

**Remarks of Governor Steve Bullock  
at the ServeMontana Conference  
on Friday, March 1, 2013  
at the Great Northern in Helena at 12:15 p.m.**

- Thank you. Pleased to be here today to celebrate all the good that Montana's many volunteers do.
- Before I was elected Governor last November, I served as Montana's Attorney General. In that capacity, I became aware of and worked with a number of incredible volunteers.
  - Each year, the AG gives one or two awards to truly outstanding victim advocates. Some of the recipients over the years were the professionals who work with victims, and others were volunteers who freely donated their time and compassion.
    - That included a 95-pound grandmother who helped run a domestic violence shelters so that abused women had somewhere safe to go.
    - In rural areas, it included women who volunteered to be on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so that women in their communities had someone they could call on if their situation become dangerous.
    - And sometimes it included people who volunteered because they had been on the receiving end of a volunteer's compassion at a difficult time in their lives.
- While I was in the Attorney General's Office, it occurred to me that there was a big group of unsung heroes in our communities who we should be acknowledging. So in 2010, I created two new awards – one for individuals who mentor at-risk children, and another to recognize the tremendous afterschool providers who do so much for our kids, for little or no compensation.
- In communities throughout Montana, every week mentors are building relationships with kids who need someone else in their lives. Men and women, some not out of their teen years themselves, find the time to take a child out for ice cream, to read a story or to throw a baseball around at the park. They find the time to connect and to make a real difference in a child's life.
- The time they give so freely pays dividends to all of us. Studies show that kids who are paired with a mentor are:
  - 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs
  - 27% less likely to begin using alcohol
  - and 52% less likely to skip school
- Some people choose to become mentors through programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters. Others volunteer with programs like the local 4-H, RSVP, Scouts or Campfire programs. And yet others work at Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs or school-based programs. But all of these individuals commit their time and energy to keeping Montana kids involved in positive relationships and activities. And that is something I believe is worth honoring.

- Last year, it turned out that one of the people I recognized was someone I'd known for years – a former Helena reporter named John MacDonald. Even though I'd known John for years, I was completely clueless about this facet of his life. I want to tell you a little about why he was nominated for the award, because it says something important about the impact of volunteering on the lives of the individuals involved.
  - John began mentoring with the Big Brothers Big Sisters program in Missoula back in the 1980s while he was attending the University of Montana. Three decades and five little brothers later, John is still mentoring and very much involved in the program.
  - The full effect of that commitment was evident in the supporting letter written by John's first Little, Zac, who was just 7 when they first met.
  - I'm going to read part of Zac's letter, because it says it all:

“Even though we lived hundreds of miles apart, John was there for me throughout my teen years. He was there to watch me graduate and he stood beside me at the altar as my best man on the day I was married. Now 27 years later, John is still fulfilling that same role. Our hair is a little thinner and our waists are a little thicker, but he is still my Big Brother and is loved and known by my wife and kids as Uncle John.”

What an amazing gift...

- At the most basic level, service is all about the commitment one individual makes to another or to a community. It's about the mostly unsung heroes who, every day, put their energy, wisdom and creativity to work for others.
- Yesterday, you recognized 11 of these individuals with Ready Montana and Serve Montana awards. They come from every corner of the state – and they serve in a wide range of capacities.
- We won't ever see them stepping out of a phone booth wearing a cape with a large “S” emblazoned on their chests. But these are the true heroes among us – the individuals who give the most, who work quietly to make their communities stronger, and who, through their efforts, make the lives of others richer, safer and happier.
- **In Montana, we are fortunate that 30% of people here volunteer in some capacity – often through their church, a school or a social service agency:**
  - An amazing three-quarters of Montanans do favors for neighbors, (ranking us 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation for this)
  - In 2011, Montanans contributed 28M hours of service valued at \$607 million
  - That's the equivalent of 13,000 full-time employees.

- They volunteer through the programs I became familiar with as AG, and through other incredible programs like:
  - **AmeriCorps Members**
  - **AmeriCorps VISTA Members**
  - **Impacts of Senior Corps**
  
- **AmeriCorps Members and VISTA Members**
  - As part of these programs, since 1994, members of the Montana Conservation Corps have built and maintained 11,000 miles of trail.
  - I just learned today that Montana’s Conservation Corps earned a reputation they should be extremely proud of in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.
  - With little warning, these young Montanans suddenly found themselves in a shelter caring for hundreds of disoriented and frail elderly patients, some of whom suffered from Alzheimer’s. It wasn’t what they’d signed on for, but as we would expect, they rose to the occasion and did us proud.
  - Montana State Parks AmeriCorps members are developing resources and interpretive guides to improve the way people experience state parks.
  - Members of the Big Sky Watershed Corps are organizing volunteers to protect and preserve our state’s water resources through water monitoring and other measures

The list of good work goes on and on:

- Members at the Justice for Montanans Project are helping veterans and their families find legal aid and consumer protection resources
- And to address obesity, in less than a year, members of the Montana Food Corps have facilitated the delivery of more than 10,000 pounds of *healthy* local foods to Montana schools
- AmeriCorps VISTA members serve full time helping organizations build capacity to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, and increase housing opportunities and much, much more.

**Senior Corps members are doing their part as well:** In fact, there are more than 5,200 Montanans serving their communities through one of three Senior Corps programs.

1. The Senior Companions helped 759 at risk individuals remain in their home thus saving an estimated \$47,000,000 in nursing home costs during 2010. **Mention Joe Mazurek’s senior companion.**
2. RSVP volunteers conduct safety patrols, renovate homes, protect the environment, tutor and mentor youth, respond to natural disasters, and provide other services through more than 920 groups in Montana.
3. The Foster Grandparent Program serve one-on-one as tutors and mentors to more than 4,000 young people for have special needs in Montana.

### **The Governor's Office of Community Service**

I'd also like to thank the staff of the Governor's Office of Community Service, which was created 20 years ago this year.

- In 1993, the office was formed to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the state, encourage citizens... to engage in... service to the state, and call young people to serve...”
- Over the last two decades, the office has worked to develop community capacity, increase citizen participation in service, and meet local needs identified by at the community level.
- Special initiatives and priority areas have changed, but it has always been an office committed to bringing Montanans together to solve problems and make a genuine difference.

I would like to recognize the commission members who help guide the Serve Montana program. With the director, you all make sure the office responds to the needs of our fellow Montanans and reflects our service community. And while I haven't announced a new director yet, I've been working deliberately to choose a director who will continue to lead and coordinate community service in Montana.

### **Moving forward, we have no shortage of opportunities for continued service**

- Education: Our school students would benefit from more volunteers, and that can include parents, other citizens and other students.
- Disaster Preparedness: Montanans are always ready to lend a helping hand when disaster strikes. As we've seen in other states in recent years, when something like Hurricane Sandy hits, we need to make sure our plans include our most vulnerable citizens.
- Conservation/Opportunity: Montana is a great place to visit... let's promote more “volun-tourism”
  - Helping guests find ways to give back to our state--maintain trails and wilderness areas or help build houses for low income individuals

Volunteers and national service members truly leave their mark on many lives. It's a vital part of what makes us a community, and that's something I'm working on teaching my three kids.

And lastly, since I wasn't able to be here for your awards presentation yesterday, I want to add my congratulations to the 11 award winners. You are shining examples of true spirit of service. Thank you all for all you do for others.