

POINT OF VIEW

T O M F O L E Y

Job training and service go hand in hand

HARRISBURG

President Clinton, from his campaign pledge of "putting people first" through this week's announcement of a national service corps, has placed two items at the top of his list of domestic priorities — building a world-class work force and creating a system of national service.

In Pittsburgh, Scranton, Erie, Philadelphia and dozens of other communities in Pennsylvania, we've found that job training and community service programs cannot only peacefully coexist, in many respects they desperately need each other.

It is clear that job training without a service component can be a sterile exercise with disappointing results, and community service without clear links to careers and skills development can be an exciting but dead-end experience.

Let me cite two pieces of evidence — one personal and the other academic and professional.

Almost 15 years ago, over the vigorous objections of my first-generation Irish-American father, I took a two-year leave of absence from Yale Law School to work with the Peace People in Belfast.

I used what legal skills I had to write ceasefire proposals and carry out negotiations, but I also repaired blasted out windows, wiped noses, ran an integrated soccer league and even replaced a bus transmission during two of the most intense years of my life.

Meanwhile, job-training programs in the United States have produced mixed results, at best, for young people. Last year, the U.S. Department of Labor released "Dilemmas In Youth Employment Programming," a massive two-volume compendium of studies of the impact of job-training programs on young people. They make dismal reading.

If reduced to a sentence, these tomes could

well say to young people, "Don't waste your time." With minor variations — particularly for young women — they reveal that youth who had completed job-training programs earned less than those who had not.

Considering that this nation annually invests nearly \$1.4 billion on job training for young people, we must ask why these efforts are so ineffective. The better question is, how can we improve these programs to bring out the best our young people have to offer?

William Butler Yeats once said, "Education is about lighting fires, and not about filling buckets."

I believe that what ails most of our job-training programs is that they are, by and large, about "filling buckets." We sit young people in classrooms, test them to see what's missing and pour in the information.

But this information is irrelevant for young people who don't have the benefit of caring adults, career options, stable communities and strong family bonds. They simply do not believe that what they are taught in classrooms bears any relationship to real life.

Community service — viewed not as an isolated, single-year experience but as a "way of life" which begins early and culminates perhaps in a peak experience like my two years in Northern Ireland — can excite and re-direct young people who face a difficult future. Job training programs, fortified with a service component, can help light fires.

In Pennsylvania, these words are both slogan and motivator.

Gov. Casey created PennSERVE — the Governor's Office of Citizen Service — to make "community service the common expectation and experience of all Pennsylvanians.

In thousands of classrooms, state parks and job-training programs throughout Pennsylvania, the blend of training, education and service has sparked dramatic results.

- The Pennsylvania Conservation Corps, which has enrolled more than 10,000 young people to "serve, earn and learn" since 1984, not only provides first-class job training, it actually "turns a profit." Every dollar invested in the corps produces \$1.81 in completed projects.

- At Raccoon State Park in Beaver County, more than a dozen young people are preparing to construct a new park office, having already renovated cabins, lodges, pavilions and a group camp originally constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. All are getting on-the-job training.

- Using seed money from the state and the Commission on National and Community Service, we transformed nearly one-fifth of our traditional Summer Youth Employment Program into a Summer Youth Service Corps. Last summer, nearly 4,000 youth served in teams on important community projects.

- A public-private partnership, led by the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Universities, has increased the number of hours of community service contributed by college students from 500,000 to 1.5 million in three years.

- At Overbrook High school in West Philadelphia, "at-risk" members of the ninth grade saw their attendance rates rise from 70 percent to 89 percent when they were given a two-hour community service assignment every week.

We face two questions: "How can we help job-training programs match their potential?" And, "How can we inspire young people to contribute their talents in a way that will help the community and enhance skills?" A strategic partnership of service and training may well be the answer to both.

Tom Foley is Pennsylvania's Secretary of Labor and Industry.