

[*The AmeriCorps volunteers repeated the pledge line by line after the President.*]

The President. Thank you, and good luck.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:46 p.m. by satellite from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks in a Swearing-In Ceremony for AmeriCorps Volunteers September 12, 1994

The President. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Vice President. Thank you, Eli Segal, for your wonderful work. This is a very, very happy day for Hillary and for me, especially, to see all of you here with all of your enthusiasm, your energy, your dreams.

There are so many things I would like to say, but before we go on, I feel that I ought to give you some explanation about what occurred here this morning and why we had to delay this event and move it to the front of the White House.

As you know, a plane came down here on the South Lawn, and a pilot lost his life. The investigation is now in place that will determine how and why this happened. We take this incident seriously because this house is the people's house. It's the job of every President to keep it safe and secure.

On his second night here, our second President and the first person to live in the White House, John Adams, wrote: "I pray heaven to bestow the best blessings on this house and on all that shall hereafter inhabit it." That prayer has been answered. In times of war and peace, in hard times, in good times, the White House has remained an enduring symbol of our democracy. It tells our people and all those around the world that the mission of America continues. And that is the message that you send out here today as well. So I pledge to you that we will continue that, and I'm sorry we had to move to the front, but maybe we ought to be in the front of the White House today for something this important.

This year 20,000 Americans, most of whom are young, some of whom are young in spirit and determined to serve and also go on to further their education, mark the beginning of a journey that will change their lives forever. It will also change the life of this Nation for many seasons to come.

This day is part of a long journey for me, personally, and for many others who have long harbored the dream that national service embodies. I want to say a special word of thanks to someone who worked with me through this whole process and who dreamed of national service even before I did, and that is Senator Harris Wofford of Pennsylvania. I thank you especially, sir, today. Like the Vice President's fine sister, Senator Wofford started out with the Peace Corps 30 years ago.

One of the main reasons I ran for President is that I felt that we as Americans needed to make our life's journeys together rather than apart. I felt that we not only needed to change our direction and make more progress but that we had to do it by coming together instead of drifting apart. Today we begin to fulfill that mission.

For many of us, this journey of service reaches back to life growing up in places we called home, back to our classrooms, our church basements, our backyards, with the American traditions of community and service. So for many of us, today is just one step on what has been a lifetime journey.

But what we do today and what we will do in the days and years ahead will give new life to the values that bind us as Americans. For service is about sacrifice for others and about accomplishment and fulfillment for ourselves, about reaching out, one person to another, about all of our choices gathered together as a country, to reach across all those things that divide us, about you and me individually and about all of us together, who we are as individuals and who we are as a nation.

Service is a spark to rekindle the spirit of democracy in an age of uncertainty. We hear a great deal today about values, and so we must. I encourage America in that conversation. But when it is all said and done, it comes down to three simple questions: What is right? What

is wrong? And what are we going to do about it?

Today you are doing what is right, turning your words into deeds. In my Inaugural Address, I called upon America to a new season of renewal, a new season of service. And I said then what I firmly believe: There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be fixed by what is right with America.

Well, all of you that are about to embark on this journey, as far as I'm concerned, you're what's right with America. Let's just look at a couple of our AmeriCorps volunteers. Laura Sullivan, who's here at the White House today, is helping people put their lives back on track and start their own businesses in Baltimore. Leo Negron out in Chicago is teaching construction skills to teenagers and offering them a role model for taking pride in their work. Sara Wittenberg in Seattle is showing us how to be stewards of our Nation's natural beauty.

Twenty thousand more this year and 100,000 over the next 3 years, all of you will do things like this in hundreds of places all around our country: saving babies in south Texas, walking police beats in Brooklyn, working on boats to reclaim the Chesapeake Bay and working on new housing projects in Roxbury, taking seniors safely to the doctor in St. Louis, and helping children to learn to read in Sacramento.

Every generation in our history has learned to take responsibility for this country, and yours is no exception. We look to you and know that you are no generation of slackers but instead a generation of doers who want—[*applause*—] we are grateful for those of you who wish to give back something to the country that has done so much for you and to the parents and loved ones who are with you today and who taught you that these values are important.

Our greatness, after all, has never come from those who went in search of distant riches or personal glory. The people who really made this country great for over 200 years are ordinary people who make extraordinary sacrifices for the common good: the farm boys on the beaches of Normandy, the police officers walking the dark beats, the schoolteachers staying up late to help students from troubled homes to lead better lives.

And you, the people of AmeriCorps, will be America's next generation of heroes. We need you now more than ever. So many of our people are alone and cut off from one another. So

many others are deeply divided from each other, resentful, skeptical, even cynical about the possibilities of their own lives and the life of their country. You will devote your own potential to helping other people live up to their God-given potential.

You remind us how America has always worked best: by offering opportunity and demanding responsibility. We've seen over the last 20 years that you can't have one without the other and expect the American community to grow and flourish.

AmeriCorps says: Come together, citizens and businesses, schools and churches, come together as partners in progress to solve our problems and reach our promise. We know we will succeed not by Government edict, not by large bureaucracies but by the spirit of service and devotion that burns within the heart of every American.

With AmeriCorps you are building your country's future and helping to build your own. For your hard work, those of you who serve will earn money for your education and the chance to do even more with your God-given abilities, earning something that money can never buy as well. For you know now that you are helping to breathe new life into the spirit of the American Republic.

Benjamin Franklin once said that if we don't hang together, we will surely hang separately. At the time he said it, he was worried about a foreign invader. But as the old comic strip character says, "Today we have met the enemy, and it is us." We better hang together, folks, or we're going to hang separately. You are the glue that will enable us to hang together.

We cannot go on as a nation of strangers, mistrusting one another because we've never had the chance to work side by side or had the chance to walk in one another's shoes. If we just stand only on our own ground, we will never find common ground. When I mentioned three of you, Leo, Laura, and Sara, before, I didn't tell you about their backgrounds. Laura is from a suburb of Boston. Leo is from the inner city of Chicago. Sara is from the farmlands of Wisconsin. Each will bring something special and different and unique from those places to their service of America.

But each will surely learn, along with all the rest of you, that with all of our differences, we can belong to something larger than ourselves. I hope the nation that you serve will

learn this as well from your shining example. We are all part of the American family joined by a common purpose, bound by a common sense of responsibility, challenged by common possibilities that know no limits.

The only limit to the future of this country and to the future that all of you hope to have is what we are willing to demand of ourselves today and in the future. Generations before us have done the groundwork, and now we must build on those foundations.

In just a moment, I will lead the 20,000 volunteers who are here, and some who have already done this a couple of hours ago across America, in a pledge. But I want to ask you and all Americans who will learn of this event to reflect on the words of that pledge, words like “action” and “commitment,” “community” and “common ground.” It’s more than a pledge of personal service; it’s a creed for America, a creed we desperately need as we move forward to renew our great country in the 21st century.

To all of you who have taken the pledge to join, who have entered this season of service,

who have redeemed the most important commitment your President ever tried to make to the American people, to give us a chance to come together, to move forward together, I say thank you, and God bless you.

Now let me ask all the AmeriCorps volunteers here 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.

[The AmeriCorps volunteers repeated the pledge line by line after the President.]

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 4 p.m. on the North Grounds at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Eli Segal, Assistant to the President for National Service, and Nancy Gore, late sister of the Vice President.

Statement on the Nomination for Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic September 12, 1994

I will look to General Sheehan to continue the innovative efforts of Admiral Miller in defining the role of allied military power in forging a safe and secure world.

NOTE: This statement was included in a statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President nominated Gen. John J. Sheehan, USMC, to succeed Adm. Paul D. Miller as Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, and to serve as commander in chief, U.S. Atlantic Command.

Statement on Implementation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 September 12, 1994

This law creates the opportunity to include millions of Americans in the political process who have previously been excluded because of difficult and confusing voting rules. I urge all Americans of all political parties to register to vote, and I urge the voter registration groups to continue and expand their efforts to ensure

as many of our citizens as possible are registered.

NOTE: This statement was included in a White House statement announcing the Executive order