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Week Ending Friday, April 14, 1995

Remarks to AmeriCorps Volunteers in Dallas, Texas

April 7, 1995

Thank you. Let's give Alexis another hand. [*Applause*] Was she great, or what? I don't think there is much more for me to say. [*Laughter*] She said it all, and she said it well. Congratulations. Thank you for your example. I want to say, also, a special word of welcome and thanks to your Congresswoman, Eddie Bernice Johnson. We have been friends now for over 20 years. And I'm sure that when we first met, well, I thought she might be in Congress some day, but I'm sure she never thought I'd be President. [*Laughter*] I want to thank all your—the local leaders for being here. We have people from the city council and from the county commission and from the State legislature. And we have Mrs. Rouse who's on the State commission for AmeriCorps. And Texas has been so supportive of AmeriCorps.

The Dallas Youth Service Corps is doing a great job here with the Greater Dallas Community Services Community of Churches and other AmeriCorps programs. But I want to tell you something you may not know. Texas has the largest number of AmeriCorps volunteers of any State in the country. You have people who are walking a police beat, teaching kids, building homes, helping seniors, cleaning up litter, immunizing children, doing all kinds of things to make this State and these communities and our children stronger and better for the future and earning money for education, as well.

I want to say a special word about this group. I didn't have a chance to ask everybody their story, but I can tell you just from the biographies I got walking down the block here, this is what I had in mind when we started AmeriCorps. I have met one person here who got off welfare to work in AmeriCorps and got a GED, and several others said they had gotten their GED. I met one person here who's done part of a college education and is going to use the AmeriCorps money to help pay for those college loans to get the college education. I met one person here who was born to a mother on welfare and was a Head Start child who is a college graduate who came all the way to Texas to help people who were like her when she was a little girl.

When I started this national service program with the idea of giving our young people a chance to serve in a domestic Peace Corps, just like the Peace Corps was when I was a young man, except I wanted it to also be like the GI bill. My idea was that we needed more people to go to college, but we needed more people to relate to each other across racial and income and political lines. And if we had a national service project where people could do whatever folks in the community needed done, not what some bureaucrat in Washington would decide but what people in the community needed done, and if they could do it without regard to their race, their income, their background, just if they were willing to serve and they wanted to earn some money to pay for college education or to pay for their further education, then we had a chance to get the American people together.

Everywhere else, the American people—somebody's always trying to divide us from one another. They're always trying to get us to fight. They're always publicizing our fights. AmeriCorps is about getting people together, doing grassroots work, earning money for education by serving your community. And all of you are doing it. I am very, very, very proud of you.

As you know, and as Alexis said, there's been some controversy about the AmeriCorps program. And there are some people who say, ''Well, we have to cut the deficit and we have to cut some spending, so we ought to cut that because it's new, or we ought to cut that because it's inefficient.''

Well, it's not inefficient. You've got 20,000 young people out here working all across America for a minimum wage, working like crazy, and earning some money to go to college just like they would if they were serving in the military. The people who are serving in the military earn the GI bill. They're eligible for up to $30,000 in benefits. But letting people earn enough for 2 years worth of benefits at about $4,700 a year, that's not too much to pay to give young people the privilege of service and the energy and the opportunity to work with other people in other ways.

There are people who say that any national program is too bureaucratic. There is no bureaucracy here. These programs in Texas were funded by competition. People have to compete for these projects and compete for these slots. And nobody gets it unless they're doing a good job.

Then there are people who say that if we actually give young people the opportunity to work full-time in volunteer work and pay them a minimum wage and then let them earn some money to go to college, somehow that will discourage all the other volunteers. Well, look around here. I don't think that's a very good argument. All you've got to do is look around to see that that is not true.

There is plenty of work to be done in this country, folks. And the Government cannot do it all, and it cannot be all paid for. It's got to be done by community service groups. And you're a part of that.

And there are people in our country who have dreams and aspirations and who have personal problems, and they can't be solved by some high-flown program. They have to be solved by people who make a decision to change their lives, just like all these young people behind me and all of you out there with your AmeriCorps T-shirts. But it helps to change your life if you know there's somebody pulling for you, somebody giving you a chance to serve, and somebody giving you a chance to get a good education so you can have a good future. That's what AmeriCorps is all about. We ought to keep it. We ought to stand behind it, and we ought to keep going.

You will find this hard to believe, I bet, but when I was your age—most of you—when I got out of high school, our country had a lot of problems. The racial problems were more severe than they are now. And we were involved in a cold war with what was then the Soviet Union. And we didn't know for sure that there would never be a nuclear war. And now, for the first time since atomic bombs have been made, there are no nuclear weapons pointed at the American people by the Russian people. I am proud of that.

But this age and time has its own problems. If anybody had ever told me that we'd have as many children born out of wedlock, I wouldn't have believed that. If anybody had ever told me we'd have as many single mothers raising little children in poverty, I would not have believed that. We have new problems and new challenges. And the only answer to it is for people in the community to take responsibility for themselves and for each other and to have the chance to pull themselves up and work their way out. What did you say? That you wanted a hand up, not a handout. That's as good a way to say it as I can imagine. That's what AmeriCorps is all about.

This is a very great country, and there is nothing we face that we cannot do. But we're going up or down together. And if we're going up together, we're going to have to make sure everybody, everybody has a chance to get a good education, because in a world economy, what you can learn determines what you can earn. And we're going to have to remember that whatever we do and how ever busy we are and whatever else we've got on our mind, we need to take some time out to serve, to be citizens, to work together to solve our common problems.

Don't you feel better at the end of every day, after you work and you do something for somebody else? When you go home at night, aren't you proud of it? And aren't you making friends with people who are different from you that you would never have known otherwise? And don't you think that will stay with you all your life?

I just want you to make the most of your life that you can, solve as many problems in this community as you can, get that education, and stay with AmeriCorps. I'll stay with you, and together we can save it.

God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. at Fair Park. In his remarks, he referred to AmeriCorps volunteer Alexis Brisby and Eloise Medows Rouse, board member, Texas Commission for National and Community Service. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks on Arrival at McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, California

April 7, 1995

Thank you very much. Thank you, Congressman Fazio, Congressman Matsui, General Yates. General Phillips, thanks for having me back. You'll have to start charging me rent if I don't quit coming out here. [*Laughter*] Lieutenant Governor Davis, Mayor Serna, Supervisor Dickinson, Mr. Sherman, to all the others who are here: Let me say, I love coming here. I've been in this hangar before, but I've never had so many young people and students here. I'm delighted to see all of you. Thank you for coming. I'm glad to see the college students, the ROTC students, the City Year students here, the elementary school students. I'd also like to say it is quite wonderful to come to California when there is no flood, no fire, no earthquake. I just want to be here. I just wanted to come. And when I was here not very long ago, I went out to Roseville, and I had a meeting in a home that had been totally destroyed. And the people who hosted me are here, and I understand they're rebuilding their home. I'd like to ask them to be recognized; they're brave people, Rick Mirenda and his wife. Stand up there, and let's give them a hand. [*Applause*]

That was really ungracious of Congressman Fazio to mention the basketball game. [*Laughter*] But since he brought it up, I don't think I'm so brave for coming out. If we had won, it would really take courage for me to show up here. [*Laughter*]

I am delighted to be here at McClellan. Vic said this is my west coast home. We couldn't very well close this Air Force base; I wouldn't have anyplace to park when I fly out. I don't know what I would do.

I'm delighted to be joined here by the wonderful Secretary of Education, Richard Riley. I thank him for coming out West with me. And I have a lot of Californians on my staff, and a bunch of them came back with me: my Chief of Staff, Leon Panetta, who in his former life or, as he likes to say, back when he had a life, was a Congressman from northern California and, of course, Doris Matsui—Congressman Matsui in our White House is known as Doris' husband because she's a valuable member of our staff—and many others. We have tried to be closely in touch with California.

For the benefit of the Air Force base, I want to make one announcement today. I'm happy to report that Congress has passed my requested defense supplemental appropriations bill which will give us the funds we need to make sure we are adequately training and preparing our personnel in all the armed services. And I know that McClellan and its families are happy about the passage of the defense appropriations bill.

With all these young people here, I want to take just a few moments to talk about their future and ours and how they are bound up together. I ran for President in 1992 because I strongly felt that our National Government was not doing enough to invest in our future and to strengthen the future prospects of America's working families and our children. I believed then and I still believe it was right that we were exploding our deficit but reducing our investment in our people. I believed then and I believe more strongly today that the global economy in a technological information age will reward what we know and what we are capable of learning and, conversely, will punish us for what we refuse to learn and for the people whose skills and abilities we refuse to develop.

Now, there is a great debate going on today about what our mission should be as a Nation in the aftermath of the cold war and what the role of the National Government should be in that mission. But to me, it is crystal clear. Our mission should be to ensure that the American dream is alive and well for every child in this country and every child in this hangar well into the next century.