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OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY THE VICE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
PRESENTATION OF NATIONAL VOLUNTEER AWARDS  
KENNEDY CENTER  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

April 24, 1975

There are some observations I would like to make about the nature of these awards. This year, the National Volunteer Awards are going to individuals and private organizations who have been active in drug abuse, rehabilitation of the physically handicapped, help for the aging, combatting juvenile delinquency, urban renewal, and sound ecology.

Governments, at all levels, are also involved in these areas. This raises an interesting point. Since government is involved, why then must we continue to promote volunteer, private citizen efforts? The answer to that question goes right to the very roots of what America is all about. All the great humane crusades in this Country were initially launched by private initiative, sometimes by only a single man or woman with an inspired vision.

Look at the health field. All the great national crusades against tuberculosis, cancer, heart disease and mental illness, for example, were initially spearheaded by volunteer organizations, well ahead of government. This has been so because there are unique attributes that derive from personal involvement and commitment.

First of all, volunteers are usually the pioneers. They can move quickly, as soon as they sense an unmet need. They can pursue their vision -- with 1,000, or 100 or simply one believer.

Government, on the other hand, must first gain fairly wide public acceptance and support before a program can be adopted and public funds committed. Those of you in volunteer work really establish the beachheads. And the subsequent arrival of government on the scene is the best proof that your efforts have succeeded. You are often the conscience, the goad, the guide, the sensitive antennae of human need for the rest of the Nation. Voluntary effort also creates a highly favorable environment for the cause you are supporting.

When people in government are engaged in a worthy human effort, this is fine and it is commendable. But it is their job. And they are being compensated for it. But when a bank president, or a teacher, or a carpenter, or a housewife, for example, take time from busy professional and personal lives to devote themselves to a cause, then, that cause assumes a persuasiveness among their neighbors and their community that no official effort can duplicate.

Obviously, what we need is both, citizens who recognize their own problems and who are not afraid to tackle them on their own hook and with their own resources, and a government which is ready to follow Lincoln's wise advice, and that is to do for people those things which they cannot do for themselves. There is something truly inspiring about people spending themselves in a cause, not because they have to, but because they want to.

There is something compelling about a humane effort that is taken up by the people -- rather than handed down by government. A brilliant observer of the American scene who visited this Country over 150 years ago said it best. Alexis de Toqueville, in his book Democracy

in America, wrote: "The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens." The National Center for Voluntary Action was created precisely to sustain this healthy quality of the American character.

The presentation of these awards this evening is testimony to the success of your efforts. On behalf of the President, I warmly congratulate the National Center for Voluntary Action. And I warmly congratulate the award winners. Their lives symbolize one of the finest traits of a free people, the willingness to take a personal responsibility for the betterment of the world around them.

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