

**2011 Leadership Institute:  
Mark Shriver**

Roberto Rodriguez: Our community mourned the passing of Sargent Shriver last January; and the foundation that he laid for Head Start is the foundation that we all stand on today. His passion inspired us to build on the success of Head Start – the over 45 years of – of Head Start success and to chart a path for its future. We're honored today to welcome with us his son, Mark Shriver. [Applause]

Mark Kennedy Shriver is vice president and managing director of U.S. programs for Save the Children. He leads programmatic and advocacy efforts to improve the early childhood development, literacy, physical activity, and nutrition of children living in impoverished rural communities across the United States. He also leads Save the Children's Domestic emergency programs to ensure that the unique needs of children are incorporated into disaster preparedness, response, and recovery plans. Previously, Mark served two four-year terms as a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, and he was Maryland's first-ever chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Youth, and Families.

Mark is a great friend. I've had the honor, in particular in serving with Senator Kennedy in the U.S. Senate, of meeting Mark, of – of getting to know Mark, of meeting his parents. He's a great man; he puts the needs of children and families at the heart of everything he does. More than anything, he is a great and tireless advocate for our most vulnerable, and he carries forth that spirit and that vision that Sargent Shriver first laid for Head Start.

So, Mark, thank you so much for being with us today. And in recognition of your father's vision and – and his leadership for Head Start, I'd like to present to you the 2011 Office of National Head Start Leadership Award; and to your father, Sargent Shriver. Will you please accept the award on his behalf? [Applause]

Mark Shriver: Thank you all very much for that very kind standing ovation. I assume it had nothing to do with me. [Laughter] So... I also told Roberto, when Yvette was up here saying some nice things about my dad – I said the only reason I was coming here today was to listen to Roberto say something nice about me.

He is actually – I looked over at his notebook, and it says, "Special Assistant to the President on the Issue of Education." So I suggest everyone in this room – I think Yvette told me there are 3,000 people here – that you grab Roberto before he gets out of here and you tell him exactly what the President should be doing on education. I'm serious. [Laughter and applause] I assume Yvette's already got that organized, but anyways...

Dr. Brazelton, it is an honor to be with you this morning. I've got to say, when Yvette called me up and said – you know, and I saw those names up there – Jule Sugarman, Julius Richmond, Ed Zigler, Dr. Brazelton, Bob Cooke – it was all the people that were running around our house when I was a little kid.

I – I was so honored to be asked to be here that – you know, I come from a big Irish Catholic family. We're very competitive. And when I heard that there were going to be 3,000 people here, the first thing I did after the phone call was I hung up and called my older brother. I said, "Bobby, you're not going to believe it. Yvette called me up, asked me to come out and speak at this First Leadership Institute. There's going to be 3,000 people at Head Start." He goes, "I know all about that." I said, "Really?" And he goes, "Yeah, Yvette called me about five days ago and asked me to do it." [Laughter] And I said – I said, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "You know, I created the ONE Campaign with Bono, we've created Product Red, we're eradicating poverty all across the world, in Africa." I said, "Bobby, this is America." And he goes, "I know, and I'm on the city council in Santa Monica; I support the Head Start program there. I'm great on this issue." [Laughter] So I hung up on him.

And then I called my brother Timmy. I said, "Timmy, you're not going to believe it. Yvette called me up, asked me to do this whole Head Start thing." And he said, "I know, Yvette called me like four days ago." And I said – I said, "What are you talking about?" And he goes, "You know, I run Special Olympics, we're all around the world, we're focused on early education, we try to help kids with developmental disabilities. I'm really good on this issue." So I hung up on him. [Laughter]

This is true. Then I said – then I said, "Okay, this just cannot be happening to me." So I called up Maria. I said "Maria, listen, I just talked to Bobby and to Timothy. I think they're lying; they told me that Yvette called them up about..." And there's a little pause, and she goes, "There's a message here from Yvette to call her back." [Laughter]

So I don't know if I was number three or four or five, but I'm honored. I'm honored to be here. [Applause] I made some of that up, because Yvette – Yvette is looking at me like she's going to kill me right now. So I'm going to tell you just a couple of stories, and then I'm going to give an award, which is so richly deserved by Dr. Brazelton and Ed Zigler.

When we were little kids growing up, we'd go in the summertime up to Massachusetts, and my folks had two boats: A little motor boat, which was about 20 feet long, and it was called the Lucky Seven. And my father said it was called the Lucky Seven because there are seven people in our family, and he considered himself the luckiest guy alive. He had five kids, all of whom idolized him, and a wife; so he called it the Lucky Seven. He'd also laugh and say, "You know, I was the seventh choice for George McGovern to run for vice president." [Laughter] And we'd all laugh; and he goes, "I'd rather be number seven for George McGovern than number one for Richard Nixon." [Laughter and applause] And he was clearly right, since the ticket that lost in a landslide didn't have to resign in scandal within the next year-and-a-half. But we're not going to talk politics.

The other boat was a 20-foot sailboat that my mother would go on all the time. Every day she'd take us out sailing, and it had so many great memories. It was called Head Start. The boat actually burned down a couple of years ago in storage, and my mother bought a new one and called it – named it after Mary, the mother of Jesus. So Head Start was just a little in front of Mary, as far as my mother is concerned.

[Laughter] So, you're in good company in the Shriver household. Now, that is totally true. She named it the Saint – Santa Maria. I don't know if it was named after Mary or Maria. But you're in very good company, and that was because, you know, my mother and father loved Head Start.

So many people – last week we were in town for the Peace Corps 50th anniversary and it was a wonderful celebration. So many people in the Peace Corps called themselves "Sarge's kids." And I think when my dad looked back on his life, and I had a number of conversations with him about it, he said his greatest love was God and my mother. His second greatest love, I think, was his kids – [Laughter] – but I know we were tied with Head Start and the Peace Corps. [Laughter] He was – really, all of you are "Sarge's kids." [Applause] And he – he meant that most sincerely. The boat was named after the work that you all do every day. It's pretty amazing.

My dad always said that when he was asked by Johnson to head the Office of Economic Opportunity – actually, I don't know, you've probably heard the story, Dr. Brazelton – Johnson called him up and said, "Sarge, I'm going to announce that you're running the Office of Economic Opportunity." And he said, "Well, Mr. President, I'm running the Peace Corps." And he said, "Well, you can do both." And he goes, "Well, I – I have to talk to Eunice." And he goes, "Well, talk to her right now because I'm announcing it in 20 minutes." [Laughter] And then he hung up on him.

So, Daddy always said that "if you're going to declare a war on poverty, you have to know what the enemy is" – poverty – "you have to know where the enemy lives, and who the enemy is and who it attacks the most." And when he always talked about Head Start, he said that the enemy, poverty, was attacking our youngest kids and that if we invested in those youngest kids that we would defeat poverty at its very roots; that we would help kids socially, emotionally, cognitively; we would help the community; we would help the parents and the volunteers; and that that was the essence of declaring war on poverty and eradicating poverty, was really through Head Start. [Applause]

You know, Daddy used to... People used to say he was a huge federal government supporter, and he would laugh and say, "You know, when I was a kid, we were always told to support local government and to focus in on the local community." And he said, "There's no greater example of local effort than Head Start." It may be funded by the federal government, but it's being run by local people, it's affecting local people's lives, and local people are doing the work. [Applause]

Just two quick last stories. My father told a bunch of stories, but I think his – two of his favorites were what happened in the country of Panama, and it impacted Peace Corps volunteers. In 1964, there was a huge riot in Panama, and the Panamanians went after Americans. And the Peace Corps was told – Daddy was told that he should evacuate all the Peace Corps volunteers in Panama, that their lives were at risk. And he thought about it for a couple of hours, and he decided, despite what the State Department was saying, to leave all those volunteers in their communities, in their homes, working with the local people. And he said that it took two or three days before he knew whether they had all been killed or whether they were all safe.

Imagine making that decision before the age of Internet and CNN, not knowing whether the volunteers – young Americans who you had put into a developing country, Panama – and not knowing whether they were alive or dead. But he left them there. And he left them there; and the next – four days later there was a big article on the front page of the New York Times, and it wrote about how not one Peace Corps volunteer had been hurt, and that the only injuries to Americans in Panama happened for those Americans that were evacuated into the Canal Zone, protected by the U.S. military. That's where the injuries happened. But the Americans were taken into the homes of the local Panamanians, and they were kept safe by the people that they were working with.

The second story, which is tied into that, was a speech he gave in 1965 to a gathering in Atlantic City of social workers. And he told them that story and then he said, you know, "Last" – maybe it was '66 – "Last summer, in America, there were riots all across this country. Cities were burned down." And he asked them, "If that happened to you, would you be safe? Would the Panamanians – the poor people in this country just like the Panamanians, would they protect you? Would they bring you into their homes and keep you safe? Would they consider you part of the culture and part of that community?"

And I'm here to tell you that I think everybody in this room would've been protected. They would've taken you in because not only are you working in the local communities doing God's work, but you're in – but you're of the local community. So, I think today the news is great. We're celebrating our past, but we're also looking forward to the future. Now, if you read the Washington Post today, unemployment is definitely too high. The budgets, we all know, are tight, and the stock market is not doing great. But I am in a room filled with people that would've been protected, and that is good news indeed. You would've been taken into the homes and protected by those folks.

The good news is also that we have Roberto Rodriguez in the house. [Laughter] And we know that he knows, and that President Obama knows, that if we invest in Early Head Start – as he spoke so eloquently about a few minutes ago – and into Head Start, we will have kids better educated, better socially and emotionally prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn, and if we invest in Head Start and Early Head Start that the community itself will benefit as well. Can we do... [Applause] Can we do a better job providing Head Start services? Of course we can. But everybody in this room, I know, wants to do a better job today than they did yesterday; and we will get better each and every day.

The news is really good today. We know that when we make a national commitment, like President Johnson did in that speech, to eradicate poverty – make a real national commitment to eradicating poverty, we can touch – cut poverty rates for kids and for senior citizens almost in half. We did that in 1965, and 10 years later it was cut in half. But I think if we go forth from this Leadership Institute waiting for another Sargent Shriver, or Jack or Bobby or Teddy Kennedy, or Martin Luther King, or Cesar Chavez to lead that charge, we will have missed our opportunity. I think everyone in this room, and the people that you work with day in and day out, are able to bring about that change, are able to influence public policy to really make that full-scale commitment. Look who – who brought down Communism: it was an unemployed ship worker in Poland named Lech Walesa. Look who led the charge to eradicate and to end segregation in this country: Rosa Parks.

Today, the news is definitely good. We're in a room with 3,000 people that want to eradicate poverty, that know how to get it done, that are working with thousands if not hundreds of thousands of other people in this country to do that – to do just that. I'm honored to be with all of you today. Thank you so much for honoring my father.