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**PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS FOR AMERICORPS SWEARING-IN
CELEBRATING 100,000 MEMBERS
THE WHITE HOUSE
OCTOBER 23, 1998**

Acknowledgments: Harris Wofford; Philip Wu; The President's Service Award winners. I ask them to stand. They show us that the need for citizen service has never been greater -- from reclaiming blighted neighborhoods from drugs and crime to preparing disadvantaged students for the SAT to making the Internet safe for children.

One of the greatest Presidents to live in this house, Thomas Jefferson, said that "a debt of service is due from every man to his country proportional to the bounties which nature and fortune have measured to him." For more than 200 years, through times of both prosperity and hardship, that sense of civic responsibility -- the idea that every citizen has the obligation to give something back and the power to make our world a better place -- has been at the heart of what it means to be an American. It is the driving force behind our country's greatness.

Seven years ago, when I first sought this office, I felt that this sense had begun to wane. America was in danger of becoming a nation of strangers, alienated from our duties to each other and our communities. We lived apart; separated by races, ethnicity and class. We saw boarded-up storefronts and crime infested streets in once-thriving urban neighborhoods, saw rising numbers of children growing up without mentors and role models, and we looked away. We looked away and said that they weren't our responsibility; that it was government's job to help them, not ours.

But I was confident that the reservoir of civic responsibility and citizen service that built America had not yet run dry. It was still deep. It could still be tapped to once again meet our newest challenges and make our country great. So, seven years ago today, October 23, 1991, I went to my alma mater, Georgetown University, to lay out my vision for where I wanted to take America. I said we needed a new covenant, a solemn agreement between the people and their government, to provide opportunity for everybody, inspire responsibility throughout our society, and restore a sense of community in this great nation. We had to move beyond the "something for nothing" ethic on one side, and the "everyone for himself" ethic on the other, to a new ethic of "mutual obligation." Everybody -- government, the private sector, and most important, every citizen -- had to take responsibility and do their part to move our country forward.

That is why I proposed -- and fought to create -- AmeriCorps. It embodies the ethic of mutual obligation. Through AmeriCorps, we have sought to use the enthusiasm, the idealism, the energy of our young people to meet some of our society's greatest unmet needs. In exchange for a year or two of service, our young people not only gain money for college, they gain a greater sense of responsibility for the community they live in. And through each of these young people, we are once again making service the hallmark of American citizenship, the common

expectation and experience of every American. AmeriCorps is one of the most important promises I ever made to the American people; it is one of my proudest achievements as President.

Today, we celebrate an AmeriCorps milestone: 100,000 members -- a number that took the Peace Corps 20 years to reach. In just four years, AmeriCorps members have made a difference in 4,000 communities, touching the lives of 33 million Americans. AmeriCorps members have taught, tutored, or mentored 2.6 million children; built or rehabilitated more than 25,000 homes; helped more than 200,000 seniors live on their own, planted 52 million trees, immunized 419,000 people; and organized an additional 2 million volunteers. AmeriCorps is getting things done.

But even beyond solving problems, AmeriCorps is good for the young people in it. They are learning the power of civic action: How a single committed individual can make a difference in a community. They see a child struggling to read, a senior citizen fighting the disabilities of old age, a dilapidated playground, and rather than throwing up their hands in despair, they are rolling up their sleeves and getting to work. They are saying with confidence, "I can help." "I can make a difference."

And by serving together -- Ivy Leaguers next to inner-city high school students next to new immigrants -- these young people are learning that much more unites our people than divides us; that America works best when we work together; that what matters most is not your politics or the color of your skin or the size of your bank account, but your ability to get things to done -- to hammer a nail, to paint a wall, to teach a child to spell.

Those who were here in 1993, know we had a tough fight to create AmeriCorps. A lot of people were skeptical of its value to our nation. And every year since its passage, AmeriCorps has been a target in Congress. But every year, a strong, bipartisan coalition of governors, mayors and members of Congress have become AmeriCorps' biggest champions. They know firsthand that AmeriCorps works, so they've fought not only to keep it alive, but make it stronger. I am pleased that the new balanced budget gives thousands more Americans the chance to serve through AmeriCorps.

In the five years since we created AmeriCorps, I have seen evidence that the spirit of service and mutual obligation is growing in America. Eighteen months ago, I joined Presidents Bush, Carter, Ford and Mrs. Reagan, and General Powell at the Presidents' Summit on America's Future to find new ways to bring our people together to help all our children fulfill their greatest potential. Now we must keep the momentum going. Today I am delighted to announce a new partnership between AmeriCorps and America's Promise to create 500 new AmeriCorps Promise Fellows who will help advance the goals of that Summit: Providing every child with a caring adult, a safe place live, a healthy start, a marketable skill and a chance to serve.

And we must make sure that the ethic of service and mutual obligation takes root early in the lives of all Americans. That is why I am very proud to launch the first ever President's Student Service Awards. Modeled after the President's Physical Fitness Awards, these awards

will work through schools and community organizations to recognize young people for outstanding service. I hope every student in America will strive to win one of these awards. We must help them learn that civic fitness is just as important as physical fitness; that service should be as universal in our schools as gym class or sports practice.

Even in this time of unprecedented prosperity and unlimited possibility, every American still owes the "debt of service" Thomas Jefferson spoke about. I thank each of the new AmeriCorps members standing behind me for making good on their debt of service. In this very room, the East Room of the White House, America has honored some of our greatest and most famous patriots -- courageous soldiers, daring artists, brilliant scientists, visionary statesmen. You deserve to be here, too. You may not think of yourselves as patriots, but I do. Each of you, by answering the call to service, by lending a hand to your fellow Americans in need, by working to give every American the opportunity to meet their greatest potential, has earned a place among our great patriots. I honor you for your courage to resist the cynicism of our age. Your daring to tackle the problems that have vexed Americans for decades. Your brilliance at solving them. And your vision for a better future for all Americans. You are the reason America is great. You are the reason America will be great in the 21st Century.

So now I ask you to raise your hand and repeat after me:

"I will get things done for America."

"To make our people safer, smarter, and healthier."

"I will bring America together."

"To strengthen our communities."

"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 am going to get things done."

WHITE HOUSE STAFFING MEMORANDUM

Date: 10/22/98ACTION / CONCURRENCE / COMMENT DUE BY: 7 P.M. 10/22/98Subject: AMERICORPS REMARKS

	ACTION	FYI		ACTION	FYI
VICE PRESIDENT	☒	☐	McGINTY	☐	☐
BOWLES	☒	☐	NASH	☐	☐
PODESTA	☒	☐	REED	☒	☐
ECHAVESTE	☒	☐	RUFF	☐	☐
LEW	☐	☐	SMITH	☐	☐
BEGALA	☒	☐	SOSNIK	☒	☐
BERGER	☐	☐	SPERLING	☒	☐
BLUMENTHAL	☐	☐	STEIN	☒	☐
IBARRA	☐	☐	STERN	☐	☐
KLAIN	☐	☐	STREETT	☐	☐
LANE	☐	☐	VERVEER	☐	☐
LEWIS	☒	☐	WALDMAN	☒	☐
LINDSEY	☐	☐	YELLEN	☐	☐
LOCKHART	☐	☒	<u>KAGAN</u>	☒	☐
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REMARKS:

COMMENTS TO JUNE SHIH

RESPONSE: