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OU student honored by President Bush

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Presidential receptions, speeches, TV interviews – all have been part of Lenny Compton's world since he began his whirlwind trip to Washington, D.C., Jan. 28 as a guest of President George W. Bush for the State of the Union address.

Compton, an OU senior education major, was invited to attend the address in recognition of his volunteer work for **AmeriCorps**, a national community service program to which he has devoted more than 1,800 hours. During the address, Compton sat three chairs away from First Lady Laura Bush in the House Gallery. He also toured the White House, met the president at a post-address reception and spoke with him about volunteerism at a panel discussion on mentoring.

"I can't narrow my visit down to the best part, but my favorite part was going to the White House," Compton said. "To be received at the White House was a privilege, and it was an honor to represent Oakland University and the volunteer work that millions are doing across the nation.

"After the State of the Union address, we were escorted downstairs to meet the president and the first lady. I had a chance to have a photo taken with them, and I thanked the first lady for having me. President Bush saw me and said, 'I know this gentleman – he's Lenny Compton.' That was a big thrill. I told him I enjoyed his passionate delivery."

Compton's visit was coordinated by the **Corporation for National and Community Service**, which oversees AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve America. The corporation and its programs also are part of the **USA Freedom Corps**, an effort by President Bush to coordinate citizen volunteer efforts. Last October, Compton was selected to be an official Freedom Corps greeter at the Oakland County International Airport when the president arrived for a Republican rally.

Bush remembered Compton from the October visit and asked him to provide more details of his volunteer efforts.

"At the discussion on mentoring, I was part of a panel of 10 that met with the president. He asked us brief questions, and we discussed my last two years with AmeriCorps," Compton said. "I spoke about my own experiences and how I'm mentoring two young men, whom I've labeled my brothers, from a disadvantaged neighborhood in Pontiac. That was a wonderful opportunity. When President Bush saw me at the panel, he said, 'Third time's a charm, Lenny.'"

The action was non-stop for Compton after checking into the Crown Plaza Hotel in Washington, a mere three blocks from the White House. There was no time for sightseeing, however, with all the activities and media appearances.

Compton's trip began at 6:30 a.m. Jan. 28, when he flew out of Detroit to Washington, D.C. That day, he met with staff from the Corporation for National and Community Service to discuss how to handle typical media questions. Corporation representatives and public relations staff accompanied Compton throughout most of his visit and coached him during several appearances on TV news networks such as CNN and MSNBC. OU Dean of Students Glenn McIntosh arrived in Washington, D.C., Jan. 29 to help Compton juggle the multiple media interviews.

"The corporation, AmeriCorps and Oakland University have all been very supportive of me," Compton said. "I couldn't have done all of this by myself."

Corporation staff also accompanied Compton to the White House, where he toured the East Wing.

"As I walked through the gates of the White House, it hit me that I was really there," Compton said. "We met all the individuals who would be seated in the House Gallery with the first lady. Then we all took a tour of the East Wing. I saw the Blue, Red and Green Rooms, a huge dining room and reception room, and the Rose Garden. The White House is very beautiful, roomy and large. We also met the Mayor of Washington (Anthony Williams) and the chief of staff."

Compton then traveled by motorcade to the Capitol building, where Secret Service personnel escorted him and other attendees to the House Gallery.

"Being at the address was great," Compton said. "It was pretty interesting to see the reaction of the attendees. You could

definitely tell by the applause who the Republicans and Democrats were. I also looked around to see who else was there, and I saw a lot of distinguished journalists.

Compton said he was most impressed by President Bush's references to the Citizen Service Act. "This will directly assist AmeriCorps," Compton said. "I hope Congress will pass that."

Besides meeting President Bush and the first lady, Compton said a quick hello to Senator Hilary Clinton and National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice.

When he returned to the hotel later that night, Compton answered 23 voicemails and called his parents.

"I asked my parents how their day went," Compton said. "They told me about all they had been through. All the major stations had TV crews at their house to interview them about me."

Compton had some television interviews the following morning, then he and others from the Corporation for National and Community Service went to the Capitol once again, where they met with Senator Debbie Stabenow and Congressman Joe Knollenberg of Michigan.

"Both are great supporters of AmeriCorps," Compton said. "Congressman Knollenberg discussed some of his plans for Pontiac and asked me about my involvement with AmeriCorps."

That afternoon for Compton was filled with many more interviews, mainly by telephone from the Corporation for National and Community Service offices. But he had some quiet time later that evening with his godfather, Tim Humphrey of Detroit, who flew to Washington to meet him for dinner at the hotel.

Compton got off to an early start Jan. 30, as he was transported at 8 a.m. with corporation personnel and McIntosh to the Jelleff Branch of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington for the mentoring discussion panel. After the panel spoke with the president, they all attended his speech. Bush cited Compton once again for the many hours he has spent working as a mentor in Pontiac. "President Bush introduced me to the audience, which was a thrill because I saw many famous people in the audience, such as Senators Bob Dole, John Ashcroft and John Glenn. I got a lot of autographs afterwards."

That afternoon was filled with more telephone interviews before winding down with packing and preparing for a return flight to Detroit.

Read more about Compton and his Washington, D.C., experiences by visiting the [OU Student in National Spotlight](#) Web page, which includes [Lenny's D.C. Diary](#). An in-depth story on Compton also will appear in the Winter 2003 issue of [OU Magazine](#).

Visit the [Center for Student Activities Volunteer Opportunities](#) Web page for more information on local volunteer opportunities. To find out about other national and local community service opportunities, visit the [AmeriCorps](#) Web site. For more information on the State of the Union address, visit the [White House](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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