

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

DISBAND AMERICORPS

HON. BOB SCHAFFER

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, November 13, 2000

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, today I express my deep concerns about yet another wasteful and inefficient government program championed by the Clinton-Gore administration. AmeriCorps, the Nation's failed "volunteer" program, is currently up for reauthorization. Recently, 49 governors signed a letter to Congress requesting their support for the program. Fortunately, Colorado's Governor Bill Owens had the courage to stand alone in declining to sign, and I applaud him for his reluctance.

There are three indefensible problems with AmeriCorps. Before Congress considers acquiescing to Bill Clinton's demand for a \$533 million increase, it should think long and hard about the disappointments of AmeriCorps.

First, AmeriCorps distorts the notion of volunteerism. The AmeriCorps web page boastfully states, "Service is and always has been a vital force in American life. Throughout our history, our Nation has relied on the dedication and action of citizens to tackle our biggest challenges." I could not agree more. Three-quarters of American families give to charity, and 90 million adults in our Nation volunteer. Americans are the most philanthropic people in the world.

This inevitably begs the question, why would the Federal Government set up a paid "volunteer" program when private citizens, churches, and organizations are fulfilling this role independently? Just as Bill Clinton has stripped the White House of dignity, he has adulterated the notion of American volunteerism.

Second, how many \$500 million corporations in America are not auditable? Certainly none that survive. AmeriCorps' books have been unauditably since 1995, just two years after its inception. When AmeriCorps Inspector General, Luise S. Jordan, was asked at a 1999 Education Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing if AmeriCorps was auditable, she replied, "Although the Corporation [AmeriCorps] puts its Action Plan into effect in December 1998, its August 21 update indicates that none of its goals to improve the Corporation's operations and its financial management have been achieved." As Members of Congress, it is our duty to shield the American taxpayer from such abuse. Furthermore, how can the Congress even consider reauthorizing a program with a 25-percent increase when, almost eight years after its inception, AmeriCorps is still not able to be audited because of its extreme financial disorganization?

Finally, Public Law 103-82 prohibits individuals or organizations who receive Federal funds from performing or engaging in partisan political activities. One of AmeriCorps' largest abuses of taxpayer dollars occurred in Denver, CO. The AmeriCorps division was supposed

to use its "volunteers" to help the needy in northeast Denver. According to state records, the AmeriCorps leaders organized "volunteers" to make and distribute political fliers attacking Hiawatha Davis, a local city councilman. The Denver Rocky Mountain News reported, "The volunteers had to draft campaign fliers and distribute them door-to-door in April and May (1995) when Davis and [Mayor Wellington] Webb were fighting for re-election." Americans' tax dollars were used for political activities through AmeriCorps, in this case, which is but one example of a larger trend.

Mr. Speaker, the best action Congress could take is to disband AmeriCorps—that is obvious. Reauthorizing AmeriCorps and possibly increasing its budget by the President's request of \$533 million would be foolish. To allow more tax dollars to be wasted on an ill-conceived Clinton-Gore social program is to belittle the authentic charity of philanthropic Americans and to treat their hard-earned money with unabashed disrespect.

A MILITARY INSIGNIA THAT MATTERS

HON. DOUG BEREUTER

OF NEBRASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, November 13, 2000

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, recently the Chief of Staff of the Army took it upon himself to permit all members of the Army, including all reservists and National Guardsmen, to wear a black beret. Traditionally, this honor has only been conferred upon Army Rangers, with Airborne units being permitted to wear maroon berets and Special Forces the well-known green beret.

While the Army chief's motive of enhancing morale may have been laudable, the decision to permit all Army personnel to wear the prized beret diminishes its significance. A nation does not create crack troops by giving everyone the insignia that previously had been reserved only for the elite.

Mr. Speaker, symbols often have meaning. The symbolism and mystique of the black beret was earned on the battlefield, and in countless thankless peacekeeping operations. Making the prized black beret common headgear diminishes the efforts and the sacrifices of those who have earned the right to wear the beret. This Member urges the Army to reconsider this decision, and submits into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD an article in the November 4, 2000 edition of the Omaha-World Herald entitled "Still Time to Save the Black Beret."

STILL TIME TO SAVE THE BLACK BERET

The black beret is a symbol of the mighty effort that U.S. Army Rangers put into training, readiness and service. An effort in the brass to usurp that badge of honor must feel like a bayonet in the gut.

Gen. Eric Shinseki, the new Army chief of staff, came up with the idea personally and unilaterally, apparently after giving a talk

to an audience of black-bereted Rangers, maroon-bereted Airborne and green-bereted Special Forces. His thought: Give every member of the Army, including reservist, the right to wear a black beret. National Guard, too.

His reasoning: If the black beret is good for the elite Rangers, it would be good for everyone else, too. The Army must "accept the challenge of excellence," he said in announcing the change. The black beret "will be symbolic of our commitment to transform this magnificent Army into a new force."

Oh, and it's also a fashion statement, too, according to an Army spokesman. Black is the only color beret that would go with every Army uniform. So black it must be.

What is Shinseki thinking? These guys are the Rangers, the Army's least unconventional warriors. They do 15-mile runs just to get warmed up. With full pack. They are known for being able to survive off the land—on rats, snakes and insects if necessary. Their kind of combat is called, with good if understated reason, "extreme prejudice."

They often remain Rangers, in spirit at least, for the rest of their lives. They have active and up-front veterans organizations. And it is these organizations that stepped up to lead the objections to Shinseki's fashion statement. (Active-duty Rangers will, of course, obey any order fully and promptly, no matter how much the order might sear the soul.)

Shinseki offered to give the Rangers an alternative—a group of senior noncommissioned officers is going to come up with a substitute Ranger symbol. An alternative, whatever it might be, is not good enough, the veterans groups said.

Amen to that. Receiving the black beret is an honor earned by hard work, courage and commitment. Handing it out willy-nilly to every soldier who passes basic training is something akin to awarding the Medal of Honor to anyone who reaches the rank of private first-class. But, hey, they'll come up with some alternative or other to give to Medal-of-Honor winners. No prob.

The idea was ill-conceived from the start. Thankfully, there is time to get Shinseki's idea overturned. If veterans organizations can't do the job through official channels, they have said they will go to the new president, whoever he might be, and ask for an executive order. President Kennedy, after all, gave exclusive rights to green berets to the Special Forces. President Bush or President Gore could easily do the same for the Rangers.

And should.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON S. 2796, WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2000

SPEECH OF

HON. BUD SHUSTER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 3, 2000

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, section 430, Atchafalaya River, Bayous Chene, Boeuf, and Black, Louisiana: Nothing in this section

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