

United States of America  
White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative  
Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

MS. WILEY: Good morning. My name is Dorothy Wiley, and I am a resident of Shreveport, Louisiana. I am here to share with you for one minute before I introduce Secretary Preston, how my family life was transformed by two organizations. Too often, we take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, it forced my family and I to leave. We left with nothing, literally nothing, but the clothes on our back.

We relocated to Shreveport, Louisiana. Traumatized, devastated, and overwhelmed, it was time for us to start a new life. This is when Community Renewal International stepped in to our lives. Community Renewal donated land and they partnered with the Fuller Center for housing to build us and other Hurricane Katrina evacuees a new home. They just didn't build us a home, but they gave us a sense of hope and the neighborhood they built in, they brought restoration back to it. Community Renewal and the Fuller Center transformed our lives and I am very grateful, I am thankful.

Their hard work reflects back which God values. I feel truly connected to Community Renewal International and continue to volunteer with their programs that help to spread the love and even the love that they show to me. This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Community Development Block Grant Funding, and it is through the support of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the President's Faith-based and Community Initiative that organizations like Community Renewal and the Fuller Center are able to transform more lives like they did mine across the country.

It is my honor today to introduce to you the Secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Honorable Steve Preston. (Applause.)

SECRETARY PRESTON: Thank you, Dorothy. Good morning, everyone. Hope you are enjoying yourself here in Washington. Before I start, I just have to tell you, for those of you who don't get to spend much time here, I just really encourage you to get out there. It's a beautiful time of year, and just walk around the city and look at all the, just the tremendous number of remembrances we have around this city of the great things our country has done, what we have been through, and how people have served, because there really is no other place like it.

You know, I was thinking about addressing this group today on the issue of homelessness, and it occurred to me, not only the fact that homelessness has been with us for centuries, but how filled, you

United States of America  
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Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

know, our religious accounts are homelessness, from Islam to Buddhism, obviously, to the Old Testament is full of stories about homelessness and the New Testament starts with a story of homelessness in Bethlehem, and the one who is born there exhorts his followers to serve him by serving those in greatest need. So I think this is a very important issue for this group to be discussing and thinking through, and obviously, you all are so pivotal in making a difference for those who have such a desperate need in their lives. You know, homelessness is a daunting problem.

As I've said, it is as old as history. There aren't any easy answers. The difficulties must not stop us, though, from developing an effective set of responses. My own department has led the federal response to providing shelter for homelessness. We provide targeted grants to states, to local governments, to nonprofits, to develop and operate housing assistance programs for homeless individuals and I think sometimes we often forget for their entire families because it's not just an individual issue. Certainly those of us who spent time in those shelters, you know, can vividly recall the times we've seen people walk in with their children and we see how deep the need goes.

Many of you have stepped forward to provide shelter or services, working in partnership with my Department and others. I just want to thank you so much for the work you do there. We need your efforts because there are about 750,000 homeless people on any given night or any given day in America. That figure, any figure, on homelessness used to be more of a guess than anything else, but now we do have information that helps us better pinpoint the number of homelessness and their needs. Last year, in fact, HUD announced its first ever annual Homeless Assessment Report and through the data collection for that report and the subsequent analysis of that data, we are learning a great deal about the demographics of homelessness. Prior to that report, we didn't even know how many homeless people there were in this country. Now with this report we do have sort of a point in time snapshot that gives us greater insight into where the homeless are which allows us to help them much more effectively. And we're going further developing that information necessary to see the patterns of homelessness over time which we think will be very helpful.

One of those patterns which many of you are familiar with is chronic homelessness. These are people who are living on the streets for more than just a few days. Many of them are mentally ill or addicted. Many of them are physically disabled. They are the most vulnerable among us, and the hardest to house and many times the hardest to serve. The chronically homeless are people who generally have been

United States of America  
White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative  
Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

homeless for more than a year, often we're seeing them cycle back into homelessness and there are people who need serious sustained assistance to overcome that condition.

As you know, or as many of you may know in 2002, the Administration declared that we would work hard to end chronic homelessness as quickly as possible. And we have built constructive and successful partnerships with almost every city and county across our country. Many of these partnerships were with faith-based organizations. This has been an extremely complex, cooperation set of ventures, one of the most complicated domestic ventures every attempted by the federal government.

For example, we've trained more than 40,000 nonprofit leaders in grant writing and other skills. We've offered almost 300 training sessions. Many of these training seminars involve faith-based groups. The training has produced results. From 2003 to 2006, the number of direct nonprofit grantees of HUD's continuum of care program grew by nearly 500 organizations which was a 30 percent increase. And in 2006, more than 134,000 homeless Americans were helped by the efforts of faith-based organizations working with HUD. Together, we are able to devote more resources to help the homeless. Since 2003, HUD has provided funding for more than 42,000 new permanent supportive beds. That's more than a 25 percent increase. And as a result of all of this effort, there is now a vast interrelated set of partnerships between HUD and states and localities and nonprofits around the country. This partnership has been effective. In November of last year, we announced that chronic homelessness had actually dropped in the United States and according to data collected in 2006 from about and counties across the country, there had been an 11.5 percent drop in chronic homelessness which means there are about 20,000 fewer chronically homeless Americans on the streets today as there were in the year before.

In other words, the hard work of thousands of people, many of whom are in this room today is paying off and we're seeing our efforts make a profound difference. Why? Well, the data seem to indicate that the investment by HUD and by these local efforts in what we call the continuums of care is working. Continuum of care is an important term for us. It means that we provide assistance across the entire spectrum of homelessness from those who find themselves on the streets for the first time who need immediate shelter, to those who need assistance with the problems of addiction or dependence, to those who need help in finding more permanent housing. This continuum of care is vital because homelessness is a complex multi-dimensional problem both for those who are homeless and for those who are working to meet the needs of the homeless. So yes, we are making very important progress and we should be very

United States of America  
White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative  
Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

thankful for that, but we have a long way to go in addressing this problem more fully. There is still 155,000 chronic homeless people on the streets.

We're winning the battles in many cases, but homelessness remains a problem for us, often with frightening consequences for hundreds of thousands of people. And these really are battles that are worth fighting for all of us. Every person removed from chronic homelessness is a victory not only for that person, but for their families and for their communities.

Overall, this Administration has shown its commitment to helping the homeless with record levels of funding. Last year, HUD announced grants of \$1.5 billion nationwide to address homelessness, the latest in a commitment that since 2001 has totaled about \$10 billion to support the homeless. In the President's new budget, we're seeking an increased \$1.6 billion for HUD's continuum of care for homeless assistance grants programs.

Now I'd like to turn to a related matter which is the plight of homeless Veterans and I appreciate so much the video that preceded my coming up here because this is a problem that we're all terribly concerned about. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there are approximately 154,000 Veterans on the street. Now that is a number that's reduced significantly. Five years ago, we think it was about double that number, but it's still very large and it's still very concerning. And we need to do more for those people who served our country so valiantly. Recently, my Department announced the renewal of a joint HUD and VA program to provide assistance for our nation's homeless Veterans. This program is called the HUDVASHP or HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program. It will provide approximately 10,000 new vouchers for homeless Veterans and their families. The HUDVASHP initiative actually dates back to 1990. It was started by the former VA Secretary, Ed Derwinski and HUD Secretary Jack Kemp who at that point were providing vouchers as well as case management, but the program was discontinued in 1995. But funding was restored by Congress and the President for the current fiscal year. The program was given \$75 million and it allows us to reach about 10,000 Veterans.

Added to our other efforts, this is a major expansion of the funding that we have available for homeless Veterans. The President has also requested another \$75 million in his 2009 budget which means another 10,000 Veterans could be helped. That would bring the number to 20,000 Veterans. So it's very important for us to all continue to be moving forward. We're thankful for the funding and -- but once again, this is an effort that we are very focused on. More broadly though, the Faith- Based and Community Initiative is an innovative effort that unites the strengths of the public and the private sector to make our

United States of America  
White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative  
Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

social programs more effective. We're part o a new way of making a difference and our work on homelessness could not be as comprehensive, could not be as successful without the partnership of so many faith-based organizations.

Clearly, the President saw something very powerful and very full of energy when he launched this initiative and if we could harness it, he knew that we could meld government programs to end homelessness with the powerful energies of people in the faith-based community. One thing I've learned through my own direct experience leading and serving in faith-based efforts is that the great talent and skill of their people in these organizations is fueled by tremendous amounts of good will, big hearts and in many cases a powerful sense of calling. These are results- oriented people, people who want to make a difference, people who want to change lives and these are places where compassion, I think in many cases works miracles in people's lives. And I know that in the faith-based organizations certainly that I've worked with they make every single dollar count. And in many cases they're turning that shoestring, they live on the shoestring into a lifeline. And I can't think of a better example of that than in the great work that so many of you are doing in addressing homelessness.

There's something else I've witnessed, something that's equally remarkable and I certainly see it in my own life is that the caregivers and the providers themselves are transformed in the active service. People who came to provide a service actually received a great blessing themselves and I think once again that is the power that fuels so many of you all in the great work that you do in faith-based initiatives. So I spoke earlier about our commitment, about yours, about mine.

We realize that every person is a child of God, created in his image. Every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect and our nation has always, always been led by compassion and generosity. So I believe that when we help the homeless we are doing God's work and our own work and this nation owes every one of you a deep debt of gratitude. So thank you for coming here. Thank you for the tremendous work you do and God bless you. (Applause.)