ the army that leaders like you have needed to continue and build upon your efforts. They will help tutor children, and assist the elderly, and make our streets safe again. What's more, I believe that they will do so not just for a year, but for the rest of their lives. As each of you knows, there is nothing so habit-forming as having helped another person.

From these efforts, communities will grow.

Service programs are the way we turn neighborhoods into communities. When kids are being tutored, and abandoned buildings become child care facilities, and bottles are recycled instead of shattered on the pavement, it is proof that to both our neighbors and ourselves that we share one home, one country, and one destiny.

Let me close by thanking our award recipients for helping to inspire our efforts towards national service. 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. I know that together, there is nothing we cannot do.