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The President's Radio Address *December 20, 2003*

Good morning. Every year during the holidays, families across America gather to celebrate our blessings, and we unite to share those blessings with others. Particularly in this time of giving, our thoughts turn to fellow citizens who face hardship or illness or loneliness. Their burden often seems even greater at Christmastime, yet the hope of this season was meant for them as well.

The American people see these needs, and they are responding, as always, with great generosity. Just this week, a Government report found that more than 63 million Americans volunteered over the past year, about 4 million more than in the year before. On average, volunteers gave 52 hours—more than a full week of work—of their year in service to others. This increase in volunteering is evidence of the new culture of service we are building in America, especially among young people.

Nearly 2 years ago, I created the USA Freedom Corps to continue the momentum generated by the countless acts of kindness we saw after the attacks of September the 11th, 2001. I asked every person in America to commit 4,000 hours over a lifetime—or about 100 hours a year—to serving neighbors in need. The response was immediate and enthusiastic and has remained strong. Over 75,000 service organizations now work with USA Freedom Corps, and a growing percentage of Americans have answered the call to service.

Americans are volunteering in every region of the country and in nearly every part of the world. Many communities have formed Citizen Corps Councils to train neighborhoods in emergency response.

About 50,000 people are enrolled in AmeriCorps, which carries out vital work in education, the environment, and homeland security. And the Peace Corps expanded to over 7,500 volunteers in 2003, the highest level of participation in almost 3 decades.

Every time I travel in America, I have the honor to meet some of our country's most dedicated volunteers. They include people like Phuong Nguyen, a high school student in Denver who gives hours of her free time to lead service projects for the American Red Cross, and Ana Cooper of Miami, who helps senior citizens with daily needs like grocery shopping, and Bill Sellers, an 83-year-old man from Houston who has dedicated almost half his life to feeding the hungry. Some of the men and women I have met are members of the Armed Forces who volunteer time in their communities on top of their service to the Nation. And next week, I look forward to helping a generous group from Virginia distribute Angel Tree gifts to children whose parents are in prison.

America's 63 million volunteers are setting a fine example for our Nation. They are meeting essential needs in their communities, and they know the fulfillment that only comes from serving a cause greater than self. And many volunteers got started in the same way, because someone asked them.

This holiday season, I ask every American to look for a challenge in your own community and step forward to lend a hand. You can learn about thousands of service opportunities by visiting the USA Freedom Corps web site,

usafreedomcorps.gov. Many Americans volunteer with their families, allowing them to spend time together while improving the lives of others. And if you find a need that no one else is meeting, you might want to start a group of your own.

The high level of voluntarism in our country is encouraging, though not surprising. America is a compassionate and generous land. With their good works, volunteers are living out the spirit of this season, and year-round they are showing the

heart and soul of our people, which is the greatest strength of our Nation.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11:26 a.m. on December 19 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 20. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 19 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in a Visit With Angel Tree Children in Alexandria, Virginia December 22, 2003

The President. Hey everybody.

Rev. Lee A. Earl. Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much, Reverend Lee. Thank you so much for having us here. Lee, thank you very much. Merry Christmas to everybody.

Audience members. Merry Christmas.

The President. We are so honored to be here to celebrate the Angel Tree Christmas. This is a program in which people who love you a lot want you to have a merry Christmas. And I want to thank you. I want to thank Chuck Colson and Mark Earley of the Prison Fellowship program, which has been hosting and organizing the Angel Tree program since 1982. Six million boys and girls have received a gift on Christmas, and I want to thank you very much for doing that.

Our attitude is—I know that the reverend here at Shiloh shares this attitude—that we change America one heart and one soul at a time; that everybody matters, everybody counts; that every child has got a hopeful and bright future; and each of us has a responsibility of loving that child with all our heart and all our soul. And it's important that all of us during this time of—joyous time, this holiday, recognize that

probably the greatest gift you can possibly give is to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself.

And that's what we're doing today. We're honoring that call to love and the call to service. And so Laura and I are thrilled that you're here. We look forward to joining the good reverend here as we pass out some of the gifts to the boys and girls.

Reverend Earl. Absolutely. And thank you for the gifts that you've provided.

The President. Well, thank you very much. We're honored to be here.

We want to wish you a merry Christmas, and we've got some gifts to give out. Don't we, Laura?

The First Lady. Yes, we have a lot of gifts to give out.

The President. Where do we want to start?

The First Lady. I don't know where to start. [Laughter]

The President. Right over here? Okay, good.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:20 p.m. at the Shiloh Baptist Church. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Lee A. Earl, senior pastor, Shiloh Baptist Church; and Charles W.