

Harris Wofford and another good friend of Martin Luther King, Congressman John Lewis, who had the idea for making the King holiday a day on, not a day off. And AmeriCorps volunteers—when we started—I signed this bill 6 years ago to make the King holiday a national holiday and a day of service, and I think we had 10,000 volunteers that day. Now we have hundreds of thousands of volunteers, all across America, doing things like what we did today, thanks in no small measure to you, sir. And we thank you very much for your leadership.

And now I just want to do one other thing. I want to acknowledge the young people who worked with me today—we were in there staining the bookcases in the computer room—because they made sure I didn't mess up too bad. [Laughter] So, thank you, Dietrich, Marcus, Dedra, Artile, and Shawntesse. Thank you. Raise your hands, all the people who worked with me. Thank you all very much. They're here somewhere. There they are, back there. [Applause]

I just want to say one final thing that I hope will go across America today. You look at all these young people here, with your T-shirts on, doing good things. Dr. King once gave a sermon at the National Cathedral here in Washington in which he said we are all caught up in—and he had a wonderful phrase—he said, “in an inescapable web of mutuality,” which is an elegant way of saying that I can never be fully what I want to be unless you have a chance to be fully what you want to be, and you can never be fully what you want to be unless I have a chance to be what I want to be; that we are in this together, that we are members of the community of this city, the community of this Nation, and the community of humanity.

And frankly, we all know that in the last 30-plus years since Martin Luther King left this Earth, we have forgotten that too much. And I have done my best to remind the American people of the truth of that at every single opportunity for 7 years now. And it is a source of immense pride and joy to me every time I see

people reaching across the lines that divide them to do things that lift us all up. This holiday embodies that. All these children embody that.

In my lifetime, and perhaps in the lifetime of our country, we have never, ever, ever before had at the same time so much economic prosperity and social progress, with the absence of internal crisis or external threat. And that means that we have an enormous obligation, those of us who are grown now, to make the most of this magic moment; to bring to all the people, the neighborhoods, and the children who haven't been a part of this economic prosperity a chance to live their dreams, too. To bring to bear—yes, you can clap for that. That's all right. [Applause] To bring to bear our best efforts to meet the long-term challenges of this country and not to forget that more than a billion people in this old world of ours still live on less than a dollar a day and that there are people, not only at home but around the world, that the United States ought to be lifting up.

And if you believe Martin Luther King was right, every time we give a child in America a chance, every time we give a child in Africa, Latin America, or Asia a chance, all the rest of us are better off, too. Every time you give a little, you always get more back. Let's remember that as Dr. King's enduring legacy.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:48 a.m. in the game room. In his remarks, he referred to Alex Orfinger, chairman of the board of directors, and Susan Linsky, executive director, Greater DC Cares; former NFL Washington Redskin Charles Mann; Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Washington, DC, Councilmembers Charlene Drew Jarvis, ward 4, and Sharon Ambrose, ward 6; and Boys & Girls Club members Dietrich Williams, Marcus Harrison, Dedra Gamble, Artile Wright, and Shawntesse Jefferson. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday proclamation of January 14 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.