
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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**CHAIRWOMAN MCCARTHY STATEMENT AT SUBCOMMITTEE
HEARING ON “STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES: AN OVERVIEW
OF SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING IN AMERICA”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), chairwoman of the House Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities, for a subcommittee hearing on “Strengthening Communities: An Overview of Service and Volunteering In America.”*

I am so pleased that the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee is holding its first hearing on the issue of National Volunteer Service and I would like to thank our very distinguished panelists today for their testimony and for their commitment to national service. I would also like to say that I am looking forward to working with Ranking Member Platts, who is the Co-Chair of the National Service Caucus, on these issues as we move ahead.

National service has a distinguished and strong history in our nation. Our roots in service extend back to the first pioneers, when colonists had to band together to overcome the challenges of surviving and adjusting to a new land. Since the time of the formation of our nation, Americans have volunteered to help each other in times of war, tragedy, and need. Benjamin Franklin started the first volunteering firefighter company. In 1933 during the Depression, President Roosevelt started the Civilian Conservation Corps to renew the nation's destroyed forests, and during World War II, the Office of Civilian Defense was formed to organize support for the war efforts.

In 1961, President Kennedy started the Peace Corps, and 1970 President Nixon started the National Center for Voluntary Action. More recently, President HW Bush started the Points of Light Foundation, President Clinton started AmeriCorps and President George W. Bush created U.S.A. Freedom Corps in his 2002 State of the Union Address.

Evidence shows that service and volunteering lowers dropout rates among teens, lowers crime rates in communities with high rates of volunteerism, lowers costs associated with the aging population and improves the health and lowers the rates of depression among the elderly. Volunteering is a cost effective way of meeting our nation's social needs both from the standpoint of the volunteers and the people who benefit from the services.

Today we will hear from witnesses about current national service programs including AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America. In my home state of New York, more than 76,000 people of all ages and backgrounds are helping to meet local needs and strengthen

communities. There are 239 national service programs in New York alone. In my district we have more than 1,300 service volunteers, and we have almost 3,000 students age K-12 that participate in the Learn and Serve programs.

Our national service volunteers tutor and mentor youth, help build houses, clean parks and streams, help communities respond to disasters - including Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and 9-11 - provide leadership in managing community projects, and help conduct safety patrols in neighborhoods. The volunteers who give their time are from diverse backgrounds and span all generations. I truly believe that expanding national service, particularly to disadvantaged youth, is an effective way to combat things like youth gangs and violence, and the evidence bears that out. And it is critical that we begin teaching about participation and service at an early age.

I am looking forward to learning from this and other hearings we will hold on this issue how we can mobilize more volunteers, ensure a brighter future for all of America's youth, engage students in communities, and harness the experience of our seniors. With that, I now yield to the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Platts, for an opening statement.

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