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Representative Bud Shuster, PA

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on National Service in New Orleans, Louisiana

April 30, 1993

The President. Thank you. It's good to see you. How many of you are students here? Okay. And how many of you are in the Delta Service Corps? And then, who's here from Teach For America? That's good. I've got it.

Let me, first of all, say how delighted I am to be here and how much I appreciate all of you taking a little time out to talk with me. You probably know that I am going from here over to the University of New Orleans to speak about the national service plan and the new direct loan plan for college students that will be announced today and will be introduced shortly into the Congress.

I have with me today Senator Johnston and many Members of your congressional delegation and your Lieutenant Governor and many State officials here and some people who have come all the way from Washington to be with us, the Secretary of Education and Gen. David Jones, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a lot of people who believe in you and your future and all the other young people in this country.

What I wanted to do today is to try to sort of set the stage for this speech that I'm going to go give and also to listen to you a little bit about the kinds of things that you do now: Why did you get into this service? Do you believe if there were more opportunities, more young people would do it?

This program we're going to propose will provide opportunities for tens of thousands of young people to work before, during, or after college to build up credit against a college edu-

cation or, if they do it afterward, to pay off their college loans. It will also change the way young people borrow money to go to college so that you won't have to pay money back that you can't afford to pay back. Even if you borrow a lot of money to go to college, you'll always pay it back as a percentage of your income, so that people will be able to, and if you're not working, you don't have to pay it back. Then you pay it back as you work. But we're going to use the tax system and make sure that you have to pay it back if you can, so there won't be all the defaults we have now. That will lower the cost of and the threshold of going to college for every young person in America who wants to deal with it.

So I want to increase access to college, but also it's very important for me to increase the number of people, starting in our high schools, who will engage in some form of service.

So I think it would be helpful to me to know—we can maybe start with the high school students. If you could talk a little bit about the service projects you've been involved in and why you do it and whether you think we can get a lot more people involved.

Who wants to go first?

[At this point, a student discussed her experience as a volunteer with the Girl Scouts of America and the importance of being a role model.]

The President. You know, one of the things that I think is good about this program is we're going to build on the organizations at work now and set it up on a State-by-State basis. And

a State can certify any program that's working in that State to be eligible to take young people for the national service program. So we're not going to create a whole new network of things. We're going to build on the programs that are working.

Anybody else? Anybody from the Delta Service Corps? Go ahead.

[A National Summerbridge Program volunteer discussed that program.]

The President. Anyone else?

[A student discussed a volunteer program funded by the Nestle Corp.]

The President. And how many young people were involved in the project?

Q. We started out with about 40, and then through attrition, we ended up with about 8 or 10 of us at the end. But it was just a great feeling to go down there and do that.

The President. What did you learn about homeless people?

Q. That they're just like us; that they're families and that they want to succeed as badly as we do and that there are more of them in the city than I ever thought possible. The line for that lunch just kept going forever.

[A Delta Service Corps member then discussed that program.]

The President. Do you have a feeling in the Teach For America program that you're actually helping people change their lives?

[A teacher discussed how teachers and the Teach For America program can be a positive influence in a student's life.]

The President. The Teach For America program has worked very well. This should help increase the recruitment, because you'll get some credit against whatever your accumulated college loans are to go do that.

What about you? What are you doing?

[A VISTA volunteer stressed the importance of the literacy program.]

The President. You know, one of the things that we discovered when we started trying to put this national service program together is that there were a whole lot of programs like that that had been funded at a very limited level in one Government agency or another. No one had ever put them all together and figured out how to get them all to work together. It's one of the things we're trying to do.

Another thing I want to say about the literacy issue is that when I was Governor of my State, I devoted a lot of time to trying to dramatically increase the number of people who would go back to get their GED and get into adult literacy programs. We had a huge increase. And one of the things that we can now tell those folks, too, is if you're involved in any kind of service program, you can earn credit to go on after high school. But you can't get any money until you get your GED, which I think is important. You know, that will sort of reinforce that.

[A participant stressed that local agencies should have a role in the national service program.]

The President. That's great. Yes, sir?

[A participant suggested that communities be given a leading role in the national service program and expressed concern about the motivation of some students in the program.]

The President. You might, but first, you raise two issues. Let me respond to the first one. I, 100 percent, agree with you about having to be community-based. That's why we went out of our way not to create some big new Federal bureaucracy but to require the States to have community representatives on a board that can just certify a project in a community that's plainly working, because otherwise this whole thing is going to fail. There's no way we know what's good for your home town or mine or anybody else's of the Federal Government.

The second thing is: That may be right. You may have more young people—I hope you do have more young people coming into the service. It may be that some of them will be just doing it for the money. But frankly, if you look at, for example, the GI bill, there's a lot of evidence people enroll in the military service in part because of the benefits, but no evidence that they do it only because they think they're going to get money on the back end, because you have to make the effort, you have to go to it. And I think—or one of you alluded to this earlier, one of you has already talked—I don't think you can be in these service programs without being changed yourself. I think it's pretty hard to go all the way through one and not get connected to the people you're trying to help. I think it's worth the risk to get more people.

I may mess up the numbers here, but there's a man here with me from New Jersey who is very successful in business, named Ray Chambers, who has given the rest of his life to try to help the people in his community and other communities like his community all over the country, poor kids growing up with all kinds of problems. And we were talking about trying to get more mentors. And he said there's something like 15 million children who need these mentors and only 100,000, 150,000 of the mentors out there. So I think you have to take some risk if you put these incentives out that there will be some people doing it who may not care that much about it. But first of all, the benefit is not so great as to look like you're just giving somebody something. And secondly, I think most people will themselves be changed by this, will be reconnected to our country.

Go ahead.

Q. I'm a volunteer for Habitat. We help build homes for families who might otherwise not have an opportunity to own a home of their own.

The President. It's a great program.

[*The volunteer discussed both the Habitat for Humanity and Delta Service Corps experiences and the importance of giving people the opportunity to provide community service.*]

The President. You know, I'm really particularly proud of the Delta Service Corps because it grew out of the work that was done a few years ago by the States of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and then Missouri, Kentucky, and Illinois and the parts that are right along the river. And we studied the conditions of the lower Mississippi Delta, and one of the things that we urged was that some way be found to bring young people in here to this area to work. And then the legislators and the Congressmen from our States sponsored this bill that's really been very impressive. I'm glad to see all of you here. Walter, did you have—

[*A Delta Service Corps member stressed the importance of making sure that the volunteers are suited for their jobs. Another volunteer then suggested that the Delta Service Corps become a nationwide program.*]

The President. I think it may. And certainly, things like it will. I think new organizations will spring up from the grassroots. Just to go back to the point you made about that, what's the

most likely thing that will happen is that there will be communities where there are people like you, but there's no organization. And when this thing comes out and young people start talking about it and thinking about it, it'll probably be much more likely that in every community in America there will be groups like this.

You know, when I hear all of you talk, one of the things that, as you know, I worry about most of the time is how to find enough jobs for the American people in a world in which we've had a difficult time in our country creating jobs, and other wealthy countries are having trouble creating jobs. And a lot of the good things that happen in the economy now—a lot of you can do this; most of you probably are proficient with computers and things like that—a lot of the things that happen in the economy now mean that people can do more with fewer workers, because they have all this technology.

But one of the things that you cannot substitute people for are the kind of human contacts that you all are engaged in. I mean, a lot of the people problems of America can only be solved by people in very small groups or one on one. So I think there will be a huge increase in the demand for folks like you to do what you're doing in the years ahead.

[*A student stated that the national service program will probably encourage more students to become involved in community service.*]

The President. That's a terrific point. I know we've got to quit in a minute, and I want to give you a chance to talk. But let me say that people say to me, "Well, can you afford this program, and what if 250,000, what if 500,000, what if a million young people want to do this?" Well, if you think about it, think what we're paying now for the failures of the present society, think what we're paying now for all the young people who drop out of school, who have children when they're children, who get involved in drugs, who wind up in prisons, who can't work and draw welfare or food stamps or unemployment or who wind up in homeless shelters, you think what it's cost us now to do that.

We're living in a world where we need every person. And I agree with you. I think when people like you get out of college, you get a world-class education in a place like Tulane, if you can get people like that who still are really aware of what is going on and who understand the point you made, that homeless people are

just like us. There are a lot of kids out there in these homeless shelters. A lot of them can learn and do real well if they're given a chance. And if they do well, this is going to affect you much more than me. One in ten Americans now is on food stamps.

Now, you think about what your life is going to be like when you're my age, you have children getting ready to go to college, if we don't reverse these trends. What's the unemployment rate in America going to be? What's your tax burden going to be? What are you going to be paying it for? What's it going to be like to be in the streets of your country? This service thing has so much more to do with your future in a way than with mine. And I think the point you made is terrific.

I know we've got to quit, but I want to—go ahead.

[A participant stated that working on community service projects fosters a desire to continue serving others.]

The President. Good for you.

Q. Thank you for visiting.

The President. Thank you all very much. You're terrific. I feel a lot better about my country every time I see young people like you. We're going to be fine. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. in the courtyard at Benjamin Franklin High School. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gov. Melinda Schwegmann of Louisiana.

Exchange With Reporters in New Orleans

April 30, 1993

Bosnia

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. I'm going to have another meeting in the morning about it, do a little more work on the way back today, and then have another meeting in the morning. And then I may want to make another round of phone calls after we meet with the principals. And I expect then we'll be pretty close to deciding where we are. I want to get an updated report

on the situation, and I'll ask a lot of questions about it.

Q. Mr. President, has all this talk about military force already had an impact, sir? Do you think it's already had an impact?

The President. I hope so. I hope so. I think it may well have, and I certainly hope so.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:35 p.m. in the Health and Physical Education Center at the University of New Orleans. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on the National Service Initiative at the University of New Orleans

April 30, 1993

Thank you very much. I ought to quit while I'm ahead. [Laughter] It is wonderful to be back in New Orleans and in Louisiana and to have the first chance I've had since the election to thank you for your support, your electoral votes, and the education you gave me on my many trips here during the campaign last year. I'm glad to be back on this campus. I want to thank your student body president, Robert Styron. I thought he gave a good speech. I think he's

got a future in politics, don't you? [Applause] And Chancellor O'Brien. I want to thank Senator Breaux for his kind remarks and for his leadership of the Democratic Leadership Council. I want to acknowledge the presence here of Senator Johnston and many members of the Louisiana House and many other Members of the United States Congress, along with many others who are here with the Democratic Leadership Council, including my good friend and