

## OBAMA CALLS FOR NEW COMMITMENT TO VOLUNTARY SERVICE AT POINTS OF LIGHT 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY PRESIDENTIAL FORUM

History was made Friday evening, October 16, at Points of Light Institute's Presidential Forum on Service at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

President Obama joined President Bush in honoring individual service and celebrating volunteerism's tremendous gains during the past two decades under the Points of Light leadership. The unique gathering highlighted the immeasurable value of service and served as a moment for President Obama and former President George H.W. Bush to inspire a new generation to serve.

"Today we join two Presidents who share a firmly-held belief that service is central to a meaningful life and vital to our national life," Michelle Nunn, President and CEO of Points of Light Institute, told the 2,300 forum participants.

"We come here today to pay tribute to President Bush and his legacy. We also come to envision how we can build on the past to create new solutions, to alleviate suffering and to create change. Across the nation many Americans are in distress. Many are living in poverty, have lost their jobs or their housing and some are even going hungry. Millions more teeter on the edge of financial crisis," she said.

"In his inaugural address, President Bush asked us to 'turn to the only resource we have that in times of need always grows—the goodness and the courage of the American people,' she stated. "That call is as resonant today as it was in 1989, but as we look ahead, we have a different set of possibilities that will define citizen engagement over the next two decades."

The forum included remarks from President Obama and former President George H.W. Bush, as well as a panel.

President Obama called public service "the essence of our liberty" and said that a new commitment to voluntary service is essential to meet challenges that the government cannot. He distinguished between what government can do, what it should not do and what it cannot do.

"The need for action always exceeds the limits of government," he said. "That's where active, engaged citizens come in." The President said that government can build schools, but can't run the PTA; it can buy military equipment and supplies, but can't provide a home-cooked meal to a military family stretched thin.

"In the end, service binds us to each other and to our community and to our country in a way that nothing else can," Obama said.

Paying tribute to the Points of Light initiative of the 41st President, the 44th President said that President George H.W. Bush "didn't call for one blinding light to shine from Washington, but for a vast galaxy of people and institutions to solve problems in their own backyards."

Bush, introducing Obama, said he "is absolutely right. There isn't a more important time than now for us all to get involved."

The Presidential Forum was part of a day-long series of events at Texas A&M University organized by Points of Light Institute. A Service Leaders Roundtable discussion was held prior to the forum.

"The goal of Points of Light Institute is to increase national volunteerism to 100 million people a year by 2020," Nunn announced at the roundtable discussion. "We must also explore how this new threshold of service drives systemic change and creates powerful solutions to entrenched problems.

We are already beginning to focus our impact around the issues of education, the environment and the economy.”

Points of Light Institute held a reception after the forum to honor President Bush. His son Neil, who serves as chairman of the board of Points of Light Institute, made remarks and examined the history of the dynamic organization while also noting an upcoming financial campaign. Ambassador Hushang Ansary and his wife, Shahla, are chairing this fund.

“As we are growing this new organization, which was the result of a 2007 merger between the Points of Light Foundation and Hands On Network, one of our most important 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary initiatives is a \$25 million capital campaign commencing next year,” he said.

“A critical component of the campaign is the President and Mrs. George H. W. Bush Legacy Fund, which was launched leading up to today’s celebration. We are thrilled to have raised \$3.3 million to date in support of President and Mrs. Bush and the Points of Light Institute mission.”

Dr. R. Bowen Loftin, Interim President of host Texas A&M University, described the service training and participation that have made his university a collegiate hallmark of volunteer activity. Mallory Meyers, executive director of the Texas A&M Big Event, was presented a Daily Point of Light Award for organizing more than 1,500 service projects involving 13,000 students in a single day. Approximately 150 of more than 4,000 other past Daily Point of Light winners attended the forum.

Walter Isaacson, President and CEO of The Aspen Institute, chaired panels at both the Service Leaders Roundtable and Presidential Forum that explored past successes and new ideas for increasing future community service.

The Service Leaders Roundtable included panelists Gregg Petersmeyer, who implemented Points of Light as staff member for President Bush; Harris Wofford, former U.S. Senator and former CEO, Corporation for National and Community Service; Stephen Goldsmith, Corporation for National and Community Service; and Sonal Shah, head of the White House Office of Social Innovation.

Their discussion led to innovative ideas such as using new technology in service, utilizing the increasing number of retirees in the population and helping children improve their performances in math and science through new program for teachers. Isaacson noted the need to solve the problem of matching mass donations with survivors, such as the scenario that occurred after Hurricane Katrina when thousands of individuals wanted to donate food and goods but didn’t know where to send them.

Other speakers included Bobbi Silten, chief officer of the Gap Foundation and Robert Marbut, Jr., Board Chairman of OneStar Foundation.

The legacy of President George H.W. Bush was honored at the event, as well as the inspirational ideas of President Barack Obama. The event served as a key moment in time to look back collectively and be inspired and enthused about the future of service.