

**AmeriCorp State and National Symposium 2016**  
**September 21-23, 2016, Alexandria, VA**  
**Symposium Kick-off**  
**Wednesday, 9/21, 1:00pm-2:00pm**

**Transcription**

**PRESENTER:** Good afternoon, AmeriCorps and State Commission colleagues from across the country, and welcome to the 2016 AmeriCorps Symposium. Please welcome to the stage Ms. Wendy Spencer, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, and Bill Basl, the Director of AmeriCorps.

**WENDY SPENCER:** If we just turned this into a danceathon, it would be fine with me. Did I ever mention that I won a danceathon? Oh yeah, that's years ago. Hey, AmeriCorps family, how you feeling? Fired up and ready to serve? Yeah! We have been looking forward to this week for a very long time, and I know that you all have, too. You've had it on your calendars, you've been excited about it. It's so much fun to come and learn with each other, and we really – this is the week that we love the most, when we get to see all of you, and it's after a very big year of AmeriCorps funding, which is awesome, and support for all of you is coming your way or you've already received it. So welcome to Washington, D.C., and welcome to the AmeriCorps Symposium. And I'm so happy that Bill and I are going to tag-team today. We're going to be doing a little duet. No, we're not singing or dancing because you would all leave.

**BILL BASL:** Well, Wendy's dancing.

**WENDY SPENCER:** There we go, so we're going to – but anyway, Bill, thank you so much. Welcome.

**BILL BASL:** Thank you, Wendy, and welcome to all of our AmeriCorps colleagues from throughout the country. We are very pleased, as Wendy said, to host you for the next three days at our 2016 AmeriCorps Symposium. I'm delighted to share the stage again with you, Wendy. This feels like we are co-presenting at the Emmy Awards in a way.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Kind of, kind of.

**BILL BASL:** But except instead of those swag bags that you see under your chair that usually have some swag in them, you'll find instead the Mandatory Supplementary Guidance or the Application Instructions.

**WENDY SPENCER:** All right!

**BILL BASL:** Just want you wanted.

**WENDY SPENCER:** I think that was the Deputy Director of AmeriCorps cheering. So four years ago at this very meeting, we shared a vision to the entire field of National Service, and I want to know if you could remember, this is a test, can you remember what that acronym was? Do you all know? Do you happen to recall? What is it? Oh my gosh, they know it!

**BILL BASL:** They actually knew it! I don't know how they remembered!

**WENDY SPENCER:** How do they – I'm so impressed that you all actually remembered the EDGE reference. I mean, they're so much smarter than I ever anticipated.

**BILL BASL:** Well, they are.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So much.

**BILL BASL:** They understand EDGE, and they know that the E stands for Expanding Economic Opportunity; the D is for Driving Innovation and Impact; the G means Grow National Service and Volunteerism; and the final E is for Explaining Why Service Matters.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So when we came up with this EDGE initiative, we knew it was very ambitious. We knew there were stretch goals and new priorities to present to you and to work very closely with you. There were some BHAGs, do you remember the Big Hairy Audacious Goals? That's Mr. BHAG. He is traveling around the country looking to work with you on what your BHAG is. What do you want to do in your community? And you've been doing it, and we're going to summarize some of those BHAGs that you've met today. – And a lot of this, some of this was out of our comfort zone, some of it was new and innovative, but you all responded in a very big way today. So we're going to share some of those BHAG accomplishments, and then behind each one we're going to challenge all of us for what's next with National Service.

**BILL BASL:** Well you know, Wendy, a lot has happened in the last four years. For one thing, we both have had a chance to see our country up close, and oftentimes through the eyes of AmeriCorps members. You have been to 48 states, I've been to 44, but who's really counting? We are willing to go anywhere and talk to anyone at any time to advance the mission, the mission of National Service.

**WENDY SPENCER:** I have South Dakota and North Dakota next, and I'm going to get there before the end of the year, and every single trip has been a pure joy. Many of you I've visited several times, but each time we had a mission, we spread the word about AmeriCorps and National Service, your commission, and just each time was really great. Bill, you've really been the road warrior as well, and I think it's why you still look so very, very young, yes.

**BILL BASL:** Very young but very little hair. But you know, Wendy, I think this whole idea of the motto of AmeriCorps is "Getting Things Done," but yours is "We Do It All." And even with all of the late nights and long hours, you have done so many things, and you have the energy, and clearly you have the love for this job.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Thanks, it's by really great.

**BILL BASL:** Now let's just take a minute to think about what we've accomplished together. In just three weeks, we will mark an extraordinary milestone. We will surpass 1 million AmeriCorps members serving.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Woo-hoo! Woo!

**BILL BASL:** So we put together a little video to celebrate, so let's play the video.

[video]

**WENDY SPENCER:** Isn't that great? I love that, it's really good! So this is out on social media now, so please post it, repost it, share it, get the word out, and talk to your members about each one of them, this year, 2016, is one of 1 of 1 million who have pledged to serve our country through AmeriCorps. It really is an amazing milestone, and everywhere I go and I talk about reaching this moment, leaders from all over the country are really impressed, and they really take kind of a – really!? I mean, they just take a step aside and say, “1 million!” That's truly a movement so it's really very exciting. Now, I hope all of you are planning on doing induction ceremonies on October 7<sup>th</sup>, but if you can't and you're doing it in the next 60 days, make sure to reiterate that message and certainly show this public service announcement at your ceremonies. And October 7<sup>th</sup> is going to be very, very special. Now, I can't tell you the unique opportunity and event we're going to do yet, because it's a secret, but I'll give you a hint: it's going to be out of this world. So, hmm, I wonder what that is, so stay tuned for that.

**BILL BASL:** Thanks, Wendy, and we'll try to ruminate on what “out of this world” means. Thanks to the service of these 1 million AmeriCorps, members, we are making progress on some of the toughest issues facing our communities and our country, from hunger to homelessness to disasters and the drop-out rate, and the capacity of State Commissions is growing once again. So critical to our success are those Commissions who are making those big contributions throughout the country. More programs are using evidence now and data to drive community impact, and our public-private partnerships are off the charts, with CNCS programs alone leveraging more than \$1.26 billion in outside resources last year.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So when we share this around the country and we say the Federal investment that we are honored to receive from the appropriation from Congress with the support of the President at \$1.1 billion, to have it matched and exceeded from local support at \$1.26 billion is a huge, huge impact, and it says a lot of things. It says that what you're doing, people are willing to put their organizations, their nonprofits, their philanthropic dollars behind, and to back you, so it's really significant. In fact, of the \$1.26 billion, \$1 billion of that is leveraged by AmeriCorps, so it's very, very significant. The other is Social Innovation funds and Senior Corps programs as well, so congratulations.

Another big milestone this year was, of course, Mayor, County, and Travel Day of Recognition for National Service, and you hit 3,539 mayors, local government officials, people randomly. We had members of Congress even signing up, which was just amazing, and this is something that

mayors do not take lightly. They really do want to proclaim their support and thank the AmeriCorps members and the Senior Corps volunteers to make sure that we are getting the word out about their good service in their communities. They represent 178 million Americans, and as you've heard me talk about, when I mention this to members of Congress they really – it's unbelievable that when they look at the chart that I give them of their state, peppered with all the dots from all the local officials who have embraced AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, they all say, "Wow, this really says a lot about your program to have the very local leaders supporting you."

Another recent milestone this year, Voices for National Service issued a study, and asked citizens what their opinions were of spending Federal dollars on AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, and you see the stat there. 83% of those polled said that they really wanted to see funding for AmeriCorps and Senior Corps either maintained or increased, and there was some really additional support for that where they believe that – in high numbers, 78% 80%, 83% -- believe that National Service programs helps young people get jobs. They believe that it restores patriotism and civic duty. They believe it helps replace government handouts and reduces these handouts, and also empowers people to be independent. These are very important American values. Everyone really wants to be a part of this so it's really pretty amazing.

And then the last milestone – or not the last but the last one I'll mention right now – is really significant, and congratulations with your impact and your ability to explain why service matters, you had the highest appropriation for AmeriCorps funding in our agency's history at a \$40 million increase. Congratulations, it's really amazing! And that was because of you all, what you did to get the word out, and because you were putting together amazing, amazing programs and showing that impact.

**BILL BASL:** Well, achieving this result has been really a team effort. I know I have made over 50 visits to Capitol Hill, but listen to what Wendy has done to take this message even further. She has met with 75 mayors, 189 governors, lieutenant-governors, and members of Congress, and when the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the House sees Wendy, he gives her a hug. But this result isn't because of just one person, it's a testament to the value of AmeriCorps and the reflection of the hard work of many people in this room who tell our story and show our impact. The budget and other successes we just highlighted were because of you. You made this happen. It was your hard work. It was your commitment and above all your leadership. So our hats are off to each and every one of you who are here today and those you represent for this fabulous AmeriCorps field. You are some of the most dedicated groups of professionals we have ever known. We are also so proud and impressed with what you have achieved, and with that we know what we'll have in the future, and the future will even be more success.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So are you continuing to be fired up with this great year? Yes? Absolutely? So we're not going to slow down. You know, Harris Wofford said something I love. He said, "We face some big challenges in our country every year, every day, every months, but we also have big citizens to respond, dedicated men and women who are ready to answer the call to serve, to make our communities and our nation stronger." And that's what each of you are doing. You're leading that effort. It is very hard, I know, to work with a Federal appropriation. There are a lot of rules and regulations, but they're all there for a reason, and I thank you so much for persevering, pushing through that, and making sure that you're giving opportunities for

young and young-at-heart to serve through AmeriCorps. It's really exciting. So now let's go back to EDGE for a minute because they remembered, I don't know how they remembered, but they remembered the EDGE priorities, and let's talk a little bit about that, Bill.

**BILL BASL:** So let's talk about what the E means again – E, Expanding Economic Opportunity. So this week, the Census Bureau announced that the number of people in poverty fell by 3.5 million, and that the poverty rate has seen its largest one-year drop since 1968, but far too many people and families and communities are still struggling. All of us see this every day, and we have a unique opportunity to help because our National Service does two of the most important things. One, it helps alleviate poverty by expanding individual and families opportunities. Think about the struggling third-grader who has a better shot at graduating from high school and better job prospects simply because an AmeriCorps tutor in elementary school helped them read at grade level.

Our nation has achieved an 82.3% high school graduation rate, a record high, and we are nearly on track to hit the 90% high school graduation rate by 2020, which has been set by a coalition of education advocates and America's Promise. You can bet that AmeriCorps and Senior Corps have helped move this needle, but as John Gomperts will tell you in tomorrow's Plenary, there is much more to be done. So the challenge under Expanding Opportunity, let's share information better. For instance, I think it's time that we figure out who serves as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members in one school district. Let's figure out a way how we marshal all those resources together so that together we make progress on high school graduation.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Pushing on the Expanding Economic Opportunities for All, we want to focus on veterans and military families, and this is a song that you've heard us sing for many, many years, but we want to continue to lean on this. It's so important. Think about a returning veteran who is having trouble readjusting to civilian life, whose whole economic prospects have changed because if an AmeriCorps member who reached out to them and connected them to a job, or actually served as an AmeriCorps member. Now this photo is Herb Haggot. Herb is an 86-year-young AmeriCorps member whom I met in Idaho – we've got the Idaho gang here today. Over the past several years of serving in AmeriCorps, Herb, a veteran himself, has successfully helped place 200 veterans in jobs. That is amazing, folks, it really is amazing.

Now Bill, this other photograph is Bill with a Marine Corps – ooh, rah – a Marine Corps veteran on 9/11 day just a couple of weeks ago in Baton Rouge. Bill is not the one in the Tyvek suit, that is the veteran, and Bill was able to spend some time with him in Baton Rouge – we've both been in Baton Rouge in the last couple of weeks – and the challenge here is we need to do more, folks. There is so much more to do. We're not hitting nearly enough opportunities, providing enough opportunities for veterans to serve in AmeriCorps, and we can certainly do more to serve families, veterans and military families.

So I encourage you to do a couple of things. Continue to work on developing veteran programming. This is an area where we need more support from. Recruit them to serve. Veterans bring leadership skills, their commitment to serve. It's really, really important. They become great AmeriCorps leaders. We recently signed an agreement, a Memorandum of Understanding, to get AmeriCorps Incorporated into the Transition Assistance Program, the TAP program with

the Department of Defense that helps hundreds of thousands of veterans participate each year in their transition in their life from much of the war-torn areas back to America, state-side.

So contact your local military base or your local vet program to introduce yourself, and ask your programs to do the same. So in the trainings that Bill and I know so well as commission staff and directors, in those training with your programs ask them for recruiting purposes to go introduce themselves to the veterans programs, to the base if you are so fortunate to have a base in your state, and talk to them about the fact that we are a great place for veterans to serve, and also to participate in the Pinning Ceremony that we'll now make an annual event on Veterans Day. There is a Pinning Ceremony that I had the honor of participating in for AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, and it's really a wonderful thing to be able to pin this special, special identified veteran or those serving veterans each year. So I encourage you to do that and there will be more information coming soon on that.

**BILL BASL:** So Wendy, I have another example, if you will, on how we can expand economic opportunity through matching the Ed Award, and I'll just give the audience a hint. This is going to require a little bit of your participation. So a little background – AmeriCorps, as you know, provides a pathway to education and employment for those who serve. Since 1994, AmeriCorps members have earned more than \$3.3 billion in education awards, helping hundreds of thousands of alums pay for college and pay back student loans. As of today, 184 colleges and universities match the Education Award. Thanks especially to our colleagues in Vermont and Montana for helping bring this to most of the colleges in their respective states, and now you have a chance to participate. So please raise your hand if the college or university you attended matches the Education Award.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Very good, we've got a few.

**BILL BASL:** We've got a few.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So a year from now, we should see all of the hands raised.

**BILL BASL:** Right, we should, and so the challenge is, given the skyrocketing cost of college and the growing student loan debt, we will need more colleges to match the Education Award. It's a win-win all around. Colleges get more public-minded and public-spirited leaders, and alums can stretch their education dollars further. Another challenge, and there is a lot of dialogue about free tuition, but we need to figure out a way to bring National Service also into that dialogue.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Another providing economic opportunities actually leans in on the recruiting AmeriCorps members, and one of the obstacles that we have right now with recruitment that you all have told us is that the improving economy is actually our competition. Now, that's a good thing because we want the economy to improve. The technology jobs, new entrepreneurial jobs are really competing with those who are thinking about serving and those that might have an obstacle in the way, and you know what that obstacle is? – Housing. If we can solve the housing burden for AmeriCorps members who do not have the resources to pay for their own housing, support, or don't have a family member they can live with, if we can

overcome this one obstacle, I know that the applications to AmeriCorps will surge, soar, and we will have some more.

So in response to that, and this comes from talking to many of you, we have a brand new Eli Segal fellow, [PH] Rafe Manir. Rafe, right here, here's your new Eli Segal fellow, just started about 2 weeks ago. So as an AmeriCorps alum, he competed for this position, it was very highly competitive, and Rafe, one of his responsibilities is to work on finding housing solutions for AmeriCorps members. He's going to be contacting many of you, asking about your ideas, looking for your best practices. He's going to be looking at are there regional or even national partnerships, putting together maybe a toolkit to share with your programs and commissions so that you can get the word out for you, as leaders, of solutions for housing because I know if you can solve the housing problem, if we can solve this together, I know that this will really provide more opportunities for people to apply to become AmeriCorps members. So Rafe, you've got a big job and I know you can do it. You're going to do a great job with it.

Now, another wonderful milestone was a couple years ago we had the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary for AmeriCorps, and it was such a great moment, and one of the great ideas that President Obama announced was Employers for National Service, where he asked all employers all over the country to recruit, aggressively recruit and market job opportunities within their organizations to AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alums. Well, I'm happy to report today that 406 employers have responded, and they represent 2.3 million job opportunities across America, and there's more announcements coming very soon of some other large, large employers. There's a slide coming up now, it should come up with some of the great – like Delta Airlines just joined. I think they have 80,000 employees, and of course Disney and CSX Railroad. MasterCard is a new one of our Employers of National Service. We're adding some every day.

And here is my challenge to all of you – this is great success, we're at 406, by the end of the year, December 31<sup>st</sup>, I hope that our challenge is that we have 500 Employers of National Service, and I'm going to give you a hint at how we can get there very easily. Commissions in the house, I want you to go back to your commissioners when you go back to your home states on Monday, and write a memo or call your commissioners and say, “We want every governor's commissioner, every commissioner appointed by the governor, to sign their own employment agency, whomever they work for, to sign their own agency up as an Employer of National Service. It's very easy, work with our staff, it doesn't cost any money, and the benefits are huge. You are actually letting the world know that you value AmeriCorps and you value Peace Corps, and now you want them to apply for openings in your organization.”

I was talking to very a large employer at an event with Karen Baker in California last week, and they said, “Wow, I don't know why we haven't done this yet! We're actually looking for these great millennials to join our organization but we want to find something that sort of points out those with high quality,” and AmeriCorps offers that as a solution. So are you with me? Can we hit 500 by December 31<sup>st</sup>? Yes, we can do it! And of course every one of you should be an Employer of National Service, but go after your commissioners, which there are 1,100, I believe, commissioners across the country in 52 states, and also employers in your communities as well.

**BILL BASL:** So let's get back to EDGE and D, Driving Innovation and Impact, and let's talk about accountability. We need to build on our foundation and move service to the next level, we must have a strong commitment to making it real and making it measurable. To start with, we need to make sure that every taxpayer dollar is spent appropriately. We need to be excellent stewards of the resources that are entrusted to us.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So the challenge – and I vowed that I would share this at every stage I'm on, every time I'm with leaders in the National Service field of all types – the challenge is in our system of National Service, accountability is a shared responsibility. Preventing waste, fraud, and abuse is everyone's job. Whose job? Everyone's job, not the other people, our job. Another challenge is this means that doing criminal history background checks – on time, every time. When? On time, every time – not occasionally, not every now and then, not for some, but for all. If a Federal investment from our agency touches any human being, that human being should have a criminal history background check. Are we in? We got it, and we should do it on time, and just charge right in at the beginning of the year. Let's get this done, knocked out, and then you can rest for the rest of the year, and then it needs to be repeated as you add new staff or new AmeriCorps members to your portfolio.

So really seriously, y'all, being in compliance and accountable is something that we cannot ever take for granted. It's very, very serious. We are investing the public's money, your tax dollars, my tax dollars, and Congress must be confident that we are spending and investing these dollars with the highest efficacy. So I know you're going to lean in on this, and drive this motorcycle which is going to come up next on the slide, this leaning in, it's coming. There you go, that's you leaning in and charging ahead and making sure that every dollar is spent wisely.

**BILL BASL:** Speaking of leaning in, one of the challenges that we brought to you this year and we want to talk about today is leaning in in the serious area of opioid issues with the support we're providing commissions through program development grants. One of the ways AmeriCorps is leaning in is around the [PH] grow on this problem of heroin and prescription drug abuse is because of these sobering facts: 1) Each year more Americans die from drug overdoses than in traffic accidents; 2) Since 1999, the number of overdose deaths involving opioids has nearly quadrupled; 3) Opioids claim 100 people each day in the United States; and 4) America represents 5% of the world's population yet we consume 80% of the world's opioid supply. This is a serious and growing problem in the United States, and leaders at every level and of every political persuasion, from the President to governors to mayors and county officials, are all concerned about this major challenge.

**WENDY SPENCER:** These are sobering statistics but I want to encourage you that there is a light at the end of the tunnel here, that service can be a part of the solution, that we can pursue this problem with a purpose, and I'm so pleased that we've put in our new 2017 NOFO a priority for reducing or preventing opioid and prescription drug abuse as one of our serious priorities, so it's very, very important. And we also offered a Planning Grant for state commissions to address two things: the opioid crisis and another critical challenge that we're all seeing in our communities – crime, civil unrest, and the breakdown of trust between police and citizens. These grants will support commissions in addressing the problem, exploring existing service providers,

and providing technical assistance to support organizations to apply for AmeriCorps grants in this priority.

And I am so pleased that so many of you responded, that 22 state commissions will receive Planning Grants to pursue these two issues. 16 commission opted for the focus on opioids, and 6 on public safety. So I'd like the staff for the winners of the Planning Grants to stand – Arizona, Alabama, Colorado, California – stay standing, Connecticut, D.C., Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, Nevada, Oklahoma, Ohio, South Carolina, Washington, and West by god Virginia. Congratulations to all of you. I'm so happy that you all are looking at creative ways to address these two important issues, and it's the number one conversation I have with governors, mayors, county officials, just about everywhere I travel.

And for those of you that did not apply for a Planning Grant, many of you said, "Look, we're going to use some best practices, either what we're doing in our state or draw from other states, like Kentucky and others who are already diving into this in a big way, and we're well on our way," so I think all of us are going to be looking at this important issue. So that is the light, you are the light and the way to solve and address this important problem, these two important problems.

**BILL BASL:** Another area where we're leaning in is during the tragic flooding that hit the state of Louisiana. Last month Louisiana experienced an unprecedented event, a 1,000-year flood, and National Service was quick on the scene, and we are still there. Wendy and I both visited our teams in the Baton Rouge area within the last 3 weeks. More than 1,000 National Service members have helped Louisiana disaster survivors. So far they have achieved these impressive results – they've cleaned up over 10,750 cubic yards of debris, which is equivalent to about 770 dump truck loads of debris. They have gutted and mucked 187 homes. They have assessed over 225 homes. They've collected and distributed 242 tons of food and 444 tons of supplies. They've assisted FEMA with disaster survivor assistance, recovery center support, mapping, and logistics.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Judd, where is Judd, the Louisiana state commission. Judd, stand up if you will. Judd Jeansonne! Judd, I want us all to agree to support you from every state. This is a devastating, devastating disaster. My unofficial assessment from being in the area for a couple days is that you could drive for 2 hours in a straight or a crooked line and not be out of sight of a flood-impacted structure. That's unofficial but I think that's, from my own experience, that's about right. It is unbelievable, and it will take years to work on repairing and replacing the homes and the items lost from the businesses and from the citizens, and Judd, we all want to see how we can help you, and I want to challenge every commission, every National Service program to think about what you can do, whether you raise money in your own state and send it their way, or send items that they promote that are needed, and you know my story about used clothing. The only good use of used clothing is to hold a garage with it and donate the money you raise to the charity that's going to help Judd and the state of Louisiana. But it's really, really, important.

And also Heather Foster is here from West Virginia, and Brent Kossick from South Carolina, you all has also had terrible disasters this year that you're still dealing with as well, so we want to offer our support for you as well. It's really, really amazing, over the last four years we have responded to 200 disasters, we as a family, as a National Service family. It's really, really impressive how sophisticated you have become, your programs have become, our AmeriCorps Disaster Response teams, we have a great team, our Disaster Services Unit who leads this effort. Right now in fact the White House is convening virtually a daily meeting almost, or certainly weekly, and right at this moment there is a meeting, Judd, to help Louisiana in the White House right now, and to talk about how we are continuing to help you.

Now, you know what's interesting about disasters. If you ever work in a disaster, you cry a little bit and you laugh a little bit, and I'm going to give you a little laugh of a story. I met this young man a couple of weeks ago, his name is Zach Sanders, who is a team leader for FEMA Corps, the AmeriCorps program we partner with with FEMA, and Zach is really – he's a real underachiever. He's got a bachelor's in International Relations and a master's in Public Administration, and he looks about 15. But anyway, he's one of our great team leaders, and Zach was giving me a tour of the large shelter in Baton Rouge at the Convention Center, and it was an amazing operation, and he was partnered with American Red Cross at the time.

But he told me he also spent some time serving this year in Houston with the floods, and I said, "Oh yeah, how was that for you?" And he said, "Well, I had kind of an interesting experience." He said, "You know the showers, the temporary showers." So of you are serving – and there's a picture of one – if you're serving as an AmeriCorps member or a volunteer, oftentimes in a disaster-prone area or impacted area there's no place to stay. Citizens have taken up all the hotel rooms, people are living with families, so we often have to place AmeriCorps members in fellowship halls and convention centers and the like, and there's not enough showers or restrooms.

So in this particular case, our great friends with the Southern Baptist Convention provided showers, a trailer of showers. So what you're looking at there is a shower trailer. All right, so there you see where you can enter the shower from there, and I've toured one recently and closed the door behind me. It's quite interesting in the little remote shower there. And go back to the other picture, if you will. So on this particular day, Zach is taking his shower, and you have 5 minutes in each time, and they're staffed because you've got to move people in and out. Sometimes 100 people have to take a shower in a very short period of time. So Zach is taking his shower, and all of a sudden the water shut off. Just right in the middle of his shower, it just cut off, and he thought, "Well, that's odd." And he waited, he waited, and nothing, and he said, "Well, I guess that's it for me." So just as he was about to step out of the shower, the trailer started driving off. It was taking off, and it was going to its next location! And there's Zach, in all his natural self, so he grabs the towel and he wraps it around him and he opens that door you see there and he leans out and he says, "Hey, stop, I'm still in here!" So you never know what's going to happen to you if you're taking a shower in a disaster as an AmeriCorps member, but I really, I love that. I just cried till tears came when Zach told me that story.

You have some big fans in our disaster work, and one of them is the Worldwide Director for the American Red Cross, and that's Gail McGovern, and I can't tell you, every time I see Gail

McGovern she says to me, “Wendy, I can’t thank you enough for the AmeriCorps members, and we try to hire everyone that comes across and serves with us because they are amazing,” and here’s a message from Gail for you.

**GAIL MCGOVERN:** Hi, everyone. I’m Gail McGovern, and I have the privilege of being the President and CEO of the American Red Cross. I am so sorry I can’t be with you today but I am grateful for the opportunity to recognize AmeriCorps for its incredible contributions to our nation. I hear that AmeriCorps will reach its 1 million member milestone sometime next month. What an incredible accomplishment. Congratulations to everyone involved in the program. You’ve made such a positive impact in vulnerable communities all across the country. I’m also delighted to send a heartfelt thank-you to all the AmeriCorps staff members and State Service Commissions that help to deliver vital American Red Cross services.

Our partnership with AmeriCorps is so critically important to our mission, especially in preparedness programs, disaster response, and recovery. When you try to quantify the Red Cross has gotten from AmeriCorps members, the numbers are just staggering. In total, 1,200 AmeriCorps members have completed a Red Cross program and earned the Eli Segal Education Award. Since the year 2000, Red Cross-AmeriCorps members helped in over 7,500 disaster response incidents, and provided assistance to more than 550,000 disaster victims. And in just the last 2 years, our Red Cross-AmeriCorps members reached over 35,000 individuals with prepared education and training through our Home Fire Campaign and through the Pillowcase Project.

The team here at the Red Cross is always amazed at the skill, the experience, and the dedication of our AmeriCorps members and alumni. Their passion for our mission and the way they get things done is second to none. That's why we make it a priority to hire AmeriCorps members and we're so proud that we joined the Employers National Service. We've hired 87 paid staff with national experience, and we currently have 59 AmeriCorps alums that accepted paid staff positions when their terms of service are done. They come to the Red Cross ready, and they embrace our humanitarian culture. I'm incredibly proud to consider them valued colleagues.

So on behalf of everyone from the American Red Cross, thank you to AmeriCorps, and thank you as well to the State Service Commission for your tremendous leadership to cultivate such strong professionals in AmeriCorps programs. We're so privileged that you're such an important part of our life-saving mission. The Red Cross looks forward to continuing our tremendous partnership with AmeriCorps in the years ahead.

**WENDY SPENCER:** That's really great, really great. I'll thank Gail for all of you for doing that. It's really great.

**BILL BASL:** I just also wanted to thank Harvey and your team at the Red Cross for making this possible and for the work you do every day in Louisiana, around the country, and actually around the world. Where else are we leaning in? Well, we're leaning in to support Native American communities. In fiscal year 2016, AmeriCorps will make one of its largest Tribal Organizations investment over the last 11 years. Our investment is up by 74% since 2012.

**WENDY SPENCER:** That's right!

**BILL BASL:** Yesterday at our Pre-Conference for Tribal Grantees, we showed a special video by Chairman Tom Cole from Oklahoma. Representative Cole is also the Chairman of the subcommittee that funds CNCS, and a member of the Chickasaw Nation. I thought it would be appropriate for us to hear and see what Chairman Cole said.

**CHAIRMAN TOM COLE:** Welcome to our nation's capital, and congratulations on being selected as a grantee of the Corporation for National and Community Service. As a member of the Chickasaw Nation, I'm glad to see more tribes participating in National Service. AmeriCorps members are tackling a range of challenges from tutoring youth and preserving Native languages, to preventing substance abuse and caring for the elderly. As they help others, these members also help themselves by gaining new skills, earning college money, and becoming leaders.

I appreciate Wendy Spencer and her team at CNCS for expanding their outreach and making record investments in Native American communities. Many of these communities face difficult challenges. Through AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, tribes are tapping the wisdom and talents of Native people to make a difference where it's needed most. Service to others is, and always has been, a way of life in Native communities. I commend and thank you for your continuing this tradition, and engaging in a new generation in service. I hope you enjoy your conference, learn from your peers, and take valuable lessons home to do even more for your communities.

**WENDY SPENCER:** Wow, that's really great. Wow, and that is your Chairman. When I travel in Oklahoma I say, "He may be your Congressman, but he's my Chairman," and he is really one of the very few key leaders that has to focus on our funding, that represents the larger members of Congress, and it is so great to hear from him directly, and he really does appreciate the work that you're doing to put together great AmeriCorps programs.

In the G for Growing National Service, you've really responded to this effort with the Taskforce on Expanding National Service that President Obama challenged me and also asked Cecilia Munoz, Domestic Policy Advisory, to co-chair and serve, and so many good things have happened over the last several years – FEMA Corps, School Turnaround AmeriCorps, Justice AmeriCorps, Opportunity Youth AmeriCorps, Refugee AmeriCorps, Elder Justice AmeriCorps, Summer Opportunity AmeriCorps, and now the Delta Regional Authority DeltaCorps. It is just amazing, there's so many, literally thousands of new AmeriCorps members have an opportunity to serve as a result of these partnerships, and tens of millions of dollars have been invested as a result of this effort.

And we need to do more. I love the fact that the Service Year Alliance is looking at every American, every young American having the opportunity to serve, and encourage all of our youth to serve. We've just signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Service Year Alliance to expand AmeriCorps and to encourage young people to serve in their communities and do partnerships with their communities. The challenge – we've got to keep doing it. Congress is only to appropriate so much funding, and we can't just rest on the appropriation of Congress. We have to continue to find ways to find other investments to match and expand those opportunities.

And Bill, you really were doing this way ahead of your time because you actually were looking at this in Washington programs in the '80s, and you were one of the pioneers for finding additional ways for Americans to serve, so it's really great.

**BILL BASL:** Thanks for that reminder. It was pre-internet, too.

**WENDY SPENCER:** It was, totally. There wasn't even any fax machines back then, I don't think. I don't know, maybe.

**BILL BASL:** Well, building capacity is another priority that we have, and I think there's no better example to show that than what we're doing in the field and what we've done over the last several years to invest in training. Through Wendy's leadership, we funded regional trainings for the very first time 3 years ago. This past year, we funded another very successful year of regional training conferences. Thanks to the State Commissions in Alabama, Indiana, Massachusetts and Nevada, and to AmeriCorps Service Commission for hosting these regional conferences, we want to thank you all for making that possible.

**WENDY SPENCER:** They did a great job.

**BILL BASL:** You know, we see this also as a very cost-effective way to deliver training because well over 2,000 individuals who represent AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA, and the Senior Corps were participating in these opportunities. And so now in 2017, next year, we want to announce publicly those states that took the initiative to host our 2017 conferences, and those are Arizona, Ohio, Maryland and Florida, so could you please thank them for standing up and hosting our 2017 regional conferences.

**WENDY SPENCER:** All right, awesome!

**BILL BASL:** Also this year we invested close to \$6 million in state service commissions to help build their capacity in the Commission Investment Funds. These funds were unmatched, and they give a key boost to our key state partners, which oversee three-fourths of the AmeriCorps resources. The challenge – we need to reach out and bring new organizations into the AmeriCorps family. This year is a building year, so build. When you build, be sure to measure because that is one of the most relevant and important pieces of information that we have to provide to be able to demonstrate and document how we have built.

**WENDY SPENCER:** The last E in EDGE is my favorite one, Explain why service matters, and it's my favorite one because by then you're already running a great AmeriCorps program. You're doing it right. You have your criminal history checks done on time, every time? – Yes, and you really do know how to put together a program and objectives that makes a difference in communities. So now it's time to document your impact, as Bill said, build the body of evidence that proves the value of national service and volunteerism, share the story, use data and impact statistics to help tell the story, and as I always say, statistics aren't valuable without the story, and the story isn't validated without the statistics, so you must have both.

Engaged champions, validators – I loved seeing Gail McGovern, I loved seeing our Chairman of our Appropriations on that video. They are our validators. They're telling us that this is working and it's something that our country needs more of. Get your corporate leaders involved, your nonprofit leaders, your chamber of commerce types, your mayors as we do on Mayors Day and others. We have so many great opportunities just this week that we're going to have. One is going to be the Harkin Awards tomorrow – hmm, wonder who will win, it's very exciting. That's at the midday tomorrow I think in our Plenary.

Then, of course, we have the 1 million AmeriCorps milestone. We have new members of Congress and a new administration coming. Embrace this. This is our opportunity to tell the story that you've built so well and built a great foundation on. We have state profiles that are being prepared right now, and impact stories. You are going to be getting that email very soon, probably from Sandy Scott, asking you to send that information in. And next year, the first Tuesday of every April, you've always got a year in advance notice, Mayor, County, and Travel Day of Recognition for National Service on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, and since we hit 3,539, wow, we go for 4,000 this year! Awesome! I know Alabama can lead the way because they've done such a great job with that.

The other challenge that I want to share with you is our branding. So I brought a little branding here, yes. This is what we need to do to promote our programs. Our gear should be worn every day. Every single day an AmeriCorps member should be representing the "A." If it's not in a tee-shirt or a college shirt or some kind of apparel that is appropriate for their service, they absolutely at the very least should be wearing a nametag with the "A" on it, and I actually prefer a nametag with the "A" on it as opposed to a button or sticker, and here's why. When you wear a button or sticker, that says, "This is who I support." If you wear a name badge that has the "A" on it, that says, "This is who I am." There's a big difference, folks. So certainly every day wear gear, but if it's not appropriate for some reason, certainly urge your programs to have a name badge with the "A" on it so it tells everyone "I am AmeriCorps."

Are we in with that? Is that good? Yes! Branding is so important.

And then, of course, educating, making sure that as we see new members of Congress come on board, we see mayors, elected officials, community leaders, we need to take the responsibility to tell them who you are, what you do, how you invest the public dollars, and the impact that you're having. It is important to own that responsibility to educate and share the impact, and also to thank those who have been a part of investing and making decisions to support AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, VISTA, NCCC, Social Innovation Fund, all our programs. It's important to say thank you as well.

**BILL BASL:** Yes, this is a year to build, this is a year to expand, but it doesn't necessarily mean building always has to be something new. It's building upon success, and the success we saw this year during the Flint water crisis was one of those examples. AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps leaders helped provide over 5,000 cases of water to individuals in Flint who needed it, over 4,000 water filters installed. But most importantly, you should know that every child going to school in Flint this year will be in a school where an AmeriCorps member is serving. That is building upon success, that's addressing a high need, and that's building upon looking at needs

that need to be addressed using service as a strategy to make that contribution. So go out and build.

**WENDY SPENCER:** So just to conclude, I am so pleased, both of us, Bill and I are, that you are our partners in empowering citizens, promoting and bolstering civil society, expanding opportunities for Americans, both those who serve and those we are serving, encouraging personal responsibility, strengthening our communities, uniting us as Americans. – And I have such hope that as I see service throughout the country, and I see people as I did just this past weekend on Saturday morning in Casper, Wyoming, and we were – yeah, Casper, Wyoming – we were serving together, doing an amazing project at a wonderful trail, and painting murals and beautifying the pathway, and I was so honored to be serving with people from different backgrounds, different places, different races, different economic status, different religions, and we were all there together for one purpose, and it gave us sort of a sense of pride.

So you are a part of this movement. It's the most wonderful calling that anyone can have in America is to have the responsibility to lead an AmeriCorps program or any National Service program. And our team at the Corporation for National and Community Service is proud to provide the support each and every day to you to make sure that you can lead with success, and I'd like to add all of my colleagues at the Corporation for National and Community Service to stand. These are the men and women who are proud to support you, just the ones that are here today. If you'll stand, colleagues, just as Corporation for National and Community Service. This is just a few of my amazing colleagues, Bill's amazing colleagues that care so much about each one of you, and we want to make sure that we have one goal – you are successful.

So Bill, it's been a lot of fun. We've got great, great success stories, and we've given the group some challenges which I know they're going to help us with, and you've got an amazing couple of days of training, some inspiration, some gatherings. Make sure that on Friday afternoon when you walk out the doors of this hotel, that you can add one new friend to your cadre of friends and meet someone new. Make that part of your goal this week – a new colleague in service. And I hope you have a wonderful, wonderful, couple of days of learning and inspiration, and we'll be here right alongside you the entire time. Congratulations, AmeriCorps programs, and welcome to D.C.!