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December 15, 1992

TO: Al From, Will Marshall, and Bill Galston
FROM: Gary Orren
RE: Thoughts on National Service

Susan
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p. 2... Could
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I am a relative newcomer to the issue of national service. Since there was little time for many people to express their thoughts at the meeting at the Kennedy School on December 4, I quietly deferred to those who have labored much longer in these vineyards. But I would like to offer my two cents now.

I believe that I have a unique perch for thinking about national service, and City Year in particular. This year I am both an insider and outsider at City Year. I'm spending my sabbatical leave from the Kennedy School working as a City Year team leader, taking ten corps members out each day to do their community service. But for this memo, I also want to put on my usual hat -- that of political analyst.

I have three points:

1. Will it work? If I had the privilege of whispering one thing in Bill Clinton's ear about national service, or for that matter about any of the policy initiatives he's thinking about, it would be that he should concentrate on whether the proposed policy is likely to work. For Clinton, as the old Phillips 66 commercial put it, "It's performance that counts." In the afterglow of an impressive electoral victory, he should not lose sight of the fact that the '92 election was fundamentally a negative retrospective verdict on George Bush's poor performance. The electorate shouted a resounding "NO!" to Bush, and (as usual) said little about the substantive or ideological content of future public policy. Yes, there were particular policy ideas in the Clinton platform which appealed to segments of the electorate, and in some cases to large segments (as with national service). But let's not get carried away. This was a thumbs down election.

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Nothing demeaning about this. In this respect Clinton's (first) victory in 1992 is like Franklin Roosevelt's first victory in 1932; four years later Roosevelt received a resounding affirmative endorsement for his New Deal reforms. We expect no less for the New Covenant.

The title of the DLC's new book is apt, a mandate for change. The extent of the mandate is just that -- a call for change, change from perceived government incompetence (both of the Republican and Democratic variety). The challenge for the new Clinton administration is to create a new image of the Democratic party as a party that can make things work.

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Bill Clinton's call for voluntary national service naturally has aroused the community of policy experts long devoted to the idea of national service (or rather, the many ideas of national service). Folders bulge with yellowed notes full of "good ideas." Suggestions abound about new exciting initiatives and experiments we could launch. Many urge moving quickly with a large-scale program while the time is ripe.

My advice: be careful. One person in the December 4 meeting even recommended that Clinton launch a mass immunization program for youngsters! Hold on. Heed the lessons of the swine flu disaster. Heed the lessons of presidential chronicler Richard Neustadt. Focus on what can be implemented successfully, what will work. Do not squander the opportunity to introduce national service in stages, with all deliberate speed. The country will not rise up in righteous indignation if the Clinton administration does not suddenly blanket the country with a sweeping national service program. A more limited undertaking, if it works, will rock this nation. It will become, as you put it, the defining idea of the Clinton administration. Bear in mind that the idea of idealistic young people engaged in community service is such a compelling one that City Year has captured enormous positive publicity with only 100 or 200 corps members!

Politically speaking then, perhaps the greatest virtue of City Year is that it works. That's just what the Clinton administration needs.

But the question of workability goes beyond City Year per se to the ideas that lie behind City Year. Let me turn to that next.

2. The interlocking elements of City Year. Everybody (or so it seems) thinks that City Year should be a key part of a national service scheme. Brown and Khazei said that they envision City Year comprising about 20 percent of the entire national program. [Some people might even prefer if City Year were prepared to assume a larger percent.] That leaves a huge chunk for other stuff -- conservation corps, other youth corps, Teach for America, Public Allies, Pennsylvania Leadership Corps, VISTA, the Peace Corps, new experiments in a police corps, health corps, etc. Here's how I parse the terrain:

First, let City Year be City Year. That is, in its current form this program works very well. And it is a program which can be rolled out on January 20, unlike many of the worthy ideas on national service being recommended to Clinton.

Second, the following question is key: to what extent should the remaining 80 percent of national service reflect the underlying principles embodied in City Year? Those principles include: a commitment to a decentralized, local, community-based service (including private sector involvement and sponsorship); trying to tackle the diversity problem; a comprehensive programmatic approach; empowerment of corps members by challenging them to assume significant responsibilities; and an explicitly entrepreneurial approach.

This set of principles, which has been tested over the past five years, appears to work well in combination. For example, it probably would be impossible to be successful with a diversified youth corps without an elaborate rules system like the one which is a key part of the City Year program. It looks to me like it would be folly to try to "piecemeal" City Year.

Most of the key elements of City Year are easy to understand. My impression, however, is that some of them are much fuzzier. For instance, what does the comprehensive programmatic design entail? Essentially, this means that City Year is not simply a year of community service, but rather a year of youth education which has service as its centerpiece. It includes such things as training retreats, opening day and closing celebrations, a team approach, and a detailed rules structure (the "contract") for governing corps members' behavior. One thing I have definitely learned this year from my time out in the trenches with corps members: if we are serious about making the reinvigoration of citizenship the main goal of a national service program (i.e., tying rights to responsibilities, re-engaging young people in the public life of their country, etc.), then such a comprehensive program design is absolutely essential.

One other thing may be somewhat obscure. As I have emphasized, City Year is an organization which has administered community service professionally and effectively. But City Year is also a first-rate policy shop where innovative and creative policy ideas are invented and developed.

3. **Clinton's signature on a redefinition of citizenship.** My final point is that it seemed to me that the conversation at the Kennedy School revealed the murkiness currently surrounding the proposed national service initiative. From the talk at that meeting it was not clear what was the core of the policy. You may recall that Congressman McCurdy asked at one point, "What is the defining concept of this program?" Two ideas appeared to be competing for primacy. Is this a policy aimed at redefining citizenship which also addresses the spiraling costs of higher education through its post-service benefits? Or is this a student aid program aimed at making college affordable to all Americans which youngsters can pay back through community service? Either one is a noble cause which would benefit the country.

But sooner rather than later, you must establish clarity and convey focus. What is center and what is periphery?

I would urge the Clinton administration to define this as a citizenship program which, as you say, could become its defining idea. This is the right way to go for both policy and political reasons. As for politics, national service conceived this way could even be the catalyst of a political realignment. Keep in mind 1936.

Reaping that kind of big bang political benefit requires that Bill Clinton boldly put his personal signature on national service. How to do this? Here's one idea: Clinton should come to Boston in early June to deliver the main address at the City Year graduation. The President usually (always?) delivers the commencement address at West Point or Annapolis. How poignant for him to put his personal stamp of approval on these two forms of youth national service, military and civilian. This kind of event inherently conveys the educational piece of national service, since it is a graduation ceremony (also included in the ceremony is the granting of high school equivalency degrees to those who have earned them). All the energy, idealism, and outright goodness which you witnessed when you visited City Year explodes full force at the City Year graduation. I know this because I attended the ceremony last year, and that experience helped convince me to sign on

this year. The visuals are gripping and perfectly suited to dramatically communicating a new "defining idea."

If President Clinton wanted to do something earlier than next June, he should come back to City Year, roll up his sleeves, and do some community service work shoulder to shoulder with young corps members. He should then participate in a roundtable discussion with corps members, like the one you participated in the other day, which could be televised live to the country. President Clinton would shine in this setting. Moreover, his ability to make a personal connection with the corps members would touch the nation.

I hope these thoughts are helpful. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to convey them to you.

cc: Michael Brown, Alan Khazei

file Rick & Eli - Washington state is one of the few places I have confidence

PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS WITH A COMMUNITY SERVICE FOCUS

The Washington Service Corps firmly believes that citizen service strengthens communities and nurtures the personal growth of those who volunteer to serve. This belief is built on a ten year record of success in challenging young adults with opportunities to make a difference in their own communities. The Washington Service Teams, designed and managed by the Washington Service Corps as a result of its grant from the Commission on National and Community Service (CNCS), promote an increased sense of civic responsibility and community pride; enhance community appreciation for the skills, energy and talents which young people can contribute when given the opportunity to serve; address unmet community needs; and establish sustainable projects.

could pull off a summer program - not limited to the activities they describe here. Susan

On June 3, 1992, the Commission on National and Community Service notified the Washington Service Corps of its grant award in the amount of \$1.75 million under Subtitle C of the National and Community Service Act of 1990. In less than three weeks after receiving notification of the grant award, Washington State launched the CNCS-sponsored team in the nation.

Representative Examples of Public Works Projects

Since the days of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Community service projects have historically been focused on the implementation of resource conservation, public works type projects. Those projects and the long lasting benefits are visible to the public today. In fact, those early pioneers of service, the CCC alumni, provide perhaps the greatest testimony on the value and benefits of service. Many more projects that have a long lasting public benefit could be developed so unemployed youth and young adults develop a positive service experience through their contributions to the community. These public works projects could be organized or focused around the following themes:

Park Development Improvement and Restoration: Most communities have parks, whether in urban or rural areas, that are in need of significant repairs. Some area parks, due to lack of improvements, have been closed or are used for illegal activities because they are in such a state of dispair that the general public refrains from entering them day or night. These improvements or enhancements which could incorporate major capital construction projects for the most part could be supplemented with teams of youth and young adults who "reclaim" areas not currently utilized. These projects could include the construction of playground equipment, benches, tables, interpretation areas, mapping and trail designation, habitat identification and preservation. The "reclaimed" parks could be used and maintained during the school year by students as living laboratories for the study of biology, botany, recreation/child development, physical education and any number of related academic and vocational areas.

This past summer the Washington Service Corps mobilized a youth service team to design and build cabins for a rural community summer camp along with other teams that worked to reclaim and upgrade urban park sites. Both projects provided participants an invaluable learning experience through service to the community.

Public Housing: While the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (IOPE VI) efforts have increased attention on the incorporation of youth corps activities into rehabilitation of public housing in the largest cities, much more could be done by focusing rehabilitation projects in rural areas and small to mid-sized cities. Specifically, youth and young adults who are residents of these public housing facilities can be engaged and empowered through service in the renovation and upgrading of these facilities. Successful improvements in public housing and urban revitalization are not only a matter of bricks and mortar. A youth and community service dimension will nurture a renewal of the human spirit and foster a greater sense of empowerment among residents. The focus of these efforts could be in any federally subsidized or supported housing development. If HUD would provide the funding for capital improvements, teams of youth and young adults could be trained to provide the service.

Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA): The ISTEA provides funds for communities to make improvements in areas around public highways or right of ways. Funds can be used to construct greenways, bike ways, restoration of historical sites, scenic byways, restoration of traditional Native American historical/heritage areas and reclamation of historical sites linked to the transportation improvement focus. Any of the above mentioned authorized activities would be suitable for youth service project development. If capital funding were targeted or made available, teams of youth could be engaged on valuable community projects.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Although much effort was devoted toward the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we have discovered that some communities are finding it difficult to locate the funds to make the modifications to facilities and areas as required by the ADA. Teams of youth could be engaged in providing the human capital necessary to help impacted cities and towns come into compliance. Projects such as building wheelchair ramps, marking parking lots, or making public access areas or parks more accessible to the disabled could provide the type of challenging projects that would call youth to serve.

Implementation: The above public work concepts could be implemented quickly (two weeks from award of grant) if sufficient lead time is incorporated so local project planning can occur prior to the service grant award. These public works projects could also serve as effective pre-apprenticeship activities linked to certified apprenticeship training programs. Not only are these types of projects beneficial to service participants, they also have long-term benefits to the local community. In last year's CNCS-sponsored summer projects alone, sponsors have estimated the value of completed community projects is three times the initial investment of Commission dollars. We can expect to realize the same or increased return if we develop public works oriented model projects. In Washington, we have sites in mind where all of the above referenced approaches could be implemented in a timely fashion.