

Remarks by President Obama at Points of Light Award Ceremony, White House, July 15, 2013

Well, good afternoon, everybody and welcome to the White House.

Twenty-three years ago, President George H.W. Bush began a tradition. He knew that across the country every day, Americans were finding ways to serve others, often with very few resources and very little recognition. So he created an award, the Point of Light Award, to recognize Americans who serve their neighbors and communities in innovative ways that inspire us all. So, before we actually present today's award, I'd like to take a moment to honor the man who made all this possible.

Much has been said about President Bush's own extraordinary life of service, but I'm not sure everybody fully appreciates how much he's done to strengthen our country's tradition of service. In addition to this award, he created the first White House office dedicated to promoting volunteerism. Today, thanks to the programs he championed, volunteerism has gone from something some people do some of the time to something lots of people do as a regular part of their lives. Since 1989, the number of Americans who volunteer has grown by more than 25 million. It's now a graduation requirement in many high schools and colleges. It's embedded in the culture of businesses large and small. And speaking for my family, volunteering has brought joy and meaning to Michelle and me and our daughters over the years, and I know that's the case for many of your families, too.

This national tradition may seem perfectly ordinary to many Americans. But, in fact, it reflects tremendous progress made over time. And today we can say that our country is a better and a stronger force for good in the world because, more and more, we are a people that serve. And for that, we have to thank President Bush, and Barbara Bush, who is just as committed as her husband to service, and has dedicated her life to it as well. (Applause.) The presidents who followed President Bush have had the good sense to continue this work. Even after leaving office, President Clinton and both President Bushes have come together to help people affected by natural disasters here at home and around the world -- a reminder that service is not a Democratic or a Republican value, but it's a core part of being an American. And at the White House today, we're proud to carry forward that legacy.