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HUBERT HUMPHREY RECRUITS FOR VISTA



Photo, courtesy of Minneapolis Morning Tribune

Pay Debt to the Nation, He Urges Students

Vice President Hubert Humphrey made a special appearance before a student meeting at his alma mater, the University of Minnesota, in late May, to appeal to students to volunteer to give a year of their lives in service to America through VISTA.

In his own vivid style, the Vice President sketched the challenges and opportunities in VISTA. In waging the War on Poverty, he noted, "the easiest thing for this rich country is to dole out cash. What is more difficult

I come here today to talk to students and community leaders about a very important program of which you have been informed and in which I hope you will participate.

One of the jobs the President assigned to me as Vice President was to act as a coordinator for the War on Poverty. I can think of no assignment that means more to me than to be a part of this War on Poverty—to be included in this tremendous effort of the American people to upgrade their society.

Somebody put the question this way not long ago: Can a prosperous society still have a conscience? And I think the answer has been given. By the commitment of this country, recognizing that at least four-fifths of our people live better than ever before, that one-fifth still live below the levels of what we would call a decent standard of living, and therefore, by public policy and personal identification and personal commitment, we have said privately and publicly that we will wage war upon what we term as poverty.

I would like this audience to know that this, within itself, signifies good things for this nation if we can maintain this sense of social commitment. No other nation that I've ever heard of, bearing the responsibilities of this one, sharing in such unbelievable and unprecedented prosperity, has openly confessed to itself and to the world that we have inadequacies, that we have severe limitations, that there are spots of weakness and then had the courage to proceed to do something about it. The fact that we can admit our limitations and weaknesses is a sign of our strength—and strength there is.

We're going to try to help people lift themselves, at the bottom of the ladder through education, through training, through manpower training and development,

is to be able to extend a hand of fellowship, the hand of assistance, the hand of education, the hand of training, to help people slowly but surely lift themselves."

Those Americans who have enjoyed the privilege of education, Mr. Humphrey said, "are indebted to the state and to the nation and to the community. You owe something to somebody and you'll never get through paying it, so you ought to start early."

Excerpts from Vice President Humphrey's talk are reprinted below.

through vocational education, through a host of activities.

There are 600,000 high school graduates without a job in your America today. Out of 4,800,000 unemployed, 2,200,000 of them are teenagers over 16. We find tragic circumstances where a man can't even have a job in a laundry or work in the most simple common labor, at a filling station. Why? Because he can neither read nor write, he can neither add nor identify figures and how in the name of common sense can you change a tire if you can't even read the size of it?

Such simple things as this we are seeking to remedy. And that's what the War on Poverty is all about. Not merely the poverty of money; the easiest thing for this rich country is to dole out the cash. What is more difficult is to be able to extend a hand of fellowship, the hand of assistance, the hand of education, the hand of training, to help people slowly but surely lift themselves.

That's what I'm here to ask you to do today, because you are indebted the rest of your life to the state and to the nation and to the community. You owe something to somebody and you'll never get through paying it, so you ought to start early. We all owe something, every one of us that is privileged to have an education. We owe something to the society that made it possible for us to have the education.

I urge every able spirited man and woman among you to step up and volunteer to give a year of your life to the service of America, to service to Americans who live in circumstances that are unworthy of an American. To help clean up our own backyard. And this ought to be particularly appealing to some people that are worried about what we are doing elsewhere. Join the battle.

I want you to move into the enemy camp, to help overpower prejudice, fear, and distrust that separate the poor from the life and promise of plenty that most of

us lead. And I'm asking you to serve in one of the most exciting adventures of our times, in VISTA. This is the new corps of volunteers. It's the new army that can fight right here at home. It's being sent out to bring help to the poor and to bring the poor into the councils and the affairs of the nation.

VISTA is modeled after what proved productive in many of the pioneer volunteer programs of your generation. VISTA Volunteers are not ordered to carry out orders from Washington. They are assigned to local agencies, to private and public groups, and their major responsibility is to the people they serve.

In Denver, for example, the Volunteers were requested by the juvenile court to assist with repeating juvenile offenders, in danger of becoming life-long rejects of society. But the VISTA Volunteers will not represent the court or any other institution of law and order. The Volunteers will represent only themselves—interested people who have come to help the families of the young offenders to help them straighten out their troubled affairs and make a home where a child can feel some security and acceptance.

Now I know that a thousand volunteers are not going to change overnight the statistics of poverty in this big country. Nor will even 5,000 or 10,000 volunteers change the statistics fundamentally or basically through their own efforts. What is expected to happen, and what is already beginning to happen, is that the conditions of poverty will be changed by the poor themselves, to get a good look upon the life that they wish to live. It would be ridiculous to talk about the elimination of poverty if we imagine the poor to be passive recipients of the benefits. For poverty will only be eliminated when the poor say "My children will not be poor" and take steps to assure that it is so. The ultimate effort of this War on

Poverty is to help that child to find a whole new life and to help that parent that has been afflicted by poverty. To help that person who is socially sick to take a new look upon the life that he or she is living and to try to find a better way.

I submit that the VISTA Volunteers have done much to open up the dialogue between people, to break down false barriers, to get people to talk about human concerns, rather than these false standards of race, or color, or geography or social origins.

A lady in a small Tennessee town, is quoted in *The Nashville Tennessean*, as saying, "A strange thing, and maybe it's the good thing about the VISTA Volunteers, is that they shut up and ask you to talk. If you try to wait them out they wait you out, and you find yourself doing the talking."

Now let me hasten to point out that the enthusiasm for verbal expression in no way disqualifies you for VISTA or any other government service! But I guess what the Nashville newspaper story was telling us is this: the VISTA Volunteer isn't somebody that tells people what to do, that comes out with a prescribed formula. The VISTA Volunteer comes with love, yes, concern, experience, but above all, dedication, wanting to help, trying to find ways to communicate.

I've mentioned the effect that VISTA is having on the lives of the poor but I believe the biggest effect will be on the lives of those who are Volunteers. You have the opportunity to test your skills and principles in the service of your fellow man under conditions which will give full scope to your abilities and imagination.

We have a responsibility, my fellow Americans. Responsibility does not give you privilege; it saddles you with duty. Leadership is no joy. It is a responsibility and a burden.

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VISTA WINS CONGRESSIONAL PRAISE

Republicans and Democrats alike are beginning to praise VISTA Volunteers for their quiet and effective service at the grass roots level. The following excerpts from the *Congressional Record* indicate that Volunteers, through their person-to-person efforts, are earning bipartisan support for VISTA.

Representative Charles Mathias, Jr. (Republican-Maryland)¹

"Mr. Chairman, I submit that one of the most effective weapons against poverty has been the relatively modest, quiet, earnest VISTA program. Without benefit of titles, committees, or publicity, dedicated men and women of all ages and backgrounds are entering communities, living there, establishing friendships, and helping people to help themselves in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. I hope this program won't become tangled in politics, for it seems that the VISTA Volunteers, working at the grass roots and concrete bases of poverty, may well score successes more lasting than those of more ambitious or spectacular efforts.

"The success of the VISTA program underlines the truth that no amount of money can solve the problem of poverty in America unless a great investment of human talent and energy is also made."

¹ *Congressional Record* 7/21/65 p. 16963

Rep. Frank Thompson, Jr. (Democrat-New Jersey)²

"VISTA Volunteers play a vital role in expanding the economic opportunities of many of our citizens. Volunteers can supply the human element to support other antipoverty programs and to supplement the part-time voluntary efforts of millions of Americans.

"Living with those hindered by a background of poverty and sharing their living conditions, VISTA Volunteers can serve to interpret existing programs to those needing assistance, to help them identify and express their needs, and to provide necessary skills. They can stimulate hope and personal development by introducing citizens to opportunities available in the Job Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, or other youth and adult programs in education and training. . . . Perhaps most significantly, Volunteers can help identify and develop community resources that can contribute to meeting local and individual needs. . . .

"VISTA is truly a creative program, for it nourishes within those blighted by poverty the growth of self-reliance, initiative, confidence, and skills which will enable each individual to fight, and to win, his war against poverty. I believe that our country is being well served by the dedicated Americans who have chosen to become VISTA Volunteers."

² *Congressional Record* 7/21/65 p. 16967