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Remarks on the Fifth Anniversary of AmeriCorps

October 20, 1999

The President. Well, Andre, thanks to you no one has to wonder about what AmeriCorps is all about. I thank you for your introduction. I thank you for your service to AmeriCorps and to your country. And I thank you for the power of your example. And I hope, maybe more than anyone else who speaks today, your voice and your story will be told out of this great anniversary meeting.

I want to thank all the other people here who helped to make this day possible. I want to thank Deb Jospin for her leadership; Senator Harris Wofford; Eli Segal, for what he did to help us get started; and all of them. Let's give them all a hand. [*Applause*]

I want to thank Hillary for always believing in this and for taking it on as a personal goal that we would do something about the fact that when we had 100,000 people in AmeriCorps and everybody who knew about it loved it but most people didn't know about it, she decided she would change that. And Eli and Alan Solomont and our friend Dan Dutko and others agreed to help. And I thank her for her passionate support during these years when we believed in AmeriCorps when it was just sort of an idea. And she has done a wonderful job. [*Applause*] Thank you.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here, who were here, Senator Spector, Congressman Quinn, and Congressman Payne, three who represent the bipartisan support that we have enjoyed. I thank James Lee Witt, Jack Lew, Janice Lachance, and others in the administration who have helped us. I want to thank our presenters, whom I will introduce in just a moment—General Colin Powell, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, Sargent Shriver, and the Governor of Utah, Mike Leavitt—for being here. And I want to thank the Howard University Choir. They're going to sing for us and with us in a few moments.

You know, it seems impossible to me that it was 5 years ago on the North Lawn of the White House that we led the first class of AmeriCorps members in the AmeriCorps pledge. It wasn't very long before that that I had the privilege of signing the legislation creating AmeriCorps with the same pen that President Kennedy had used to sign the legislation creating the Peace Corps.

I always believed that you would elevate the cause of citizen service in America, that you would make America a better place. But on that day 5 years ago, AmeriCorps was still just an idea with a good plan, built on the remarkable pathbreaking efforts of Sargent Shriver with the Peace Corps and VISTA; built on the remarkable service corps I had seen in Boston and Los Angeles and San Antonio and other cities; championed by some of the most thoughtful and passionate citizens of both parties; energized by—even then—20,000 young people who were raring to give something to their country and wanted to be part of AmeriCorps.

But still, it was just an incandescent idea. Today we celebrate, thanks to you and your predecessors, a glowing success. AmeriCorps members are living up to the highest obligations of our citizenship. They are creating opportunity for others, taking responsibility for themselves, and fostering a community of all Americans. They are our best builders, building that bridge to the new century.

You can see it in the way their optimism inspires others to also lend a hand and volunteer in their communities. You can see it in the remarkable teamwork and camaraderie that I have personally witnessed and felt all over this country in so many different activities. You can see it in the way they work together across the lines that would normally divide AmeriCorps members, and eliminate the alienation that too many of our young people experience today.

You can see kids who went to Ivy League schools and kids who dropped out of high school working side by side, serving together, giving together, and treating each other as equals, proving that Dr. King's dream of a beloved community is alive and well in the hearts and lives of the AmeriCorps volunteers.

I could just give you one illustration among thousands. On his very first day as an AmeriCorps member in a small town in southern West Virginia, Scott Finn heard

that local residents had a dream of cleaning up a boarded-up old schoolhouse and turning it into a community center. The school had no electricity; it had no running water. It was a complete wreck, inside and out, an eyesore, and a place that invited drugs and crime and mischief.

So Scott, fresh out of Harvard, a long way from a little town in West Virginia, put together a team of volunteers and sparked a new determination to get things done. They hauled water out of a nearby creek to mop the floors. They negotiated a lease. They raised $50,000 in grant money. And today that sorry old school is a beautiful new community center, with a lending library, a gym, and a safe playground. That's AmeriCorps at its best. That new community center is a meeting place for dances, for gospel concerts, for after-school programs, and a Boy Scout troop. It's a tremendous source of community pride. Scott is one of the 21 remarkable AmeriCorps members and alumni who will receive one of our All-AmeriCorps Awards. They'll all be introduced later. But I just wanted you to think about that.

When AmeriCorps members like Scott first took their pledge, they promised, and I quote, ''to carry this commitment with me, this year and beyond.'' Today we will help them fulfill the second part of that pledge, for today I'm asking the Corporation for National Service to develop a new initiative to connect former AmeriCorps members with service opportunities wherever they live. Habitat for Humanity, the Red Cross, the Boys and Girls Clubs, America's Promise, the Points of Light Foundation, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, the United Way, the National Mentoring Partnership: they've all signed on to help, all to use the incredible experience and commitment of our former AmeriCorps members.

Like returned Peace Corps volunteers and military veterans, those of you who are AmeriCorps members and alums represent an enormous national pool of know-how and can-do. You are already 150,000 strong and growing stronger. I hope soon we'll be adding 100,000 new members to your ranks every single year.

There is no question that you are now an indispensable force for change in America. After years of fights over funding and purpose in AmeriCorps, peace is breaking out all over in Washington. [*Laughter*] A major factor lifting AmeriCorps out of the realm of partisan politics here is the support of people and leaders and especially Governors of both parties, like Governor Leavitt, out in the country who have seen firsthand how AmeriCorps members are setting off chain reactions of civic involvement, civic progress, and civic pride.

In State after State, in community after community, AmeriCorps volunteers prove daily they're one of the best and smartest investments our country ever made. They're showing us here in Washington what you can do when you stop talking past one another and start working with each other. Right now, in the middle of this battle over the budget, we need more reminders like this.

Today I had the honor of signing the budget for VA and HUD, for the EPA, for the National Science Foundation, programs to help the homeless, give housing vouchers to empower the poor; programs for our empowerment zones that the Vice President has led; and for the first step in my new markets initiative, to give investors in this country the same incentives to invest in poor communities in America, where many of you work, that we give them today to invest in poor communities in Latin America and Asia and Africa. This is important.

I hope this is just the beginning and that we will do the same when it comes to the education of our children. AmeriCorps volunteers have been in the forefront of a lot of our education efforts, and I hope that the spirit you bring will infect the spirit of our deliberations here. We know that our children can have a good future if we work together across party lines the way you do.

Let me just say, before I introduce the distinguished Americans who will present the All-AmeriCorps Awards, once again how profoundly grateful I am to every person here who has helped to lift AmeriCorps beyond the pale of a partisan political fight. I especially thank those who had genuine reservations 5 years ago and then have the follow-through and the courage and the openness

to take an honest look at AmeriCorps in action and to help us to improve some of our actions, which we also did.

Most of all, I want to express my gratitude to the AmeriCorps members and their leaders throughout this country who have lived up to their pledge and so much more. By taking your responsibility personally, as the advertising campaign says, you are breathing new life into our old, old democracy, sparking a new patriotism among a new generation of Americans—a patriotism of the homefront rooted in the knowledge that our Nation's strength and security and our individual possibilities are all determined in no small measure by whether all of us have a chance to live up to our God-given potential. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

I'm going to introduce our four presenters and they, in turn, will come to the microphone and do their jobs.

From the moment her husband was struck down on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, Coretta Scott King determined that it was up to her to keep the dream alive. Despite her grief, she got on a plane for Memphis to address the same striking sanitation workers her husband had gone there to help. She told them, ''We are going to continue this work to make all people truly free.''

She has done that in every possible way: by leading marches and giving impassioned speeches for racial justice, human rights, an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation; by founding the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change; by leading the efforts to create a national holiday in her husband's memory; and by helping to turn that holiday into a day of service, not a day of rest. There is no one in America who is better suited to present the All-AmeriCorps Common Ground Award, and we welcome her today.

Sargent Shriver often describes himself as a lucky man, having been graced with the remarkable and wonderful family he has. I might say, the rest of us think he's lucky because, among other things, he's the youngest and healthiest man his age on the face of the planet. [*Laughter*]

But our luck is just as profound, for America has never in its long history had a more compassionate and passionate man more devoted to public service. He was the founder of the Peace Corps and the VISTA. He served the Navy in World War II, created Head Start and the Job Corps and Legal Services. He led the Special Olympics, served as Ambassador to France, led the Chicago Board of Education; fostered civil rights early, when it wasn't so popular; and economic opportunity for the poor, all growing out of his profound religious faith and his deep patriotism. On top of all that, he is one of the most warm and genuinely unassuming people you will ever meet. We are honored to have him here today to present the All-AmeriCorps Award for Strengthening Communities. One of the greatest public servants in the history of the United States, Sargent Shriver.

Whenever I speak about Mike Leavitt, the Governor of Utah and the new chairman of the National Governors' Association—one of the most popular leaders in Utah history—I am reluctant to say anything nice about him because his State is so Republican, I'm afraid I'll hurt him and knock him down a peg or two back home if it gets out that I'm bragging on him. [*Laughter*] But his complete commitment to service and his generous support of AmeriCorps is one of the reasons that we are where we are today, with the breadth and depth of support for this program.

Two years ago, in a rally with General Powell, Governor Leavitt helped to launch Utah's Promise, a statewide effort to mobilize all the citizens of that State to action. Already it is yielding remarkable results, increasing literacy, creating new service teams, recruiting and training more caring foster parents, a big issue for Hillary and for me. Governor Leavitt has been a great champion of Utah's schoolchildren, reducing class size, increasing teacher pay, equipping Utah's classrooms for the 21st century. It is only fitting that he present the All-AmeriCorps Award for Leadership, because he is truly an All-American leader. Thank you, Governor Leavitt.

And finally, General Colin Powell. In 1993 General Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the architect of America's victory in Desert Storm, retired from his extraordinary military career. I was one of many Presidents who benefited immensely by his service.

But that was just the first act in Colin Powell's remarkable life of service. He has gone on to serve our country as the leader of America's Promise, his national crusade to give every child the nurturing and support he or she needs and to give every young person the opportunity to serve. Already General Powell and his troops, including many AmeriCorps members, have touched the lives of millions of children. General Powell used to say in a characteristically modest way that he was, first and foremost, an infantryman. Ladies and gentlemen, I begin by introducing you to the infantryman who is leading the charge toward America's Promise, General Colin Powell.

[*At this point, the All-AmeriCorps Awards were presented.*]

The President. Now, I think our presenters did a wonderful job. Let's give them all a hand again. [*Applause*] They were great. We thank them for their time.

I want to leave you with this thought, and then ask the new class to stand and join me in the AmeriCorps promise. And then we will hear from and sing with the Howard University Choir in "America The Beautiful."

When you leave here today and you remember how you felt and you remember the stories of the people we honored, I want you to think of the future you would like to build for America in the 21st century. I want you to think about what you'd like this country and this world to be like when your children are your age, when your grandchildren are your age.

If I ask you to write down what you think the new century will hold, depending on your background, you might say, well, we're going to finally solve all the mysteries of the human gene, which is true, and then mothers will go home from the hospital with their newborn babies with a little map of their future, and it will tell you, individualized, what kind of food your children should eat, what kind of exercise regimes they should have, what they should avoid, how you can maximize the quality of their lives.

Or if you're into computers, you might talk about the next generation of the Internet and how, in no time at all, the number of Internet users will be as dense as the number of telephone users in America and how the Internet might allow children in the poorest villages of the world to skip a whole generation of educational and economic development. Or you might think about how these two things will join together, and we'll be able to put little digital, electronic impulses in various parts of people's bodies that will help them overcome paralysis and have medical miracles.

Or if you're interested in outer space, you might say you look forward to the discovering of billions of new galaxies and finding out what's really in those big black holes in outer space.

Isn't it interesting when you think about all this modern, exciting stuff, the most sweeping discoveries the world has ever known—don't you think it's interesting that the biggest problems we have in this country and throughout this world relate not to some modern problem—although there are modern problems, like sophisticated weapons—but they're rooted in the oldest, most primitive problem of human societies: We're still afraid of people who are different from us, who look different from us, who act different from us, who have different views about how to worship God or live their lives.

That's why AmeriCorps is so important. For all the things I've been involved in all these years as President, all the things I've worked to do, I really believe, looking toward the future, if every young person has a chance to be a good citizen—and we don't give up on anybody; we always give them a chance to come back, here; we had a lot of comeback kids here today talking—and if America can remain committed to building one America across all the lines that divide us, recognizing that our differences make life more exciting, but what's important is our common humanity—if those two things can prevail, more than any modern discovery, you'll be proud of the America your children and grandchildren have.

That's why AmeriCorps matters and why I am so grateful to you. Thank you very much.

Now, I want to ask the newest class of AmeriCorps volunteers to stand up and repeat the oath after me. Raise your right hand.

"I will get things done for America to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Faced with apathy, I will take action. Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground. Faced with adversity, I will persevere. I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond. I am an AmeriCorps member. And I will get things done."

[*Audience members repeated the pledge line by line after the President.*]

Congratulations.

Now—good for you. Ladies and gentleman, I would like to ask you, in advance, to give a warm round of applause to the Howard University Choir. They've waited through this whole thing to sing "America The Beautiful" with us. [*Applause*]

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. in a tent on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Andre Crisp, AmeriCorps volunteer, who introduced the President; Eli Segal, former Chief Executive Officer, Corporation for National Service; Alan Solomont, former national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; and the late Dan Dutko, Democratic Party fundraiser. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Statement on the Election of Abdurrahman Wahid as President of Indonesia

October 20, 1999

I congratulate Abdurrahman Wahid on his election as President of Indonesia. He and the people of Indonesia deserve enormous credit for the democratic process that led to this peaceful change in government. This election, conducted fairly and transparently, has been a true triumph of democracy.

Indonesia still faces many challenges—achieving national reconcilation, consolidating economic recovery, and building institutions accountable to its people. With a democratically elected leadership, I am optimistic that real progress will be made toward all these goals.

I look forward to working closely with the new President and his government.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on the National Emergency With Respect to Significant Narcotics Traffickers Centered in Colombia

October 20, 1999

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 401(c) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1641(c), and section 204(c) of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 50 U.S.C. 1703(c), I transmit herewith a 6-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to significant narcotics traffickers centered in Colombia that was declared in Executive Order 12978 of October 21, 1995.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 20, 1999.

Remarks Honoring the National Association of Police Organizations' "Top Cops"

October 21, 1999

Thank you very much, Tom. Congressman Stupak, Representatives Larson and Udall, thank you for being here. And I want to thank in their absence Senator Biden and Senator Leahy. Senator Biden had to go cast a very important vote in the Congress. He was here earlier.

I also want to thank the executive director of NAPO, Bob Scully, who has been a great friend to this administration and a great fighter for our police initiatives. And I want to introduce formally our new director of the COPS program, Tom Frazier, the former Baltimore Police Commissioner. Thank you, Tom, for your willingness to serve. Please stand up so they can see you.

I also have a note which says we are joined today by Attorney General Nixon of Missouri and Mayor Lafuente of Poughkeepsie, New York, so I welcome them here.