

STATEMENT OF
STEPHEN GOLDSMITH, VICE-CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
ON THE NEXT GENERATION OF NATIONAL SERVICE

MARCH 10, 2009

Chairwoman, Ranking Member Enzi, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and for the Committee's long history of leadership and support for national and community service.

Now is the right time to update our national service laws and unleash the energy and ingenuity of the American people to solve community problems. This hearing comes at a critical moment of both need and opportunity for our nation:

- The economic downturn is causing hardship for millions of Americans -- putting more people at risk of unemployment, foreclosure, homelessness, abuse, addiction, and other social ills.
- The nonprofit sector is reeling from a double whammy of increased demand for services at the same time it is experiencing drops in giving and public support.
- But against this bleak backdrop, there is strong momentum for citizen service:
 - Last year, 62 million Americans gave 8 billion hours of service to our nation.
 - The number of AmeriCorps applications has shot up in recent months, and volunteer centers and nonprofits are reporting increases in volunteers.
 - Millennials are volunteering more than past generations while Boomers will dramatically boost the number of older adult volunteers in the coming decades.
 - Leaders in every sector – from corporate CEOs and college presidents to Governors and grantmakers – recognize that service is a proven strategy to tackle tough challenges.
 - Social entrepreneurs are redefining service and volunteering, and Web 2.0 technologies are providing new ways for citizens to engage and connect.

National service has bipartisan support because it was founded on common sense, good government principles -- devolution, competition, accountability, leveraging of non-federal resources, and public-private partnership. We have worked diligently the last eight years to reposition federal involvement as the human infrastructure that supports volunteerism—rather than approaching our work as a method of putting federal workers in local nonprofits.

Today, our Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs engage nearly four million Americans in service through more than 70,000 community organizations across the nation,

addressing issues of poverty, illiteracy, disasters, public safety, independent living, and more. These participants have a powerful catalytic effect by leveraging hundreds of millions of non-federal dollars and mobilizing community volunteers. Last year, AmeriCorps members mobilized 2.2 million additional volunteers, helping thousands of nonprofits expand their reach and impact.

We are also proud that the Corporation supports a wide array of organizations, from large national nonprofits like Teach for America, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Habitat for Humanity, to faith-based organizations like Sisters of Notre Dame and Alliance for Catholic Education, to small community groups.

Approximately six years ago, you and Senator Bond challenged the board to hold the management more responsible and to improve the administration of the programs. We have made steady progress and implemented reforms across the agency to increase efficiency, reduce costs, streamline operations, improve program quality, strength grant and fiscal monitoring, and build a high-performing workforce. While the Corporation's management has improved, there are areas that need further strengthening, and management will continue to be the Board's top priority.

To take these programs to the next level of effectiveness, we need changes in our authorizing laws. I'd like to highlight a few key principles as you move ahead:

- We need to intensify the focus on accountability and results by tying funding to performance and increasing support for rigorous program evaluation, performance measures, and assessments of our civic health. Today, the Corporation is a hodgepodge of programs pasted together with a set of inconsistent and confusing rules that make clarity and transparency difficult and increase overhead costs not only to the Corporation but, more importantly, to its grantees. Both the Serve America Act introduced by Senator Kennedy and Hatch and the GIVE Act passed by the House Education and Labor Committee last Congress bring needed reforms.
- While we need to do better at demonstrating the impact our programs are having, we also need to ease the burden on our grantees by streamlining the application and reporting process, combining funding pools, and simplifying program management through expansion of fixed-amount grants.
- We need to continue providing a level playing field for faith-based and small community organizations, which are doing such critical work in our most vulnerable communities. Both the GIVE Act and Serve America Act would open up service to more small community organizations and rural and underserved areas.
- As we intensify the focus on the issues of education, health, clean energy, and poverty, we also need to maintain the core principles that have been key to AmeriCorps success –flexibility, adaptability, and a decentralized approach that gives a key role to states in identifying their problems and selecting the organizations best able to solve them.
- In recent years, the Corporation and our grantees have initiated some creative and successful programs with other federal agencies on issues such as prisoner re-entry, early childhood education, conservation of our public lands, and more. We should encourage more coordination with other federal agencies.

- Finally, the Serve America Act would invest in our civic infrastructure by creating a Volunteer Generation Fund and increasing the leveraging of community volunteers that are the lifeblood of our schools and shelters, hospitals and hotlines.

Chairwoman Mikulski and Members of the Committee, the Corporation and the entire national service field has come a long way, thanks in large part to leadership of this Committee. This bill would usher in the next generation of service and facilitate civic engagement in a way that respects and supports local and individual acts of kindness, generosity, and service. We look forward to working with you to restore America's communities and its greatness through the active citizenship of neighbors.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I'd be glad to answer any questions.