

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. in Room S-2 at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Klink's children, Juliana and Matthew; State Senator Leonard J. Bodack; Mayor Tom Murphy of Pittsburgh; Catherine Baker Knoll, candidate for State treasurer; Sophie Masloff, former mayor of Pittsburgh; former Pittsburgh Steelers running back Franco Harris; and Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush. Representative Klink is a candidate for the U.S. Senate from Pennsylvania.

Remarks to AmeriCorps Volunteers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 11, 2000

Let's give Ardelia another hand. [*Applause*] She was great, wasn't she? I thought she was great. Good job.

I also want to say to all of you how grateful I am to be here and how grateful I am to Pennsylvania's own Harris Wofford for doing such a great job in heading our Corporation for National Service. He's worked in the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps. He's worked for Presidents from Kennedy to Clinton. He worked with Martin Luther King, and he's still helping people walk their road to freedom. Thank you, Senator Harris Wofford, for everything you have done.

Eight years ago about this time, I was crossing the country with Vice President Gore, talking about all the ideas I had to try to change our Nation, if the people would vote for me for President. Eight years later, one of the ideas that always got an applause line on the stump, national service, giving young people a chance to serve their countries in their communities and giving them some funds so they could further their education, it is reality. You are that reality, and you have changed America for the better. I am very, very grateful to all of you for that.

Today, people who wonder what national service is can hear it in the swing of a hundred hammers helping families to build homes, see it in the sight of a thousand saplings taking root on a charred mountainside, burned in a fire, and hear the sound of a million children learning to read. You get things done, and I thank you for that.

It is quite appropriate for us to meet in Philadelphia to reaffirm our commitment to national service, not only because of the extraordinary effort made by the State of Pennsylvania and this great city to have a disproportionate number of young people involved in community service through AmeriCorps programs but also because it was here that our Founders declared our independence and, in so doing, expressed a commitment not only to the individual liberty and independence of all of us alone but said that we could only fulfill our own desires and our own personal dreams if we committed ourselves to forming "a more perfect Union."

Every day you work, every person you help, you help America become that more perfect Union of our Founders' dreams.

All across the country, AmeriCorps volunteers are serving as a catalyst for community action. Studies show that every one of you generates on average a dozen more volunteers, and that adds up. Over the past 6 years, not only have over 150,000 young Americans served in their communities in AmeriCorps—and, I might add, we had more AmeriCorps volunteers in 5 years than the Peace Corps did in its first 20—you are really moving to change America. But even more than that—listen to this—AmeriCorps members have recruited, trained, or supervised more than 2.5 million volunteers in community projects.

In Pennsylvania, older volunteers for the National Senior Service Corps serve as foster grandparents to 9,000 children. Thousands of RSVP volunteers are passing on their wisdom to a younger generation. In Philadelphia, nearly a thousand AmeriCorps members have been working with local organizations, running after-school programs, restoring parts, helping Habitat for Humanity to build homes, bridging the digital divide in poor communities and poor schools, engaging other young people in community service.

We know now from experience that when young people volunteer in their communities, they're less likely to get in trouble and much more likely to succeed in school. That's why the work of AmeriCorps volunteers with our young people, helping them to succeed, is perhaps our most important mission.

In 1996 I issued the America Reads challenge. I asked AmeriCorps and college students across our country to join in a crusade for childhood literacy, to make sure that every 8-year-old in our country could read—read well before being promoted. Thanks to AmeriCorps members like Ardelia, hundreds of thousands of children have now been tutored, mentored, or enrolled in after-school programs, and 1,000 colleges have given us their students to help go into our elementary schools to help teach our kids to read. Thank you very, very, very much.

In a profoundly inspiring effort, members of the National School and Community Corps, CityYear, VISTA, and AmeriCorps have helped Philadelphia schools expand their pioneering program for student service. As part of this initiative, 11th and 12th graders are trained to tutor second graders one-on-one in after-school reading programs. The students that do the tutoring say they learn just as much as the youngsters they teach.

What I'd like to see is to have this done in every school system in America. I think if all the juniors and seniors in America were committed to making sure all the second graders in America could read by the time they got out of the second grade, it would revolutionize education in America. That is the symbol that Philadelphia represents to our future.

Today I'm releasing an independent study that shows that these efforts are working. Over the past school year, AmeriCorps members served in programs tutoring more than 100,000 students in grades one through three. Sample tests given at the beginning and the end of the school year showed that children's reading skills in the programs where the AmeriCorps volunteers tutored improved significantly and exceeded significantly expectations.

In one case, an AmeriCorps member in Atlanta set out to recruit eight college students to tutor struggling kids 4 hours a week. Today, that program has 250 volunteers in 30 schools. Seventy percent of the second and third graders participating in the program have increased their test scores—listen to this—by at least two reading levels, two grade levels.

So we actually have some objective evidence that the enthusiasm that you all displayed when Harris called each of your projects and you stood up and cheered actually is making a difference, a positive difference in the lives of individual Americans and, in so doing I might add, bringing us together across lines that divide us.

One of the most important things about AmeriCorps I think is that it gives the volunteers, who come from all different backgrounds, all different races, all different religious backgrounds, a chance to meet and work with and get to know people who are different from them, to tear down barriers of distrust and misunderstanding and old-fashioned ignorance, and build a genuine American community.

You know, I think it's a great thing that America is so diverse and growing more diverse. It makes it more interesting. But it's also important to recognize that, as we celebrate our differences, we have to reaffirm our common humanity. You look anywhere in the world today where they're having trouble, and chances are they can celebrate their differences, but they're having trouble affirming their common humanity, and misunderstanding occurs.

If America wants to be a force for good and peace and freedom in all these places we see today—from the Middle East to Northern Ireland to the Balkans to Africa where they're having tribal conflicts—we have to first be good at home. You are helping us to be good at home and do the right thing.

So it turns out this idea that was just sort of an applause line in my '92 campaign speech, it was a pretty good idea after all. [Laughter] You proved it. We know it works. We have made it completely nonpartisan. We've tried to take it completely out of the normal day-to-day arguments of American politics, because it seems to be, as Harris said, the quintessential American idea.

That's why it is so important that the Congress this year rise above politics and reauthorize the Corporation for National Service with the necessary funding for a robust AmeriCorps.

We've succeeded out in the country, as you heard Senator Wofford say. We have a letter

from 49 of the Nation's 50 Governors. That's 98 percent. You don't get 98 percent of people agreeing on anything. So we've got 98 percent of the Governors saying, "Please reauthorize AmeriCorps." Governor Ridge says it's a vital resource because you get things done in Pennsylvania.

I have talked with the congressional leaders about this. I hope they will follow the Governors' lead and act in a bipartisan spirit. I came to Philadelphia today because sometimes, every now and then, no matter how bipartisan an issue is out in the country, something happens when you cross the border into the District of Columbia, and somehow it becomes a partisan issue, even though no one in America thinks it is.

So I came out here to you because I want people to see—in Washington, DC, I want them to see your faces tonight, I want them to hear your cheers tonight. I want them to know about your good deeds tonight. I want them to see in your lives that AmeriCorps does get things done, and I want them to get something done to reauthorize this bill.

A generation ago, Senator Robert Kennedy, who inspired so many young people when I was your age, spoke of the power of the single person to affect change. And he said that each person and each act of bravery or kindness or service sent out a ripple of hope, but that together those ripples could become a tidal wave that could tear down the worst wall of oppression and break down the biggest and sternest barriers to change. You are the living embodiment of those ripples of hope, and you are changing America in profound ways. You do it in the work that you do. You do it in the way that you do it. You do it in the way your lives are changed when you leave AmeriCorps and you go on about the rest of your lives.

We are all in your debt. And so I hope, for goodness sakes, that the Congress will give us the funding and the reauthorization we need so that hundreds of thousands of more young people can have this experience over the next 5 years, and millions and millions more of our fellow Americans of all ages, beginning with our youngest children, will be the better for it.

Thank you very, very much. *[Applause]* Now, wait. Wait, wait. I've got a job to do.

I have to swear in the newest AmeriCorps class in the United States. So I want them to stand up, all the new class. Stand up, please, all the new class, people who have not been sworn in. Anybody that has not been sworn in, stand up. All right. Raise your right hand, and repeat the pledge after me.

[At this point, the new members repeated the oath after the President.]

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 conflicts, 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.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:13 p.m. at Memorial Hall. In his remarks, he referred to AmeriCorps volunteer Ardelia Norwood-Ross, who introduced the President; Harris Wofford, chief executive officer, Corporation for National Service; and Gov. Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania.

Remarks at a Reception for the Pennsylvania Democratic Coordinated Campaign in Philadelphia

October 11, 2000

Thank you. Well, thank you for the welcome. Thank you, Mayor Street. I was honored to help you win because I wanted Philadelphia to win, and I'm glad you won, and you're doing great.

Thank you, Senator Tartaglione, for being the chair of our party and for doing such a good job. Thank you, Bill George. I got here in time to hear Bill George's speech. *[Laughter]* You know, Bill is so restrained and laid back. *[Laughter]* I loved it. He said everything that needed to be said and said it well. And he's been a great friend to me for more than 8 years now, and I thank him for that.

And I can't tell you how grateful I am to Ed Rendell for being willing to take over the leadership of our party, and you should be so proud of him. He's done a great, great job.