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The President's Radio Address

January 16, 1999

Good morning. On Monday America will celebrate the birth of one of our greatest heroes, Dr. Martin Luther King. This morning I'd like to talk to you about how we can honor his legacy on that day, and all throughout the year, by rising to the call of citizen service.

This morning I'm joined by Harris Wofford, the CEO of our Corporation for National Service, a former United States Senator and, long before that, a close friend and adviser to Dr. King. Five years ago, then Senator Wofford and Congressman John Lewis of Georgia cosponsored a bill to encourage Americans to devote Martin Luther King Day to serving in their communities. And I was proud to sign it into law. We believe that this national holiday should be a day on, not a day off, for as Dr. King once said, ''Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you going to do for others?''

On Monday more than 100,000 Americans, including students, soldiers, ministers, seniors, and members of the AmeriCorps national service program, will fan out all across their communities to paint schools, clean neighborhoods, read to children. There's still time for you to sign up. You can do so at www.AmeriCorps.org.

Now, in 1993 we created AmeriCorps to give young people a chance to serve in their communities and, in the process, to earn some money for college. We gave them a chance to serve not just for a day but all year round. And since then, 100,000 young people have taken the AmeriCorps pledge. They've done remarkable things. Since Dr. King's last birthday, they've rehabilitated thousands of homes, immunized tens of thousands of children, tutored hundreds of thousands of students, performed millions of hours of service.

Just as important, our diverse AmeriCorps members are learning lessons that will last a lifetime. In the words of one member, ''It's unity, people working together. You don't see color. You see people who have come together with just one purpose.'' For all these reasons, I will ask Congress to increase its support for AmeriCorps this year.

There are many other ways citizens can honor Dr. King. For one thing, you can give the gift of life by donating blood. America's blood supplies are now critically low because severe winter weather has hindered blood drives in several regions. I urge every American to find out where you can donate blood by calling 1–800–GIVE LIFE.

We can also honor Dr. King by working in our own neighborhoods to promote racial reconciliation. Today I am proud to release a report growing out of our Presidential Initiative on Race. It's called, ''Pathways To One America in the 21st Century,'' and it's a guide to some of our communities' best ways of building that elusive one America, one neighborhood, one school system, one workplace at a time.

For example, thanks to a creative initiative in greater Philadelphia, students from different parts of town have formed teams to design and then conduct projects such as food drives or after-school programs for younger kids. In the beginning, suburban students and city students tended to stick to themselves. But gradually, the students discovered the things they had in common, and by the end, the barriers had broken down. It has been a stunning success.

To learn more about this promising practice and more than 100 others, please visit the White House website. We want every community in America to get involved in projects such as these.

Until all children of all backgrounds have the chance to live up to their God-given potential, free from want, in a world at peace, Dr. King's work, and our work, will not be complete. To honor what would have been Dr. King's 70th birthday, I urge all Americans to rise to the highest calling in our land: the calling of active citizenship. For if we work together as true neighbors, we can realize Dr. King's most enduring dream.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on the Situation in Kosovo

January 16, 1999

I condemn in the strongest possible terms the massacre of civilians by Serb security forces that took place last night in the village of Racak in Kosovo. This was a deliberate and indiscriminate act of murder designed to sow fear among the people of Kosovo. It is a clear violation of the commitments Serbian authorities have made to NATO. There can be no justification for it.

The perpetrators must be brought to justice. The Serb authorities must act immediately to identify those responsible. They must cooperate with the Kosovo Verification Mission and the International War Crime Tribunal. They must withdraw security forces, carry out all the commitments they have made to NATO, and cease their repression.

We are in close contact with Secretary-General Solana and our NATO allies. Together, we will work to stop the repression and prevent an escalation of fighting.

It is urgent that these murders not trigger a spiral of reprisals. Both sides have a responsibility to work towards a peaceful resolution of this crisis and for a settlement that allows the people of Kosovo the self-government they so clearly deserve.

Remarks to AmeriCorps Volunteers

January 18, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Good afternoon, everyone.

Audience members. Good afternoon.

The President. First of all, I'd like to say that I am very grateful to be here at Regency House with all of you. I want to thank the residency council for making us feel welcome—Sarah Beaner, Kenneth Brown and others.

I want to say to the members of the press here—you know, the press, they all think that we're all on automatic, because they give us little notes here to read about every place we go. But I think it would be interesting for you to know the note I got on Regency House here: Sarah Beaner is the president of the residency council; Kenneth Brown is the past president and is now serving as the vice president, not such a bad idea. [*Laughter*] Regency House has 157 tenants. The tenant population is made up of seniors and the disabled. They are all current in their rent. [*Laughter*] Good for you; that's great.

Let me say to the mayor and Councilmember Patterson and Delegate Norton, I am honored to be here to participate in Martin Luther King Day as a day of service, as provided by law and in the spirit of what Dr. King said. And I am proud that I live in a city with truly outstanding leadership. Eleanor Holmes Norton has been my friend for a very long time and is one of the most remarkable women in any leadership capacity of any kind in the United States. DC is fortunate to have her.

The mayor, in his former life, was actually a member of our administration in the Agriculture Department. And you know, it didn't really offend me that we'd already torn the wall down by the time he showed up today—[*laughter*]—because he's working hard, and he's got a lot of things to do. And I feel good about what he's going to achieve. And, Mr. Mayor, you just stay on the job, and I'll tear a wall down for you any day your want, any time, anywhere, and I thank you.

I want to thank David Gilmore of the DC Housing Authority and my great member of the White House staff Ben Johnson who did used to be a former director of DC Public Housing. The others whom the Vice President mentioned with AmeriCorps—Deb Jospin, John Gomperts. But mostly I want to thank these young volunteers behind me.

Near the end of Dr. King's life, he envisioned a partnership in America across racial lines. He could never have imagined that America would become so diverse as it is today. But AmeriCorps, it seems to me, is the living, breathing embodiment of the way Martin Luther King thought all of America ought to work. And that's what I wanted to do when we established it.

You might be interested to know that in only 4 years, since we set AmeriCorps up and got it going, more than 100,000 volunteers have joined AmeriCorps. It took the Peace Corps 20 years to reach that milestone. And they have done unbelievable things to make America a better place: helping to deal