



Monday, September 8, 2003

OU student delivers address to Congress

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Cuts in federal funding of \$100 million for **AmeriCorps**, a national community service program, have left the organization reeling. More than 50,000 AmeriCorps volunteers work 20 to 40 hours per week providing services such as tutoring, building low-income housing and cleaning parks in disadvantaged communities. In exchange, most volunteers are eligible for grants to pay for college or student loans. But AmeriCorps officials say the cuts will not allow grants for as many as 20,000 of its volunteers this year.

To promote the work of AmeriCorps and campaign for supplemental appropriations, Oakland University student Lenny Compton, an AmeriCorps volunteer, joined more than 700 supporters who traveled to Washington, D.C., to address Congress. Compton shared his personal testimony in a morning hearing, called "Voices for AmeriCorps: 100 Hours of National Service," on Sept. 4.

"We want to help Congress gain a better understanding of AmeriCorps and the role it has played in helping thousands of Americans nationwide," said Compton, a senior education major. "There are many people who don't realize the impact AmeriCorps has had in the lives of youths and their communities."

Compton is no stranger to Washington or prominent politicians. In January, President George W. Bush invited Compton to join him as his guest at his State of the Union address because of Compton's extensive volunteer work. Bush also recognized Compton's efforts during a fly-in for a Republican rally at the Oakland County International Airport last October.

During last week's visit to Washington, Compton spoke on the invitation of Kyle Caldwell, executive director of the **Michigan Community Service Commission** (MCSC), an organization that supports volunteer efforts.

"I began by giving some statistics on Oakland's AmeriCorps program, then spoke of two specific examples of people I've helped," Compton said. "One third-grader was receiving Ds and Es in his classes and was having a lot of trouble with his schoolwork. He had an emotional detachment from school and a lack of positive people in his life. After working with him as a positive role model, he had a B average by the end of the school year.

"Another student was known in his school as a 'problem kid.' By working with him every day and using the AmeriCorps training I received, I recognized that he was learning disabled. He was in the fifth grade then. Now he's in the ninth grade and progressing very steadily. I hoped that both of these examples would show how the cutting of funds is detrimental to the purpose of AmeriCorps."

During his trip, Compton met Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., and Rep. Harold Ford, D-Tenn., among others.

"I spoke with them individually, which was great because they were able to see an AmeriCorps member first-hand," Compton said. "I also had the opportunity to answer some of their questions about AmeriCorps."

In July, the Senate passed a bill that would provide \$100 million in supplemental funds for AmeriCorps this year, but those monies were subsequently stripped from the bill in the House. Compton hopes Congress and the president will approve \$100 million in emergency appropriations before fiscal year 2004. If the funds are not available, the MCSC says the number of volunteers who serve throughout Michigan in programs similar to Compton's will be reduced from 700 to 300.

"It's all in the hands of Congress right now," Compton said. "We were told a decision would come toward the end of October. I think the hearing was a positive step for AmeriCorps, and hopefully it will serve as a stepping stone toward the right decision."

The 40 individuals who make up AmeriCorps Oakland commit 900 hours of service annually. Those hours are primarily spent tutoring children in first through eighth grade during the school year as well as providing after-school and summer enrichment programs at Pontiac community centers and churches.

For more information on AmeriCorps Oakland or for information on volunteer opportunities, contact Program Director Carol Anne Ketelsen at (248) 370-3216 or ketelsen@oakland.edu. For more information on national community service opportunities,

visit the **AmeriCorps** Web site. Information on the Voices for AmeriCorps hearing can be found on the **Save AmeriCorps** and **Michigan Community Service Commission** Web sites.

SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Monday, September 8, 2003

Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Monday, September 8, 2003

Article Start Date: Monday, September 29, 2003