



Presidential Forum on Service Selected Prepared Remarks

Neil Bush, Chair, Points of Light Institute

I'm Neil Bush, chair of the Points of Light Institute Board of Directors. Welcome to the Presidential Forum on Service.

I can think of no better place to host this program to celebrate the power of service and my Father's visionary leadership than right here at Texas A&M. Thanks to all of you for joining us—it will be an extraordinary afternoon.

I am truly honored to serve the new Points of Light and to help carry on the legacy that my father started 20 years ago with his invocation of a thousand points of light.

The Points of Light movement is made up of many parts, many organizations, and many people like you.

Its roots grew from President Bush's inauguration speech in 1989. He portrayed a movement of, in his words, "all the individuals and community organizations ... spread like stars through the nation, doing good."

A year after those inaugural remarks, he signed the National and Community Service Act of 1990. It enabled a set of programs that would support people in solving problems and improving their neighborhoods and towns.

This act established the Commission on National and Community Service—the foundation upon which President Clinton grew AmeriCorps and President George W. Bush extended the USA Freedom Corps. This Commission has become the Corporation for National and Community Service which is leading the service movement and represented here today by Nicky Goren and Steve Goldsmith.

The National and Community Service Act also chartered what has become the Points of Light Institute, the organization that convened this gathering.

Today's Forum is a cornerstone event in a year-long celebration of President Bush's initiative to inspire every person to become "a point of light," someone who brightens the future for others. His belief in the American people is enduring and unshakeable—as is his belief that a successful life is defined in large part through service to others.

My dad envisioned a network of grassroots activities and organizations supporting people's efforts to make a difference. I believe, as President, he laid the groundwork for a civic movement that is as necessary today as it was then.

Today, 61 million people a year volunteer. They perform 8.1 billion—that's B, billion—hours of service worth 158 billion dollars to America's communities and their residents.

Intensive volunteering also is on the rise: 35 percent of all volunteers give more than 100 hours of service a year—the highest ever.

Since 1989:

- The percent of 45 to 65 year-olds serving youth has doubled;
- Business support for employee volunteering has become a pillar of corporate social responsibility
- The number of Older Americans engaged in service has risen
- The percent of teen volunteers has doubled; and
- Service on college campuses has become a new standard and is on the rise.

Texas A&M University students, faculty and administration are at the forefront of setting this new standard, serving as a national model around the role of higher education in creating and sustaining a new era of servant leaders and empowered citizens.

It is my pleasure to introduce to you, Dr. R. Bowen Loftin, Interim President of Texas A & M University. Dr. Loftin is a physicist by education and has been a professor of computer science and marine systems engineering. He also has recent experience with a field in which voluntarism is essential—disaster and survival. Dr. Loftin was CEO of Texas A&M University at Galveston when Hurricane Ike wrought its devastation on Galveston Island just a little over a year ago. He was named interim president at this main campus of Texas A&M four months ago.

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Thank you, Dr. Loftin. Texas A&M offers us an excellent example of how to involve young people in volunteer activities.

As all of you well know, colleges and universities play an important role in the service movement; in fact, University of Phoenix is a Presenting Partner for this event.

I am proud to announce that University of Phoenix and Points of Light are launching a new scholarship program called "Serve It Forward." The program will award scholarships to individuals who make the world better through the gift of their time—starting with \$1 million for 20 individuals.

An event like this couldn't occur without the leadership and support of many important contributors. Please make sure to see the event program for a complete list of our host committee members, our event partners and sponsors, in particular Target, The Washington Times Foundation and Stewart & Stevenson LLC, our Gold Level partners. We are tremendously grateful for all of their leadership and support.

Leading the next generation of the Points of Light civic movement is a woman uniquely worthy of carrying my dad's legacy forward.

At the time that my father was working with others to create the Points of Light movement, Michelle Nunn was building HandsOn Network, a grassroots volunteer network focused on putting people at the center of change.

By merging with HandsOn Network in 2007, Points of Light became the largest organization in the world dedicated to volunteering and civic engagement—the Points of Light Institute.

Today, Michelle is charged with envisioning and leading a new path for the Institute. A path where “points of light” shine through the impact they create as volunteers and volunteer leaders; through projects directed toward meeting community needs; through policy decisions, and innovative solutions to today's social concerns.

Michelle began HandsOn Atlanta in 1989 and has been committed to the service movement for the last twenty years. The *NonProfit Times* has named her to its Top 50 in Power and Influence list the past three years. It's my honor to introduce you to Michelle Nunn, CEO of Points of Light Institute and co-founder of HandsOn Network.

Michelle Nunn, President and CEO, Points of Light Institute

Neil, thank you. It has been a great privilege to partner with Neil and to experience his boundless optimism, passion, and gracious spirit of service.

I am always struck by the Bush family, and how profoundly the bonds of affection bind them and how the spirit of service has been nurtured and cultivated through the generations in an extraordinary and continuing legacy.

When President Bush spoke of a Thousand Point of Light, I don't think that he could have fully imagined how his vision, words, and actions would generate a service movement that would transform our nation.

But I do believe that if he had looked forward and imagined commemorating these accomplishments, he would indeed have chosen to celebrate with two thousand points of light here at his beloved Texas A&M.

There is a very special ethic of service and sacrifice at Texas A&M—one that manifests itself in exceptional rates of community and military service.

Texas A&M is at the forefront of a trend in which young people are volunteering at double the rates that they were when President Bush first issued his call. Young people are truly leading the way, but others are following and there are 23 million more Americans volunteering—23 million more points of light—than were serving in 1989.

When President Bush issued his call, he built upon our nation's greatest tradition—the compassionate and innovative power of citizen action.

He carried forward this tradition and gave it poetic aspiration and imagery. He supported it with legislation to pilot new forms of national service and he also created Points of Light—an organization to celebrate, steward, and grow this movement of change agents.

His call and his work has been built upon and extended by each of the Presidents that followed him, most recently, by President Obama.

In his first months of office, President Obama worked in partnership with legislative leaders like Orrin Hatch to pass the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. This new law received the strongest bipartisan support of any major legislation this year and signifies a monumental leap forward for service—through the expansion of AmeriCorps and new funds for volunteer generation and social innovation.

Amidst many competing demands, President Obama's presence here today is testimony to his commitment to engage citizens in re-making our communities, in President Obama's own words, remaking this nation, block by block, brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand.

At our National Conference, First Lady Michelle Obama said "This new Administration doesn't view service as separate from our national priorities, or an addition to our national priorities—we see it as the key to achieving our national priorities."

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.

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.

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."

That call is as powerful 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.

We have assembled a group of distinguished and diverse thought leaders here for a panel to reflect on the ways policy, technology, and cultural forces could combine to give citizens more muscle for solving problems, driving change, and creating impact. Our panelists set the stage for today's Presidential call to action.

It is my honor to introduce our moderator, Walter Isaacson, president and CEO of The Aspen Institute, and former CEO of CNN and Time Magazine. He has written best-selling books about the genius of Albert Einstein and Ben Franklin. But perhaps most importantly he unites extraordinary intellect with compassion. He has been a tireless leader in rebuilding his home state of Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He is the chairman of the board of Teach for America—one of our country's greatest national service programs.

Please join me in welcoming Walter Isaacson.

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Thank you, Walter, and panelists Melody Barnes, Ambassador Ron Kirk, Sam Nunn, and Jean Case. Our panelists did a terrific job of creating a vision for what it will look like to put people at the center of change—a world in which individuals can join together to solve local, national and international problems in unprecedented ways.

Through my work at Points of Light, I know that individuals of enormous ingenuity and compassion and commitment are already leading the way.

People like Amy Blankson from Central Texas, who at the age of 16, started an organization to assist homebound seniors; and at 18 convened a youth service summit that inspired each of the 1,200 young participants to pledge 100 hours of service. Amy recently fulfilled a life-long dream and founded an organization that encourages families to instill a spirit of giving in their children.

Then there's the story of 94-year-old Edith Harvey of Lawrenceville, Georgia. Over the last 30 years, Ms. Edith has cooked more than one million meals for her fellow seniors. In the process she mentored 100 former prison inmates—and in her own words, she believes that none of them has gone bad yet. And on top of this she raised 17 children and foster children.

There are millions of stories like these unfolding everyday in communities around the country—stories that remind us of the power of people to change the world. Through Points of Light, volunteers complete 1,000 service projects every day—restoring green spaces, tutoring children, and assisting individuals in finding jobs.

President Bush established the Daily Point of Light Award in 1989 to honor these individuals and inspire others to serve. Since then, Points of Light Institute has presented more than 4,000 awards. We are honored to have 150 of the Daily Points of Light Award winners with us today. Will you please stand and be recognized.

I'd like to invite Neil Bush back to the stage to help me induct our newest Daily Point of Light Awardee.

We have a new member of this remarkable group. Today we present the Daily Point of Light Award to a young woman known to many students for her leadership on campus as director of the Texas A&M Big Event. At 20, she leads the largest volunteer event among college campuses—organizing more than 1,500 service projects in a single day. This event has been replicated on 70 campuses. When not organizing the Big Event she is a mentor and planning for a career committed to public service. It's my privilege to present today's Daily Point of Light Award to Mallory Myers and the 13,000 Aggies that serve in the Big Event!

Every day, the Points of Light narrative unfolds through the action of individuals like Mallory. These individuals brighten our world and inspire others.

Now we turn to the leadership of our presidents, two men who through their office and character embody the nobility of service.

It is interesting to note that the things we most remember when we think back on our Presidents and our great heroes – over the decades and over the centuries—is their call to what is best in all of us. It is not necessarily the topic of our daily headlines, but it's their call to serve, defend, advocate, change. From President Kennedy's challenge to "ask not what your country can do for you," to Gandhi's summons to "be the change you want to see in the world," to Dr. King's poignant reminder that "everyone can be great, because everyone can serve."

In his inaugural address, President Bush asked us to "work hand in hand, encouraging, sometimes leading, sometimes being led, rewarding. The old ideas are new again because they are not old, they are timeless: duty, sacrifice, commitment, and a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching in."

These ideas, these words and his example endure. They resonate today and they will continue to inspire tomorrow.

Ladies and Gentleman please join me in welcoming and celebrating the 41st President of the United States, President George H.W. Bush.