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Speech to Staff of ONS [Office of National Service], ACTION, CNCS [Corporation for National and Community Service] 9/24/93 - OEOB [Old Executive Office Building]

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**ELI SEGAL
ALL HANDS' MEETING
OEOB - SEPTEMBER 24, 1993**

Good afternoon. For those of you I haven't yet met, I'm Eli Segal. While I will work as the CEO of our new Corporation and therefore your boss, I hope I'll prove to you as you will to me that I'm actually nothing more than your colleague, friend and fellow service warrior as we begin our awesome responsibilities.

It's been quite a week, hasn't it?

Years from now, in the quiet moments of our own personal winters, we will remember having been a witness to history -- remembering that we were there, on September 21st of 1993, when with the instruments of our history President Bill Clinton made the National and Community Service Trust Act the law of the land. Today, with the memory of that triumph fresh in our minds and hearts, I want all of us to turn our attention toward the road ahead. Much of what I want to say I covered with some of you Wednesday night at the state structure meeting, but I feel so strongly about it that I want to make

certain that everyone from ACTION, from the Commission and from ONS heard it at the same time. That huge tent on the South Lawn was supported by three giant columns -- and the immense enterprise of national service must be similarly supported by each of the three organizations as it moves surely toward one, acting in harmony -- or the Corporation -- and national service itself will not stand.

Whether you have been a service warrior since Bill Clinton was a teenager, or whether you are just out of your teens yourself, you are part of a historic experiment. More will be called for from you than attending ceremonies and cheering others. We have before us -- before each and every one of us -- a series of challenges. Whether we can rise together to meet them will determine whether this effort, in which the President and the American people place so much hope, will succeed. We are aiming to make citizen service bigger and better than it has ever been. This will be a challenge of mind and spirit more than an exercise of arithmetic. Nevertheless, let me place our work in its starkest terms: by the end of our first full year of operations, we aim to have more Americorps members on the streets and in the classrooms of this country than ever served in any year

in the Peace Corps' 32 years existence. And then we intend to increase Americorps -- and VISTA -- and the National Senior Volunteer Corps -- and ServeAmerica -- in each of the following years, all without creating a new federal bureaucracy.

When Sarge Shriver, Harris Wofford and the other founders of the Peace Corps began that project, the sense of Camelot was at its height. Today, after assassinations, break-ins, and credibility gaps, the public is far more suspicious -- indeed, cynical -- about any assertion that government can help them. So we have our work cut out for us.

Each of us will need to do more -- far more -- than we have before. For those of us from ACTION, you will need to move from survival to creative energy. For decades you have brought committed volunteers -- the young and the young in spirit -- to serve the most pressing needs of our communities. The evolution of the agency and its programs from its founding in the 1960s to the turbulence of the 1970s and the neglect of the 1980s, to a visionary and effective service powerhouse for the 21st Century, must now be completed. On this most experienced of the three columns, a particular burden will be placed -- a burden to have the courage and rigor to examine old ways in light of new challenges, and make reinvention not a slogan, but an ethic and an operating principle.

For those of us affiliated with the Commission, stimulators of so much good in the field without the support structure to follow your investments as fully as you would like, the Corporation for National Service also opens a new chapter. From an era of developing models, we move into a time for requiring results. The Commission has brought a fierce independence to community service; now, those from that structure must harness that spirit in the service of a new community -- the broader roof of the Corporation.

And for those of us who come from the White House, the transition may be most jarring of all. In the first place, we may have to get used to individual offices and phones that actually work! But our challenge, after the luxury of a White House cocoon, will be to find real collaboration with those who were guiding the development of service long before we knew what that meant.

And by the way -- we will all be under one roof soon. We aim to have all of the Corporation housed at 1100 Vermont Avenue within the next month. We may all move again early next year, if we can locate space within which we can work together even more easily. But the key is, soon and for as long as the Corporation exists, we will be officed together and will be working together.

Each and every one of you will have the chance to play key roles in the Corporation. In fact, we are beginning a collaborative process to determine how we can best make ranges of opportunities open to all of us. I honor your past efforts -- and I want you to take this moment to applaud yourselves and your neighbors for those efforts.

And for those of you who don't yet know them, I want to introduce five people who have been working with you and me, and who will be among the senior executives of the Corporation. I'd like them to stand up and be acknowledged: Shirley Sagawa, Catherine Milton, Gary Kowalczyk, Rick Allen and General Don Scoot, who joins us to head up the new Civilian Community Corps.

We are, all of us, on the front-lines of change. The ancient Chinese character for change was written by combining the brush-strokes for "danger" with "opportunity", and so it will be for our collective work. If we can write together the story of the next few years, we can truly transform America.

That's why we will give you the "reinventing government" credo when you leave today -- to keep us clearly focused on that task. And why you will be among the very first actual rego cardholders in the federal government. Maybe that won't get you the same notoriety as those American Express cardholders you see in the magazine ads -- but being the first to have these cards is a clear indication that the President and the Vice President regard the Corporation as a critical model for reinventing the entire government. We

are first for a reason -- and we have good reason to make sure we stay the best.

In a minute, we will watch a brief video that was put together for the state structure meeting -- it depicts a compelling view of what national service is. In a way, the video is a visual reflection of our Corporation's mission statement, which we've developed collaboratively with a team from ACTION, the Commission and ONS. That mission statement, which you will also receive when you leave today, and the video say the same thing in different ways. They indicate three basic principles of national service:

First, national service programs should get things done. We want to show the American people what national service can accomplish for their neighbors and in their neighborhoods in the four areas of education, health and human services, public safety and the environment. Americans of every persuasion must feel that this program improved their communities and their country -- whether it was by tutoring children, bringing healthcare to infants, policing the streets, or cleaning up our parks. That is why we will be working to establish meaningful performance goals for programs -- then we'll fund the programs that reach them, and improve or eliminate those that don't.

Second, national service programs should bring diverse Americans together and improve their lives. National service has the capacity to heal some of the pain of racial injustice and economic inequality in America. But to do that, it has to unite Americans in all of our magnificent diversity -- including rich kids from the suburbs, poor kids from the inner city, rural elderly and urban yuppies, high school dropouts and law school graduates. The program really should look like America. With all of these diverse Americans working together for a single cause -- not to advocate a political

position, but to serve their communities and help themselves -- it'll be the best education in citizenship we'll ever get.

Third and finally, national service should be a truly national program. Whether you're a teenager tutoring in Tallahassee or a senior serving in Sacramento, you should know that you're part of a single effort to improve America. And that will take more than t-shirts and hats.

It will take shared standards and shared commitments by all of us. And it will take a special brand of courage -- a courage to think and act anew. Few are given the opportunity to participate up close, as the play of history unfolds. Only a figurative handful in each generation, out of a nation of almost 250 million, is given the chance each of you has been afforded.

In mid-June, the President met in the East Room of the White House with representatives of AFSCME. In front of union members who had been among his strongest supporters, he could have spoken about any topic -- from healthcare to reinventing government. He chose to speak about the challenge of history. He reflected on his meeting with the President of Namibia, the

first African head of state he had welcomed to the White House. President Clinton noted that the President of Namibia talked, not about increased aid or the struggles of multi-ethnic diversity, but about the heroic role 83 Peace Corps volunteers were playing in his country.

And, President Clinton told his visitors from AFSCME, three decades after John Kennedy's death, his transcendent legacy is the Peace Corps. "Thirty years from now," the President concluded, "that's what people will say about the young people in national service -- that they will be in the streets of America solving the problems of Americans." We will help create the legacy of this administration -- and this generation.

To succeed in that task, every ounce of dedication and energy will be called upon in the days and years ahead -- demands on each of us.

But one demand is the most critical of all: to move -- immediately and forever -- beyond mindsets that I can only describe as tribal. The Corporation is a single team -- and that means we will not have anyone on our payroll who will elevate the perceived interest of ACTION -- or of the

Commission -- or of ONS -- above the interests of the Corporation and of national service.

Machiavelli won't be on our payroll. Empire-builders won't be on our payroll. Information-hoarders won't be on our payroll. There is no room for "us" and "them" thinking. We are now, each and every one in this room, "us".

This will be a difficult transition. To put it in the business lingo I'm used to, we are embarking on a merger, and a start-up, and establishing 50 franchises, and making a host of venture capital investments -- all at the same time. And we are doing it all with the eyes of an expectant nation -- and a none-too-forgiving press -- on us. Some outside of this gathering already expect us to fail. And we will make mistakes. We must if we are to be bold. We will encourage risk taking, and we know that means disappointments as well as triumphs.

But I am confident that we can -- and must -- succeed.

And I'll tell you the three reasons why we must succeed: Pricilla Aponte, Derek Gottfrid and Reshard Riggins -- the three young people who spoke Tuesday. They and the two CCC veterans -- Owen Davis and Billy Bailey -- and all the VISTA volunteers and corps members, and all the Retired Senior Volunteers and Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions in the audience -- are and must remain the real stars of national service. They will shine if we do our supporting roles.

There was magic in the air at Tuesday's bill signing. The President gave us all a sendoff we will never forget. And if we go to work with the strains of "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow" in our ears, we should also have in our heads the story that the great civil rights worker Fanny Lou Hamer used to tell, of the wise old man and the two little boys who thought they were very clever. They decided they would fool the old man by catching a small bird and cupping it in one boy's hands. They would then bring it to the old man and say: "old man, we have a bird in our hands. Is it alive or dead?" Their plan was that if he said the bird was dead, they would release it and let it fly away. If he said it was alive they would crush it and show him the dead bird. But when the boys brought the bird to the old man and asked him their question, he answered "it's in your hands."

The future of service, my friends and colleagues, is now in our hands. The energies we can release; the standards we can set; the purposes we can inspire, will guide the movement in which we have long believed, for years to come.

With appreciation for your past efforts and excitement about our mutual future, I thank you.

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Much of what I want to say I covered with some of you Wednesday night at the state structure meeting, but I feel so strongly about it that I want to make certain that everyone -- whether you come from ACTION, from the Commission or from ONS -- heard it at the same time... That huge tent on the South Lawn was supported by three giant columns -- and the immense enterprise of national service must be similarly supported by each of the three organizations, ^{as it moves ^{surely} toward one, acting} in harmony -- or ^{the} Corporation -- and national service itself -- will not stand.

Whether you have been a service warrior since Bill Clinton was a teenager, or whether you are just out of your teens yourself, you are part of a historic experiment. More will be called for from you than attending ceremonies and cheering others. We have before this new Corporation -- before each and every one of us -- a series of challenges. Whether we can rise together to meet them will determine whether this effort, in which the President and the American people place so much hope, will succeed. We are aiming to make citizen service bigger and better than it has ever been.

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And by the way -- we will all be under one roof soon. We aim to have all of the Corporation housed at 1100 Vermont ^{Avenue} within the next month. We may all move again early next year, if we can locate space within which we can work together even more easily. But the key is, soon and for as long as the Corporation exists, we will be officed together and will be working together.

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I honor your past efforts -- and I want you to ^{to take this moment} ~~applaud~~ ^{applaud} yourselves ~~and your neighbors in this testing time~~ ^{for those efforts.} ~~yourselves a big hand.~~

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first for a reason -- and we have good reason to make
sure we stay the best.

In the last nine months, I have had the chance to meet many of you. But whether we're old friends or destined to become new ones, we've really worked together behind the scenes of service for a long time. It's good finally to meet in the same room -- a kind of founding shareholders meeting of the new Corporation -- to plan the next steps together.

In a minute, we will watch a brief video that was put together for this week's state structure meeting -- it depicts a compelling view of what national service is.

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It will take shared standards and shared commitments by all of us. And it will take a special brand of courage -- a courage to think and act anew. Few are given the opportunity to ^{participate} ~~watch~~ ^{as}, up close, the play of history unfolds. Only a figurative handful in each generation, out of a nation of almost 250 million, is given the chance each of you has been afforded.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Barack Obama", is written over the page number.

In mid-June, the President met in the East Room of the White House with representatives of AFSCME. In front of union members who had been among his strongest supporters, he could have spoken about any topic -- from healthcare to reinventing government. He chose to speak about the challenge of history. He reflected on his meeting with the President of Namibia, the first African head of state he had welcomed to the White House. President Clinton noted that the President of Namibia talked, not about increased aid or the struggles of multi-ethnic diversity, but about the heroic role 83 Peace Corps volunteers were playing in his country.

And, President Clinton told his visitors from AFSCME, three decades after John Kennedy's death, his legacy burns brightest through the Peace Corps, even in far-distant lands. "Thirty years from now," the President concluded, "that's what people will say about the young people in national service -- that they will be in the streets of America solving the problems of Americans."  We will help create the legacy of this administration -- and this generation. 

To succeed [in that task] every ounce of dedication and energy will be called upon in the days and years ahead -- demands on each of us.

But one demand is the most critical of all: to move -- immediately and forever -- beyond mindsets that I can only describe as tribal. The Corporation is a single team -- and that means we will not have anyone on our payroll who will elevate the perceived interest of ACTION -- or of the Commission -- or of ONS -- above the interests of the Corporation and of national service.

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This will be a difficult transition. To put it in the business lingo I'm used to, we are embarking on a merger, and a start-up, and establishing 50 franchises, and making a host of venture capital investments -- all at the same time. And we are doing it all with the eyes of an expectant nation -- and a none-too-forgiving press -- on us. Some outside of this gathering already expect us to fail. And we will make mistakes. We must if we are to be bold. We will encourage risk taking & we know that means disappointments as well as triumphs.

But I am confident that ~~all of us are as certain as I am, and as the President of the United States is,~~ that we can -- and must -- succeed.

And I'll tell you three ~~more~~^{the} reasons why we must
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There was magic in the air at Tuesday's ~~bill~~ signing, ~~combined of equal parts history and energy~~. The President gave us all a sendoff we will never forget. And if we go to work with the strains of "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow" in our ears, we should also have in our heads the story that the great civil rights worker Fanny Lou Hamer used to tell, of the wise old man and the two little boys who thought they were very clever.

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Sent Reagan

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