

Aug. 30 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1993

conomic change. And I think it's important that we make these commitments over the long run and that we keep the doors of communication open, and that's exactly what we intend to do.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 24th news conference began at 2:09 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Exchange With Reporters on Cuba August 30, 1993

Q. Mr. President, are there any conditions that would be met that you would be able to end the U.S. embargo on Cuba?

The President. We've had the press conference. [Laughter]

I support the Torricelli bill, as you know. I did when it was passed, and I still do. But I said before, I could just reiterate what I said again: We all hope that there will come a time

when democracy and an open economy will come to Cuba. And it will be a cause of enormous celebration in this country when it happens.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:36 p.m. in the Blue Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With the Joint Chiefs of Staff August 30, 1993

Defense Review

Q. Is this a crisis meeting, Mr. President?

The President. I hope not. [Laughter] The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs say it's a meeting to discuss their review of the defense needs of the country and how we're going—

Somalia

Q. Was the Somalia raid bungled?

The President. I don't think I would characterize it in that way.

NOTE: The exchange began at 4:16 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at the Summer of Service Forum in College Park, Maryland August 31, 1993

The President. You know, I really love Senator Mikulski, if she just weren't so laid back and passive and soft-spoken, you might figure out what's on her mind. [Laughter] She was terrific.

I'd like to begin by introducing some other people who are here, and I hate to do this always because I know I'm going to miss someone that I should introduce. But I want to begin anyway by introducing the distinguished Gov-

ernor of Maryland, Governor Don Schaefer, one of my former colleagues when I was a Governor; one of the most important leaders in the House of Representatives, Congressman Steny Hoyer from Maryland. I want to introduce a man who came all the way from his State of Connecticut to be here with us today, the first Republican sponsor we had for the national service legislation, Representative Chris Shays from Connecti-

cut. Thank you very much.

I see my good friend Senator Mike Miller there, the head of the Democratic majority in the Senate of Maryland. A former Congressman from Maryland and now the Cochair of the President's Council on Physical Fitness—when he stands up you'll see why—distinguished former professional basketball player, Mr. Tom McMillen, my friend in the back. I was really—Tom and I ran 4 miles together the other day, and he's almost 7 feet tall, and he ran at a pace I had difficulty maintaining. So I was very impressed. He convinced me he was qualified for the job I gave him.

And finally, I'd like to acknowledge the president of the University of Maryland, President William Kirwan, who is here. And in some ways most important of all, the person who I put in charge of creating and carrying out the national service program, my friend of nearly 25 years, Mr. Eli Segal; I'd like to ask him to stand.

I'll tell you, I just saw—there's one other person way in the back I've got to introduce because he and I started working on this concept of national service a few years ago through an organization I was involved in called the Democratic Leadership Council. And he's a professor here at the University of Maryland, but he's on leave. He's working in the White House for me now, Professor Bill Galston. Thank you, Bill, for your help.

I came here mostly to listen to you today and to thank you, but I wanted to just say a few words. This campus has a special meaning in my life. The first time I ever came to the University of Maryland was 30 years ago this summer when I was a delegate from my home State of Arkansas to the American Legion Boys Nation program. We stayed here and then went to Washington frequently to learn about the Government. I met President Kennedy then. I saw Members of Congress, members of the Cabinet, and really had my eyes opened to a whole world of possibility. But the thing that I remember I think most clearly after all these years is that President Kennedy said in his Inaugural that we should not ask what our country could do for us but what we could do for our country. And he also said that we must always remember that here on Earth, God's work must truly be our own. That's what all of you have done.

I just finished a 2-week vacation, which I needed very badly because I've worked pretty

hard the last several years. But you just finished 2 months of very important work. The summer of service ends today, and I hope you feel refreshed by the time you gave to other people and the service you rendered. And we are about to begin, as Senator Mikulski said, when the Senate passes the national service bill next week, we'll start the first full year of national service at the community level. I always believe that you and tens of thousands, eventually hundreds of thousands of young people like you could change the future of America and, in the process, could change your lives.

I ran for President for two big reasons. One is, I thought our country was not going in the right direction; and the second, I thought our country was coming apart when it ought to be coming together. I wanted to get the country moving again, and I wanted to bring the country together again. I wanted people to have a sense of the common good. I wanted us to draw strength from our diversity and to face our problems honestly and to seize our opportunities. I wanted people to recognize again that we don't have a person to waste and that too many of our young people are being lost.

And I believed that we could do it. I never thought the Government could do all these things alone. I just don't believe that. And for too long our country has been in the middle of this great debate where some people say, well, the Government ought to solve these problems, and other people say the Government ought to walk away. And I don't believe either is right. The Government basically has to be a partner. In order for Government to work, it has to be a partner.

And I have now, for the last several years, long before I started running for President, tried to capture this idea in three simple words. It's those of us in Government, it's our responsibility to try to help create opportunity. So our watchword should be opportunity. That's what the economic program's all about. That's what trying to reform the health care system's all about. That's what creating a national service bill is all about, trying to create opportunity. Then citizens have to recognize that all the opportunity in the world doesn't amount to a hill of beans unless there is someone there to seize responsibility, personal responsibility, for themselves, their families, their communities, and for their neighbors. And finally, out of that we can build

a new American community.

There are so many people lost today because they don't think anybody really cares about them, because they can't imagine the future, because they have never been the most important person in the world to anybody else. We have got to create a sense of community in this country where we're prepared to take responsibility for each other, not just to point the finger at each other and tell each other what we ought to do but to offer a helping hand.

So I say all these things to you because I think you represent that. You represent the best of the opportunity you were given to be in the summer of service, of the personal responsibility you displayed by doing your work, and of the sense of the community that you helped to create by what you have done.

If every American did what you did for the last 2 months, if we all could do that for several years, we could revolutionize our country. There are no problems we could not solve. There is no future we cannot have. And I hope with all my heart that what you have done here will set the standard for the national service projects in community after community that young people will engage in when this bill becomes law.

I told Eli on the way up here today I'm convinced now there are tens of thousands of young people who could do this every summer who may not need to, want to, or be able to do it during the year. And I'm not sure we shouldn't go back to the Congress, Senator Mikulski and Representative Hoyer and Representative Shays, and at least file a report on this summer of service and consider having a special summer program over and above the year-long program we do because so many young people could do it just during the summer.

I just want you to remember that you are this country. You are America. You are this country. And so now I want to hear from you, but I want you to know that not just your President but your country is grateful to you for showing what America can be at its best. And I hope that we'll see it repeated hundreds of thousands of times over the course of my Presidency. And I hope it will become a permanent part of American life. If it does, the whole country will be stronger.

Greg, shall we begin?

[At this point, Greg Ricks, facilitator of the event, discussed the Summer of Service project

and the group's overall accomplishments. A participant then discussed her experience working in an immunization program.]

The President. Thank you so much. That was a terrific presentation. Let me just make one comment about the immunization issue because your presentation pointed it up more clearly than my words could, but you all should know that in spite of the fact that America is a very wealthy country we have the third worst record in the Western Hemisphere of immunizing our children. One problem is the cost of vaccines. We make vaccines in this country which cost more money here than they do in many foreign countries. That's a long story, and we don't have to go through it, but one of the things that Congress did, and I want to thank those here who supported it, was to pass the economic program which included several hundred million dollars for the Federal Government to buy vaccines in bulk to make them available to clinics like the ones with which you were working. Even if you have the vaccines there it won't increase the immunization rate if people don't know about the service, don't feel comfortable about it, don't want their kids to be immunized. And one of the things that we clearly need is more people going out doing door-to-door work, doing community work, and it's obvious that there's not enough money in any local government, particularly an area with a lot of poor people and a lot of diversity, to hire people to do that unless you have a service project like this. So the national service whole idea really carries within it the seeds of lifting the immunization rates of America to those of other advanced nations in the world and changing the whole health care future of thousands and thousands of young children. Thank you.

[A participant from ICARE-Philadelphia asked if the health care reform plan would subsidize immunization programs.]

The President. Yes, the health care plan that will be announced in the next few weeks will have a big component of preventive care in it and will also provide the resources necessary to support the community-based clinics.

I think it's very important that—we have spent too little on preventive and primary care, causing us to have to spend too much on emergency care and care in later stages. So we're going to try to invest more in preventive and

primary care and in those neighborhood clinics both in urban and rural areas. I think it will make a huge difference. The Philadelphia program is very, very impressive.

Yes. Nice hat. [Laughter]

[A participant asked about the role of medical students and health care professionals in the health care reform plan.]

The President. Yes, actually, of course, all the students in all the health care professions will be eligible to actually participate in some of these programs through the national service initiative, so there will be a continuing opportunity there both during the school year and during the summer to do that.

Secondly, we have tried over the last several months, through the task force that the First Lady has headed, to engage in dialog medical students, nursing students, other people studying in the health care professions to try to make sure that the incentives we have in this program produce the kind of health care system we want and give young people who really want to serve in the problem areas a chance to do it. For example, as compared with all other advanced countries, the United States has far more specialists and far fewer family practitioners—dramatic difference, huge difference from any other country. That means it's much harder to get people out in the basic clinics doing the basic services. So what we tried to do was to construct a program which would provide more incentives for medical schools and for students themselves, financial incentives and others, to go out and practice family medicine but at the same time would not frighten the American people into thinking we're backing off of medical technology. So there's going to be more invested in medical research under this program. So I think that it will be good, and I hope you will be able to take advantage of that and continue to participate.

[Participants described their experiences working on environmental service projects.]

The President. Thank you very much. I thought they both did a terrific job. I'd just like to make one comment again to try to reinforce the importance of the whole service concept in the environmental area.

When you talk to most people, maybe even a lot of you, and certainly in my mind when you mention environmental issues, often you

think of policies that ought to be changed. So, for example, after I became President, I had promised to take some different policies. So we committed ourselves to signing the Biodiversity Treaty that other nations signed after the world conference in Rio de Janeiro last year, or we committed ourselves to reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the environment to the 1990 levels by the year 2000, or last week we committed ourselves to no net loss of wetlands.

But as you can see, when you pass a law, it's one thing to say these things and another to do it, just like you did the wetlands restoration project. An enormous number of the environmental things that need to be done in this country require the same amount of labor intensity that it does to go door-to-door and try to immunize children. The lead paint example in New York is just one, but it is a very good one. That's a serious problem in many of the major cities in America, exposing some of the most vulnerable children.

That's another irony that you brought out here in your environmental presentation. A lot of people think of the environment as preserving distant areas that most people never see. But the truth is that the people in this country who need a better environment than most may be those who live in inner cities, who are most subject to pollution from dumps that are there, from lead in the paint, from any number of other threats.

So I really appreciate this because I hope that we can come to see the environment not only in terms of the sweeping national policies that the Vice President and I have committed ourselves to but also in terms of things that preserve the culture of Native Americans and that literally may preserve the lives of people not only in rural areas but in the cities as well. So I thank you for that.

Anybody got any questions on that subject?

[A participant asked about increased funding for energy conservation programs.]

The President. Yes. You know, having been a Governor—and the States operate those programs, Congress provides the funds but the States specifically operate them—I have seen firsthand how many jobs they create and also how much good they can do. I mean, I didn't make that point before, but a lot of this weatherization work for poor people, especially for a lot of elderly people who are stuck in these

old houses that have holes in the walls literally, a lot of them, or in the floor not only make them warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, they also save money on their utility bills. They literally do. They conserve energy, and they put more money in the pockets of people who have just barely enough to get by. So I strongly support them.

I also think that, in general, we should move to more energy resources that are within our own control. We have vast amounts of natural gas, for example, in this country that are environmentally cleaner than a lot of the fuels we burn, and we ought to move to develop them.

So the short answer to your question is yes. It's interesting, it's kind of a hard sell in the Congress now because the price of oil is so low and energy is so cheap. It's much cheaper in America than it is in any other major country. But if you just have enough to get by on, you're living on a Social Security check or you're living on a minimum wage, it's still very, very expensive and a big part of your budget.

Thank you. Yes?

[A participant commented on lead paint and other housing conditions and asked about extending the national service program to community members who are not in college.]

The President. Good question. That's a good question not only on the housing issue but on a number of other issues. And I wish I had a very good, complete answer for you today. I can tell you that that question is one that we have seriously discussed, and I have asked Henry Cisneros, who is the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, to try to come up with a proposal for me that would help to do that, where the Federal Government could basically help local communities trying to engage the energies of people who are prepared to volunteer, work part-time, do whatever it takes to solve some of these problems. They are also very labor-intensive.

I'm hoping, beyond that, that some of the things that were in this economic program we passed, for example, extending the low-income housing tax credit and some other things that we put in there, will help State governments and local communities to work with developers to try to rehabilitate a lot of these houses and try to put people to work in doing it.

If you look at the building structure of the United States, we still have a lot of commercial

overbuilding. We haven't worked through that. And a lot of people are in a position now to finance or refinance their home mortgages or buy new homes because interest rates are low. But the population growth in America of people who can buy homes has kind of slowed down. So the real economic opportunity may be in rehabilitating existing housing structures. And we are looking at what can be done to try to deal with that terrible problem.

We went for 12 years without any kind of serious housing program in America, and it led to a lot of these difficulties. And now I hope that, through Henry's work, working in partnership with people at the local level, we can come up with a better idea. So I don't have an answer for you today, but I can tell you we're working on the problem. And I see it as a real area of economic opportunity for people, the rehabilitation of existing housing structures. It's a better opportunity than building new commercial real estate buildings in many places and a better opportunity than building even new houses in some places where there's no population growth and no demand for it. So I hope we can come up with an answer to the problem you've posed.

[A participant asked about homeownership programs.]

The President. The most important thing we can do is get the mortgages down, which we've done. I mean, we have now the lowest mortgage rates in 25 years, so that people can buy housing at lower costs. The other thing that we did in this last economic program was to extend something called the low-income housing tax credit which basically gives people real incentives to build low-cost housing that is affordable. The final thing that we're doing is having Mr. Cisneros, the Secretary of the Housing and Urban Development Department, work with developers and people in local community groups all across the country to try to figure out how we can either build or rehabilitate more low-income housing so that those three things together I think should permit more people—particularly low-income working people who have virtually given up on the idea of owning their own home over the last 15 years as the price of housing outstripped inflation dramatically—I think you're going to see that kind of turn around now. And I believe that in the next 5 years the percentage of people owning their own homes, including lower income working

people, will go up rather dramatically, but only if we work on all three of those areas.

[A participant discussed his experience as a teacher's assistant.]

The President. Thank you very much. I think you could see we were all very moved by the presentation.

Before I ran for President, I was Governor for 12 years, and I spent during that time more time in schools and with children and with teachers and watching people learn and watching people struggle, not just in my State but around the country, I guess than anything else I did. What I saw there emphasizes some very basic things that, again, I would say, the whole country could learn from and mobilize young people.

Number one, the one-room schoolhouses in New York proved that children can help other children learn dramatically. There's a lot of evidence of that, by the way. If we had time I could give you lots of other examples. But at phenomenal levels, phenomenal levels, there's evidence of—there's a school in Boston where, in order to get in the school, the seniors and juniors had to agree to tutor the seventh and eighth graders. And these kids were all basically from average or low-income families and most of them had average IQ's, and they all did very well, and there was almost no dropout—nearly everybody went to college, nearly everybody finished. And one of the key things was—and they had a very, very hard curriculum, very hard. But the older kids all did the tutoring for the younger kids—made a big difference.

Second point that your slide show pointed out and your presentation, was that learning should be fun for children, especially if they come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Instead of making it a pain, it should be fun, and they should be taught to believe that they can learn things. That New Orleans project I'm familiar with—it is astonishing that kids that once would be given up as—you know, you'd be lucky if they could read at the 7th-grade level when they got out of high school—are now being exposed to physics and computer technology and all that.

The third point I want to make—and this is something that all of you should remember, too—and that is, there's a lot of research in America which shows that kids that grow up in educationally disadvantaged homes or poor

homes may work like crazy in school, but they're always afraid that they're not going to do as well as other kids, so they're always afraid to say what they don't know. But most of the best learning occurs in groups.

There was a huge study done a couple of years ago—and a lot of you going to college, you'll remember this—a huge study done in California a couple of years ago which showed that different groups of kids going into the University of California at Berkeley were studied based on how well they did academically and the connection to how hard they studied. The kids that actually spent the most time studying did the least well because they were afraid to study with each other because they were ashamed to say what they didn't know. The kids that studied in groups and talked with each other about what they didn't know and didn't understand, who worked together in a family, learned like crazy.

All of these things could be affected nationwide, these learning patterns could be affected nationwide by programs like this. You could literally revolutionize the educational system of the country if there were enough service volunteers like you to reach these kids.

The last thing I want to say is a lot of this stuff was done one on one. Every serious study of kids that grew up in difficult circumstances and succeeded against all the odds show that every one of them has got a different story, and there's only one constant that's almost always there: Nearly every child had some sort of a relationship with a caring adult, which you qualify for, for these little bitty kids. Keep in mind if you're 18 years old and you're helping some kid that's 5, you are the caring adult. Right?

So those are the points I want to make. Again, I would say, I hope this work will somehow register on people throughout the country that may not be within our program, because these four simple things that you have shown here could change the face of American education.

Yes, sir? I've been wanting you to talk because I wanted to get a good look at that hat. [Laughter]

[A participant from Harlem Freedom Schools asked about plans to focus on diversity in schools.]

The President. Under our system of government, basically, public education from kinder-

garten through 12th grade is the province of the State government and the local school districts. The Federal Government provides extra help, by and large, to help poor kids through nutritional programs or extra educational resources. So the New York City School Board would have to decide to change that.

It's an issue, by the way, that you might want to see what you could do to get it made an issue in the coming mayor's race. There's going to be a mayor's race in New York. That's what politics is for, to debate these things. That's what elections are for, to discuss these.

But I want to try to support what you're saying in this way: When cultures lived separately from one another, you didn't have to worry about any of this being done at school because it was always communicated at home, and besides, everybody was just like everybody else. Now that we're crashing in on each other—Los Angeles County, for example, has 150 different racial and ethnic groups living in one county—this has become a very important thing. And I was very moved by what you said about the kids that wouldn't get on the bus with other kids, that wouldn't go in the classroom with other kids. You know, it seems when you think about it, it's perfectly logical that people coming to another country would be terribly frightened by people very different from them, and maybe the only image they had of them was something they saw in some cheap thrills gangster movie or one of those. So I think it's important.

But I think the only thing that we can do at the national level besides talk about it—the President can talk about it—is to try to make sure that we run the national service program all year round like you said, not just in the summertime, all year round to make sure that we have volunteers available for programs like this and that if a program, for example, in your community is set up to do this year round, that we would give that a priority through national service so we could direct our people and say, you can earn your college grade, you can do it if you'll become a part of this program. We can support that, and we will.

So you can say, look, to New York, you won't have to pay for all of it; the national service people will get you the volunteers if you will let the program go forward. And that's what I think we should do.

[A participant asked about the long-range future of the national service program.]

The President. Ten years from now I believe this will be a major fixture of our national life. I don't believe it will be 10,000 kids a year or 50,000 or 100,000; I think that the program will become so popular and will so capture the imagination of the country that, in effect, anybody who wants to be a part of it, to help defray their college costs or just because they want to serve, will be able to do it. I think it will become a very, very big part of American life.

Just look at what we've seen already, and look at what your experience is. This country simply has—first of all, we've got all these young people full of energy and passion and belief and without any cynicism and all this talent out there dying to serve, at a point in your life when you don't have to support a lot of other people so you can work for a fairly modest wage, particularly if you get some educational credit out of it. And secondly, we've just got an unbelievable number of problems out there that have to be solved in a personal, highly labor-intensive way that neither the Government nor the private sector could otherwise afford. So I believe 10 years from now, you will look back 10 years from now and say, I was a pioneer in something that changed America for the better.

[A participant asked about the role of the national service program in educational reform and innovation.]

The President. First, let me tell you what I think the innovation should be in general. We have a bill now that we're trying to pass through the Congress which would write into law the national education goals that the Governors and President Bush's administration agreed on back in 1989. And I care a lot about them, because at that time I was the Democratic Governor representing the Governors to write the goals, so I believe in them.

One of the things that we learned, after years and years in studying schools, is that all the magic of education and the learning occurs not in the White House, not in the Statehouse, but in the schoolhouse and in the school room between the teacher and the students and then among the students and then at home, if the student is lucky. We have to find more individual ways of reaching kids, and we've got to make our education system far less bureaucratic, and

we've got to give school by school much more flexibility to principals and teachers and students to design their learning programs and to be flexible and to be creative.

So I believe that the role that the national service program will have in the revolution of American education will be very large if, but only if, we can persuade the schools of our country, in effect, to restructure themselves to give more flexibility and authority to the principals, the teachers, and the students on a school-by-school basis.

[A participant asked about school system accountability for education.]

The President. Well, I think community service should help, but I think the school system should be held accountable for it. The answer to your question is, we will start doing that when we start evaluating our schools based on the results they get rather than the input.

For example, let me just give you one simple example. We evaluate teachers for whether they can get hired in most school districts in this country based on whether they've got an education degree from a certified college of education, right? So there are all kinds of Americans who are retired from the military. Right now, we will take, from 1987 to 1998, the United States military will go from having 3.5 million people to 1.5 million people, 2 million folks out there walking around among the best educated, best trained, most highly motivated people in the world, with the best values, that know how to get things done, right? You can have one of these people, a graduate of the United States Military Academy and a massive amount of knowledge in chemistry, and they can't teach in most of the schools of the country. Most States now have some sort of exception, but it's a real problem. Why? Because we evaluate people not on whether they're good teachers but on whether they've got good—the qualifications. We evaluate schools based on how many kids are in the classroom, what the schoolbook certifications are, or what does the building look like. All these things may be important, but we don't have any way of evaluating our teachers, our schools, and our school systems in most States based on the results they get. What do the kids know when they started; what do they know when they finished? What happened to them? What kind of problems did they have, and did they get services—that goes back to

your question—did the school actually serve the problems they had instead of the problems that some kids had a generation ago? And we're still doing it the way we used to do.

So that's what I'm trying—I'm trying to be a part of a movement, at least, that will decentralize authority, let the principals, the teachers, the kids, and the parents, in effect, design more and have more flexibility over their own school year and then measure them by the results they achieve. So that if you don't get results, you stop doing what you're doing and you do something else. But we don't measure—anything funded by tax dollars is normally measured by rules and regulations on the front end, instead of results on the back end. We need less rules and regulations and more results, and we need it in schools.

[A participant spoke about her work to increase literacy.]

The President. Greg said you had been a VISTA volunteer for 20 years, is that right? 20 years ago you did it?

Q. Twenty years ago this summer.

The President. Good for you. That's another answer I'll give you. Ten years from now I hope you'll be wanting to do this just like she did after 20 years. That's great.

[A participant spoke about her work to improve housing and encourage safe neighborhoods.]

The President. I just would make one point about that. When we had a commission to study the needs of the Lower Mississippi River area, starting in southern Illinois and going all the way to New Orleans—that is still the poorest part of America. And one of the things that you forget—we always think of public safety as an urban issue, but one of the things that's easy to forget is it becomes a big rural issue. And at periodic times in this country you will see crime waves will sweep across rural America. And one of the reasons is that a lot of people are just out there, and nobody can even find them.

The story she told you about the county in our State where people are literally unidentified, where they don't have an address, where they called for help—you know, it would take you 5 minutes to explain where they were—this is a serious problem in all of rural America. And I appreciate the work you did on it.

[A participant asked if the President could give

concrete examples of welfare reform.]

The President. Yes, I can. That's a good question. I will give you three concrete examples, but let's talk about what's wrong with the system now, very briefly. Again, it goes back to the question the young man from Harlem asked me about education, where a lot of the schools are being run for a time that no longer exists instead of a time that does exist. The original welfare system was set up to deal with an American society that existed about 50 years ago, where nearly everybody who wanted to work could find some kind of job at some low level, but they could find some kind of job. There were very few women in the work force, if they were in the home and they had children. And the typical welfare recipient in the beginning was, let's say, a West Virginia miner's widow, 60 years ago. The husband gets killed in the mines. They live up in the hills and hollows of West Virginia. The woman has a fourth-grade education. She's got three or four kids, no way to go to work, no job to find, and the welfare supports the kids.

Then there was another typical welfare recipient that represents about half the people on welfare today, for whom welfare should exist, the people who hit on hard times. Suddenly a spouse dies, and there's two little children in the home, and you can't work. Or you lose a job, and you can't get another one, and you run out of unemployment benefits. In other words, about half the people on welfare only stay for 4, 5, 6 months, and then they get off. Those are the people we would all want a welfare system for, because they fall through the unemployment system cracks or they need support or they have little children. They can't be working because they have a whole slew of them or whatever.

Increasingly, however, there are people on welfare whose parents were on welfare, whose grandparents were on welfare, who never have worked, and who basically can stay on forever as long as they have children under a certain age, because welfare's proper name is Aid to Families with Dependent Children, AFDC, that's what it means.

So, why do people stay on welfare? To know how to fix it, you have to know why they stay. The benefits aren't all that great in most States. In fact, over the last 20 years, benefits have not kept up with inflation. Why do people stay?

They stay for one reason: because they, by and large, have very little education, may not know how to get into the system; if they did get a job, their job would pay low wages and they would lose two things they have on welfare, medical coverage for their kids under the Medicaid program and they would then have to pay for child care that they themselves are providing.

Now, I see the Governor paying close attention. Maryland's done a lot of work on this whole issue in this State. He can maybe give a better answer than I can. But if you look at the system—and by the way, I have spent hours and hours in my life talking to people who are on welfare, and nearly all of them want to get off quick as they can. So what would you do to fix it?

First thing you've got to do is make sure work pays. Eighteen percent of the American work force, almost one in five, work for a wage that will not lift a family of four out of poverty. In the last economic program that we passed just before the Congress went on recess, one of the most important parts of it was to increase something called the earned-income tax credit, which is a refund you can get from the Government on your tax system to say to the working people of this country, if you work 40 hours a week and you have a child in your house, you will be lifted above poverty by the tax system. We will not tax you into poverty. If you're willing to work hard, play by the rules, and raise your kids, we'll lift you out of poverty. That's the first thing. That's one specific thing, very important to do.

The second thing you have to do is to provide medical coverage for all Americans without regard to whether they're working or not. Seventy percent of all the people in this country who don't have health insurance are working for a living. So if you're on welfare, let me just give you an example. This is something that actually happens now. I helped work on a welfare reform program which Congress passed and President Reagan signed in late 1988 right before he left office. And to try to deal with this medical coverage program, we said, if you get a job that doesn't have health insurance we will provide you health insurance for 6 or 9 months, to get you off welfare. That's great, but guess what happens? You've got two people working side by side, one of them that used to be on welfare has got health insurance for her kids for 9 months, working next to somebody who has

never been on welfare that doesn't have any health insurance. So the second thing you have to do if you want to end welfare as we know it is to provide a system, like every other advanced country has, that has affordable health care for all Americans. If you don't do it, you're going to continue to have these problems.

The third thing you have to do is to make sure that all the States that run the welfare programs have the resources they need and the incentives they need to actually train people for jobs that it will exist.

And then there's one final thing, there's a fourth thing you have to do. If you want to end the welfare system as you know it, you have to say, if you have health care for your kids and yourself, and you have the education and training, after a certain amount of time, if you don't go to work there will be some sort of community service job provided for you by the local government, and that's what you have to do if you want to get an income. In other words, there has to be an end of it. Finally, you have to move people to independence and away from dependence.

If we did those four things, we could end the welfare system as we know it, and we could leave welfare for the people that really need it. And all of you would feel good about the program instead of bad about it.

[A participant from Habitat for Humanity asked about easing restrictions in Federal housing programs in favor of homeownership.]

The President. Yes, I do support that. I don't know if I can prevail, but I do support that. There's a reason why there's been a long-standing debate in the Congress about this. And a lot of the Members of Congress who really believe in providing affordable housing to people are afraid if you move away from—if you have a really strong bias in favor of homeownership, that the good things that would be done by Habitat for Humanity, for example, would be offset by people being, in effect, cut loose in these public housing units that then they won't have the resources to maintain. So we have to do it in a delicate way, but I think you're absolutely right. And I think it has to be done.

By the way, for those of you who don't know about—we talked about it a couple of times, but Habitat for Humanity is arguably the most successful continuous community service project in the history of the United States, started by

two wonderful people, Millard and Linda Fuller, who I was lucky enough to meet in another life before I ever thought about doing this job. It is organized on a community service basis, community by community. They never take any Government money. And it has revolutionized the lives of—how many houses has Habitat built now?

Q. —are we building now?

The President. No, I mean where are they now in the cumulative total? Does anybody know? How many?

Q. Twenty-one thousand around the world.

The President. Yes, that's how many they're building right now. They've built more, though. But anyway, it's an amazing thing. And I think—I wish I knew. I did know a couple of months ago, but I've forgotten.

You're absolutely right. What we need to do—that's one way we can have a partnership with Habitat, if we use the HOME program to favor more homeownership. And I think we can do it in a way that will satisfy the legitimate concern of Members of Congress that we not be in a position of handing over big housing units to people who don't have the capacity, the resources to maintain them. That's the real problem there.

[A participant asked if former participants in the national service program could advise in the development of new projects.]

The President. I'll let Mr. Segal answer that. Eli.

Mr. Segal. We've learned so much in the course of the last 8 weeks, I think. Had we not thought of it, we would have said yes to you right now. It's a great idea, and we certainly need to make certain we're enjoying all the benefit of all the wisdom you've learned, and it certainly should be part of the program going forward.

The President. Let me make a suggestion. If you have a specific idea about how we can do that and how we should do that, if you would write it up and send it to Mr. Segal, I'd really appreciate it. I hadn't thought of it before, and it is self-evidently the right thing to do. So why don't you think about it a little bit and write him a proposal on it.

[At this point, a participant presented the President with a T-shirt.]

The President. I'll get it. He'll bring it to

me. Go ahead. Thanks, Chris. Nice color.

[A participant asked if national service would be mandatory and part of the school curriculum.]

The President. A different question—those are two different questions. I don't believe that participation in this program, the national service program, which we are proposing is, by definition, voluntary, but you get something for it. You get credit toward college.

I believe that it is a very good thing for States or local school districts to mandate community service for kids at certain levels in the public schools. A few years ago I had the opportunity to serve on a commission on middle schools, and we recommended two things that didn't get done but I thought should be. One is that there ought to be a set of basic civic values that are taught in the schools, and the second was that community service ought to be a part of the curriculum. So yes, I think that every State should include community service as a part of the curriculum at some appropriate point, where students, young people, as a part of their education, get the experience of doing what you've done, the thrill of it and learn from it and see—don't you find that you see the world in a different way once you do this? I mean, you know what the problems are, but you also have a sense that you can solve them and make a difference. Yes, that's what I think should be done. Yes, over in the corner.

[A participant asked what could be done about the high number of young people in jail.]

The President. Yes, there are a huge number of young people in jail. We have now the unfortunate distinction of having the highest percentage of our people in prison of any country in the world. Did you know that? America has the highest percentage of its population behind bars of any country in the world, and most of them are young. Most of them are under 25 years of age.

I think, in a way, all of you are doing something about it. I think that if you go to the prisons and talk to these people and get the story of their lives and figure out how they got there. And most of them never met anybody like you on a consistent basis, that is, had a chance to be part of what you are doing. And so, I think there are a lot of things we can do about it, but in the end, what we have to

do about it is to continue to touch more of them at the earliest possible point in their lives so they don't wind up doing what they're doing later, and keep something in their mind about tomorrow. Let them always believe there is a tomorrow, that there is a future, that there is something they can do that makes them feel good, that makes them important, that makes their lives meaningful, that doesn't require them to do what they do to get in prison.

I also think that a lot of kids who wind up getting in trouble because they're in gangs do it because—it goes back to what I said about studying—everybody wants to be in a gang. You just hope it's a good gang and not a bad gang, right? You're in a gang. That's what all these T-shirts mean. Right? See what I mean?

So I think the whole point of what you do is to try to gather them up before it happens. Also, there's a whole lot of law enforcement strategies that work and antidrug strategies, and we could talk about that. But from your point of view, giving people something to say yes to as well as something to say no to and to be part of a group that matters, I think that would do more over the long run. If you gave every kid in America that chance, every one of them that chance, you would see the prison population go down dramatically over 10 or 15 years, not overnight but over a 10- or 15-year period.

[A participant asked about initiatives to help African-American and Latino males.]

The President. What I think I can do—again, I will say—I gave this answer to another question, but one of the things that I like about this national service concept is that we can go out and recruit African-American and Latino males, and then we can give priority to projects, community-by-community, that we know have a good chance of succeeding and put people in there and help to pay for it. That's what we can do. And that will be a major, major thing. That's what you did, I mean, without maybe thinking about it in that way. But that's what we can do.

But what you've also got to do is to make sure that those things which are in the control of the State or those things which are in the control of the local government or those things which the private sector ought to be doing in your community, that they're doing that, too. For example, I still think you could rescue a bunch of kids that are in trouble if you have

the right kind of court programs, if you have alternatives to incarceration for first offenders.

We've got another program that is separate from this now. I'm really proud of it. I signed a bill in June, another one of my passions, where we're using empty military bases and National Guard volunteers to work with high school drop-outs to give them a chance to do what they once might have done in the military but can't now because we've phased the military down so much, to recover their future and get a GED.

So we're going to continue to do programs like that that are highly targeted toward people that otherwise might get in trouble. But I will say what we want to do at the national level is to provide a vehicle for people like you to serve. But you still got to get people at the local level to say, "Hey, this is a problem in our community; will you give us the folks to do it?" And then we can say yes.

[At this point, the facilitator introduced a participant from south central Los Angeles.]

Q. How are you doing?

The President. I'm doing better since I spent the last couple of hours with you.

[The participant discussed his experience working with children in the neighborhood he grew up in.]

The President. If I might just respond to you. You know, I've spend a lot of time in your community over the last—and I started going there before I ran for President and before the riots. I first went to south central L.A., over 3 years ago now, just to sit and talk with people. My wife and I went and talked with a bunch of sixth graders, and we met with the people from Uno and SCOC, the community organizations out there, and others. And one of the things I think Americans who don't live in these really troubled communities often forget is that most people who live in places like that do not break the law, get up and go to work every day, want their children to do well, are doing the best they can. And a lot of the kids who wind up in gangs do it almost out of self-defense because they don't think they have any alternatives.

I was out there the other day—you probably don't remember this, but I visited that sporting goods store in south central L.A. run by the two guys who used to be in gangs. We played basketball in the backyard there—the parking

lot of the sporting goods store. But I think that is so important.

Now again, we have a job to do. We, the government and the private sector, have got to put more opportunity into places like that.

One of the things that the Congress did in this economic program I really hope will work—at least we've got a chance to see now—is to pass a bill which will enable us to identify six really troubled, big, urban areas and say to people in the private sector, "Look, we'll give you a whole lot of extra incentives if you'll put you money there, create jobs there, and put people to work." I mean, it is nuts if you go into some of these areas and you think about all these people just walking around without jobs. That's an enormous resource going to waste. If those people were working, they'd have money to buy things from other people. They would create jobs. We've allowed this economy to shrink.

But over and above that, we have to put in a lot of volunteers, people like you who can do that. I mean, I'm convinced that the economy is one thing we have to address, but all these social problems have to be addressed one-on-one.

And let me just close with this sentence. I was talking to somebody I've known since I was 6 years old the other day, and we were talking about all the kids in trouble. And she said, "You know, a guy asked me the other day what are we going to do about all these kids? How are we going to save all these kids?" And she said, "We've got to save them the same way we lost them, one at a time." And so you can have an enormous impact on the future of your community. And it's up to me to try to make sure that we can keep programs like this going so that you and people like you will have a chance to do that.

It's also important that you be an advocate for all those people and not let us forget about them. I mean, it's crazy just to pay attention to a city when all the buildings burn down. Then it's often too late. We need to pay attention to them when the kids are growing up and they're trying to do the right thing. And I hope that in south central L.A. and in a lot of the other places that are represented here today, we're going to be able to do that. Not that we'll solve the problems overnight, but if everybody knows we're trying, everybody knows we're working together, everybody knows we're going in the right direction, that is the feeling

I think people want. That's what gets people going.

What breaks people is not the problems they face; what breaks people is that they think tomorrow is not going to be any better than today. And what this national service is about is making people believe that it will be different. And you have proved that. Thank you.

Q. And finally, Mr. President, nowhere have we seen service so urgently needed—

Q. Excuse me, Mr. President. I've got a really important question to ask and a really important observation. I'm from Ohio Wesleyan University, and I'm under the direction of John Powers. And I'd like to take time to ask you to recognize the program directors and the community leaders who are here and who have come so far to—[applause]—

The President. Would they stand up? Will you have them stand up?

Q. —to make sure that your vision has gone through.

The President. Stand up. Stand up. Good for you. Good for you. Thank you.

[A participant asked how the national service program would address rural problems.]

The President. It is true that this summer, because we were basically doing a test program this summer and we wanted to plug into programs that were established and that had a real chance of working—the program you mentioned in Philadelphia, the City Year Program that Greg's involved with—that we knew were working. So we did that, and we did it deliberately, and I still think it was the right thing to do.

On the other hand, there were some non-urban projects, the Red Lake project, the one in south Texas that was done. And as I said earlier, I come from a rural background, a State full of small towns and rural areas, and I know that all the problems that are in the big cities are also there. So we are going to appoint this board to run the national service program that is fully representative of the rest of the country, and one of their missions will be to allocate the resources in a way that are fair to the whole country so that we don't forget about the small towns and the rural areas. They're not much

different, except in size, in the scope of the problems that they face today. And I thank you for saying that. Give them a hand. [Applause]

[At this point, the facilitator introduced participants who discussed their experiences in restoration of disaster areas.]

The President. First, let me just say a simple thank you to all of you.

I was in the Midwest during the floods on four occasions, and I saw a lot of young people there working hard and really giving it all they had. But one of the things I think being a Governor is a good preparation for President is dealing with natural disasters, because when you see them occur—first of all, it's just breathtaking to see a flood take away a town or a tornado or a hurricane blow away a place. But the other thing, you know, is just what you got through saying, that everybody pours out their heart when it's happening, and they come and help. But a year from now there are still people who don't have their lives together. And the stresses on the families and the communities are staggering.

One interesting thing we have done is to— as soon as I got in office, I named Henry Cisneros as the administration's coordinator for dealing with the long-term relief of Hurricane Andrew. Then I named Mike Espy, the Agriculture Secretary, as the administration's coordinator for dealing with the long-term relief of the flood in the Midwest. These are the kinds of things that we have to do. We've got to stay with it for the long run. And I hope that the national service project can provide volunteers next year in the Midwest if they are needed and next year in south Florida if they are needed, so that we don't forget about those people. It takes a long time to recover from a disaster of the magnitude of Andrew or a 500-year flood, which is what we just had in the Midwest. And I really thank you for it.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the Adele H. Stamp Student Union at the University of Maryland.