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FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS AT PRESIDENTS' SUMMIT TELECONFERENCE
WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 2, 1997

Thank you, General Powell. On behalf of the President, let me thank you, Mayor Rendell and Harris Wofford for all the hard work you have done on behalf of this summit and on behalf of service and good citizenship in our country. We are grateful to each of you not only for your lifetime of public service, but for your continuing efforts to serve our country and to inspire others to do the same. I also want to thank Ray Chambers, Stuart Shapiro and Marian Heard for their leadership in this endeavor.

I'm delighted to be able to join all of you gathered here and across the country to take part in today's teleconference and to prepare for the Presidents' Summit for America's Future. And I want to thank you for the commitments you are already making to our communities and to our youngest citizens. Throughout this month, the Clinton Administration will be highlighting the importance of citizen service. We hope to make this upcoming summit a success and an inspiration to all Americans.

No task facing America is more crucial -- or more difficult -- than the task of preparing our children for the future. To do that, we must help our children and families overcome the challenges of society today: the burdens of poverty, illiteracy and poor health, the lure of tobacco, alcohol and drugs; the pressures to acquire skills to compete in a global economy. Far too many of our many children are growing up without the love and guidance of a responsible adult; too many children are living in communities fragmented along racial, ethnic, religious, or economic lines; too many young people have lost faith and hope in the future.

The answer to all of these challenges begins with each and every one of us. Every one of us, whether we are students or teachers, homemakers or CEOs, journalists or politicians, has a role to play in giving every child the opportunity to make the most of his or her talents and the inspiration to lead lives of personal responsibility and civic duty. Over the years I've had the chance to see firsthand what wonderful things can happen when all sectors of the community -- schools, churches, government, and businesses -- work together on behalf of our children. I've visited public schools in depressed neighborhoods that have been transformed into first-class learning institutions because people came together to change the status quo. And I've met children who were able to escape the spiritual and material poverty of their surroundings because an adult cared enough to help them follow their dreams.

Most importantly, our young people must also take leading roles in shaping their own futures. Five years ago, my husband made national service a centerpiece of his campaign for the presidency. One of his proudest moments as President came a year later, when he signed the bill creating the Corporation for National Service and AmeriCorps. It reflected his belief, reinforced over a lifetime, that citizen service can not only be an effective answer to a community's

problems, it can also be an important part of every young person's civic education -- of their sense of responsibility for themselves, our community, and our nation. Over the last three years, tens of thousands of Americans have improved their own lives as they served our country. They have earned money for college by cleaning up rivers, working with police to make their neighborhoods safer, helping children learn to read. Through their years of service, AmeriCorps volunteers have gained much more than college tuition, they have gained a greater understanding of the communities they live in and the neighbors they live with. They have learned what the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. meant when he said, "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve." And in many ways, they have learned what it truly means to be an American.

Service is the lifeblood of our democracy and the hallmark of American citizenship. In America, we have always put our democratic values into action through service. More than 150 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that volunteer organizations and community groups had become a distinctive part of our national life. As a people, we have long believed -- and acted on the belief -- that we can change the world by working together, taking responsibility and serving each other. And that belief has bound us a nation.

Let us all work together to awaken the spirit of service in every individual, every home, and every community across America, so that our children can grow to fulfill their hopes and dreams and our democracy can endure into the next millennium and beyond.

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