

REGULATION

Bush Plan to Stimulate Volunteerism Gets Cool Reception From Charities

Most remain skeptical in spite of a few ringing endorsements

By VINCE STEHLE

President Bush's new proposal to encourage Americans to volunteer is receiving a lukewarm reception from many charity and foundation officials.

A handful of leaders of large national voluntary groups embraced the President's proposal enthusiastically, but some of them said they worried that the nation's charities might not be ready to handle a dramatic influx of volunteers. Several charity officials complained that the President's plan would provide too little federal support for community-service programs, that it was inconsistent with Congressional proposals to stimulate volunteering by young people, and that it was too diffuse to have a significant impact.

\$25-Million per Year

In announcing his "Points of Light Initiative" last month, President Bush asked Congress to establish a new foundation that would encourage volunteer programs at the state and local level. Backed by \$25-million per year in federal funds and additional donations from private sources, the program would try to stimulate volunteer efforts, increase the use of technology to match volunteers to non-profit groups, and expand the use of business offices, churches, and public buildings as volunteer centers. In addition, the President said he would establish a new set of awards to recognize exemplary efforts in community service and youth service (*The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, June 27).

The President appointed Republican

Gov. Thomas Kean of New Jersey to head a small commission to design the financial and legal structure of the new foundation. Within a week, Governor Kean announced the formation of "Serving the Garden State," a new program that will attempt to promote volunteer efforts in New Jersey. The Governor has asked the state Legislature to provide \$500,000 for the program, a fig-

ure that has already been matched by Raymond Chambers, a New Jersey financier who is one of the leading forces behind the President's national initiative.

Commenting on the White House proposal, William Aramony, president of United Way of America, said: "President Bush's call to action for every American to volunteer in service to oth-

ers could create a force more powerful than any our country has ever known."

Others were more skeptical.

"I'm disappointed with the lack of detail in the President's proposal," said Gail Kong, executive director of New York's City Volunteer Corps. "There are almost too few details to say anything about it."

The proposal, which called on all Americans to make a greater commitment to community service, contrasts sharply with several Congressional bills that specifically encourage young people to volunteer.

"Skirts Some of the Basic Issues"

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, is leading the effort to construct a compromise bill that would incorporate parts of more than 20 separate measures now pending in Congress. Most legislative proposals focus on encouraging high-school- and college-age youth to do volunteer work and some, like the one sponsored by Sen. Sam Nunn, Democrat of Georgia, would tie federal benefits to a one- or two-year period of community or military service.

"It's gratifying to have the President pay attention to this issue," said Anne C. Lewis, author of "Facts and Faith: A Status Report on Youth Service," published by the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship. "However, I believe that it skirts some of the basic issues that the Congressional proposals deal with. The

Congressional plans all seem to grasp the idea that the first priority in the service area is to stimulate activity among young people."

Nor does President Bush's proposal include enough money to succeed, she argues. "Twenty-five million dollars to stimulate programs spread across the whole country is not really a whole lot of money," she said.

Ms. Kong said she believed that it would have been better to devote \$100-million to youth service annually, rather than spreading that amount over four years to cover all aspects of community service.

More Federal Funds Sought

In announcing his proposal, President Bush said his plan would rely primarily on non-governmental resources, and that the federal government would act mainly as the catalyst for private volunteer programs.

"We know that government can't rebuild a family or reclaim a sense of neighborhood," he said. "The key to constructive change is building relationships, not bureaucracies."

But some officials of youth-service efforts say that new federal support is needed. Ms. Kong said that while federal aid was required to support existing youth-service programs, it was not necessary to create a new federal bureaucracy to administer the funds.

Testifying before the House Education and Labor Committee, Ms. Kong said, "No one is calling for the creation of a federal bureaucracy here. Many of us do believe that the strong existing network of more than 400 [youth-service] programs across the country could be strengthened, stabilized, and enhanced with the addition of dedicated federal funding."

Currently, she said, some youth-service programs receive federal funds provided through the Job Training Partnership Act, but it would be better if the government authorized funds specifically for the volunteer programs.

"Volunteers Aren't Free"

John A. Briscoe, director of PENNSERVE: the Governor's Office of Citizen Service in Pennsylvania, echoed Ms. Kong's call for additional federal money for youth-service programs.

"Volunteers aren't free," Mr. Briscoe said. "They're efficient. They're a good return on investment, but they're not free. If community service is going to compete with McDonald's or with serving as a lookout for a crack dealer, it is going to have to offer some sort of compensation."

Many youth-service programs offer stipends for volunteers, sometimes including college scholarships for students who successfully complete the program.

Several experts on volunteer service complained that the President's appeal for volunteers was so broad that it might have little impact. The President called on "all Americans and all American institutions, large and small, to make service central to your life and work."

Said Ms. Lewis: "Because the foundation is so general, there's nothing to grab hold of. There's nothing for young or old people that can make them say, 'Here's a specific contribution I can make.'"

Maria Smith, consultant for volunteer activity at the American Red Cross, said that while she generally approved of the President's proposal, she felt that it was not broad enough. She said President Bush had focused too narrowly on youth service, ignoring the potential for involving the elderly

Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, disagreed with the criticisms. He said the President's leadership would be a valuable part of efforts to attract volunteers to public service.

"When the President gets up and says, 'This is important,' it has a powerful effect," said Mr. Newman, whose organization sponsors Campus Compact, a volunteer effort at over 200 colleges and universities. "One would hardly call this a blockbuster announcement, but it certainly is a positive move."

Too Many Volunteers?

David Tobin, executive director of the Association for Volunteer Administration, said he worried that President Bush's appeal might be too successful, and that charities might not be prepared to handle a new wave of volunteers.

"People are worried about their capacity to deal with the potential increase in volunteers," Mr. Tobin said. "We run the risk of losing a whole generation of volunteers if we are not able to accommodate the volume that the Administration inspires."

Mr. Tobin said that studies needed to be done soon, perhaps by the President's proposed foundation, to determine the capacity of groups to absorb the increase.

Brian O'Connell, president of Independent Sector, a coalition of non-profit groups and grant makers, played down that concern. "I don't think it's going to be so overwhelming that it will swamp the organizations," Mr. O'Connell said.

Ms. Smith of the Red Cross, like Mr. Tobin, said she was concerned that volunteer agencies might not be able to absorb new volunteers unless federal funds are provided to help with administrative details. While President Bush has been successful in getting businesses to support new voluntary efforts, she said, "I don't think anything can replace government funding."

The White House has said, however, that it will not provide federal money to help agencies absorb new volunteers. Said Clark Ervin, associate director for policy in the Office of National Service, "There is a conviction here that there is no need for federal funds for that purpose."

In any event, the increase will not take place overnight, Mr. Tobin said. "It's going to take a lot more than one speech to get through to the American people."

Text of President Bush's Speech on His 'Points of Light Initiative'

NEW YORK

Following is the text of President Bush's speech to a group of community leaders here last week in which he outlined his "Points of Light Initiative":

It is indeed an honor to address the members and guests of the New York Partnership and the Association for a Better New York. For already, you have enriched fields from business and labor to education and the media. We meet today to go still further: To join hands, and link hearts, to light the American sky.

I begin with a single, simple statement: There is no problem in America that is not being solved somewhere. Think of that.

Today, millions of Americans, the quiet Americans, the selfless Americans, are giving of their time and of themselves. They work at day-care centers, inner-city schools, homes for the elderly—anywhere there is a need, anytime they are needed—making a difference in the lives of those for whom the American dream seems an impossible dream.

Already, this involvement—what we term national or community service—has helped countless Americans find self-respect and dignity.

But the job is far from complete. Too many Americans still endure a living nightmare of want and isolation. That must stop. Ladies and gentlemen, we must bring back those who feel unwelcome. We must awaken their hope for the future.

We know that government can't rebuild a family, or reclaim a sense of neighborhood. We know that during the past two decades we have spent more money, on more social programs, than at any time in our history. And some problems aren't better. In fact, they're worse.

Most Americans understand that the key to constructive change is building relationships, not bureaucracies. And they know that those who say, "It's government's problem," are really part of the problem themselves.

All my life I've believed that government could not substitute for "do unto others." Barbara and I, like all of you here, have tried to do our small part. In Midland, [Tex.,] with the Y.M.C.A. and United Way. Coaching Little League, helping to build a theater. And dating back to my days at Yale, raising funds for the United Negro College Fund.

We've all done these things, and as we participated we fulfilled ourselves. Learning that we are not what we drive, or where we live, or what kind of clothes we wear. Rather, learning that America's greatness rests on the goodness of her people.

These beliefs are beyond any individual, for they are timeless. Today, more than ever, we need community service to help drop-outs, pregnant teens, and drug abusers, the homeless and AIDS victims, the hungry and illiterate. Often they are disadvantaged, and as their communities disintegrate around them they become disconnected from society.

Our challenge, then, is to raise their spirits and their expectations by engaging each citizen, school, and business, church and synagogue, service organization and civic group. For this is what I mean when I talk of "a thousand points of light"—that vast galaxy of people and institutions working together to solve problems in their own back yard.

I am here today to ask that both sectors, private and public—and all branches and all levels of government—join this great movement to extend national service into every corner of America. For it is a movement—bold and unprecedented. Not a program. Not another bureaucracy.

Let me tell you the strategy of this movement. First, to issue a call to action, and to claim problems as your own. Second, to identify, enlarge, and re-create what is working. And third, to discover and encourage new leaders.

First, our call to action. It is individual, and collective. And it begins this afternoon, with you.

So today, I ask all Americans and all American institutions, large and small, to make service central to your life and work. I urge all business leaders to consider community service in hiring, compensation, and promotion decisions. I call upon non-profit and service groups to open your doors to all those who want to help, irrespective of age, background, or level of experience. And leaders of high schools and colleges, I urge you to uphold the values of community service and to encourage students, faculty, and personnel to serve others.

To every corporation, large and small, I say: Begin a literacy program that teaches each employee how to read. And to every member of a body of higher learning: Start a Big Brother or Big Sister program for kids in your

neighborhood. Of every church and synagogue, I ask: Become an around-the-clock community center. And of every restaurant and grocery store: Distribute surplus food to soup kitchens and local shelters.

And to the youth of America, I issue a special appeal.

Yesterday, on the South Lawn of the White House, we held a kickoff rally for a key element of our strategy: The YES Initiative—or "Youth Engaged in Service" to America. It was attended by thousands of kids—some of those points of light I like to talk about. I challenged every young American to fight against self-absorption. And to emulate those leaders who have shown that there is no problem in America that is not being solved somewhere.

Their presence reminded me of the saying, "Life is not a state of time—life is a state of mind." So is our call to community service. It summons the young, and the old. I believe Americans will listen to that call. The poet Emerson once said, "The greatest gift is a portion of thyself." Well, today, across our 50 states, groups and individuals are giving of, not to, themselves.

Americans like these are missionaries, and they are heroes. Our mission is to achieve, nationally, what they are doing, locally. To complete it will require a catalyst. This brings me to the second part of our strategy. And I am proud to announce it now: A new effort to identify service programs that work—and carry them to America.

We call this catalyst the "Points of Light Initiative"—a foundation, of which I will serve as honorary chairman, and that will help make our movement a reality.

I will soon ask Congress for \$25-million annually to support this initiative, which, in turn, will seek matching funds from the private sector. But I will also name an advisory committee to report to me within 45 days of its first meeting on the structure, composition, and legislation needed to achieve the foundation's goals. And I am proud to announce today that Gov. Tom Kean of New Jersey, one of this nation's most dedicated and caring public servants, has agreed to head this committee.

But, a federal effort alone cannot succeed. Therefore, today we invite each governor—and, through them, the mayors of all municipalities—to join our movement by forming state and local

"Points of Light Working Groups" composed of outstanding leaders.

These individuals will become a vehicle to solve problems locally. And to help solve problems nationally, the "Points of Light Initiative" will be a magnet for the best ideas, and brightest programs, in community service. For while countless service initiatives are already working successfully, they are too often isolated and unknown to others. Our foundation will change all that: By bringing success stories to other communities, we will repeat them across the nation.

We will repeat them through a foundation initiative to be called the "ServNet Project." Professional firms, corporations, unions, schools, religious, civic, and not-for-profit groups will be asked to donate the services of some of their most talented and promising people for a period of time.

These extraordinary individuals will form and lead peer-to-peer working groups. For example: lawyers going to fellow lawyers, teachers to fellow teachers, union members to fellow union members. ServNet will provide training and technical assistance—showing what works, and what doesn't.

But we also have to improve current methods of matching people with meaningful service opportunities.

"Volunteer centers" should be directly accessible to all Americans in their neighborhoods. Such contact points may be in a place of worship, union hall, library, fire station, business building, service-group headquarters, or neighborhood home.

Over time, through an initiative called the "ServLink Project," the foundation will stimulate the development, through private-sector resources, of "technology links" between those who wish to serve and those needing service in the inquirer's own community. And in addition, we will ask banks, credit-card issuers, telephone and utility companies to include in statement envelopes information about how people and their institutions can become engaged in serving others.

Like the foundation itself, these efforts can help individuals—and institutions—provide new hope to America. And so can the third part of our movement's strategy: our initiative to discover and encourage new leaders of every age in every town and city, and to inspire them to devote

their talents and energies to national service. And then, to honor those who excel.

Though the foundation, the YES Initiative will annually select two college-aged youths from each State as the "President's National Service Youth Representatives." They will spend one year traveling their regions as serve ambassadors—urging other young Americans to get involved. And "Points of Light" will convene youth and regional "Presidential Leadership Forums," uniting young people, educators, and community activists.

From such action will come achievement. And such achievement should be rewarded. We will ask media, from small-town weeklies to network television, to profile the brightest stars of community service. And our foundation will also recognize successful community initiatives and outstanding leaders through two new Presidential Awards. The "National Service Youth Leadership Awards"—given each year to individuals. And the "Build A Community Awards" honoring "partnerships" which work together to strengthen families and decaying neighborhoods in America.

All of this will fulfill us as Americans. By asking us to combat problems like loneliness and poverty, drug abuse and homelessness, we cannot afford to fail, and we won't. For as Americans, we know what is at stake.

We know that volunteerism can help those free-falling through society.

We know that as citizens, and institutions, we can use "one-to-one" caring to truly "love thy neighbor."

We know, finally, that from now on, any definition of a successful life must include serving others. And we must resolve to carry this belief to every person in the land.

Two centuries ago last year, Alexander Hamilton sent a letter urging General Washington to seek the Presidency. He wrote him: "The point of light in which you stand . . . will make an infinite difference."

National service will succeed. It can make "an infinite difference" in the life of these United States. For "a thousand points" can light the lives of a people, and a nation.

Remember, there is no problem that is not being solved somewhere in America. You—you in this room—can prove that statement a thousand times over. It's in our hands.