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SWEARING-IN OF ACTION AGENCY OFFICIALS

THE WHITE HOUSE
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Sam Brown and Mary King have generously said that I am progenitor of both the domestic and international programs of ACTION -- the Peace Corps and VISTA. But I refuse to take the sole credit for these wonderful programs.

These voluntary service programs are born of the American people. They exemplify our best national characteristics. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing about volunteerism in America, singled out this feature as the distinguishing, unique and powerful aspect of American life in the mid-nineteenth century. This observation is as true today as it was then.

Peace Corps and VISTA, along with the Older Americans programs of the ACTION agency, come from the American people. These volunteers who serve at home and abroad demonstrate through personal commitment that the American people care.

I remember so clearly when we passed the legislation for the Peace Corps, and later when we passed VISTA's legislation. Those were exciting days.

But the days ahead are just as compelling. Both here and abroad, people struggle for dignified lives, health, learning, housing and food. This struggle is worthy of our best effort. Americans can find no greater challenge than service that makes life better for others -- beginning with those who are most in need.

In 1971, as a member of what now is the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, I was involved in the process leading to the birth of the ACTION Agency. We struggled to resolve difficult questions about this reorganization, in an effort to maintain the genius and spirit of the original programs that were to be consolidated.

On balance, we felt that this new agency could provide an important focus and higher priority for these vital programs. Regretfully, because of adverse attitudes in certain quarters of the Administration at that time, the agency and its programs were to face an unending struggle to survive.

But now there is new, dynamic leadership at the ACTION Agency. And its determined efforts to address the urgent needs of persons in poverty at home and abroad, and to open new opportunities for volunteer service by our youth and our older citizens, are receiving the support of a new Administration. I know that Congress also will give its full support to this highly important undertaking.

There is a new spirit abroad in our land. Our people do have confidence in the future of our nation, and they believe there should be an equal opportunity for all our citizens to share in this future.

But the people of America are restless. They look to our leaders to make our country both dynamic and just. They respect and support leadership that has a sense of compassion, but also a dedication to individual initiative. They ask our leaders to inspire and to be inspired by our history, and to sense that our greatest days lie ahead of us.

In short, the American people want "action." Let us, therefore, commit ourselves to making this Agency the spearhead of a vital, new work, reflecting the true spirit and greatness of America.

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