

## **Written Testimony of**

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I was born in a very small town in Western Montana where my father and mother were raised, met each other and ultimately were married. I grew up listening to my father's stories about the Civilian Conservation Corps camp located just outside of town. It was just one of the camps that were located in every state and several territories from 1933 to 1942. Three million young men from those camps worked fighting fires, building public infrastructure on public lands and restoring the nation's public forests by planting 3 billion trees. When unemployment began to wane and the draft was initiated in 1940, the CCC and its camps ceased to exist even though fond memories of those days have inspired more than one generation over the last 70 years.

I was just starting high school when President Kennedy and Congress created the Peace Corps and reminded all Americans of our proud legacy of public service. Throughout all of my time growing up I watched my parents help our friends and neighbors, our church and to serve in our little community in a variety of ways. There were no heroes, just a vast number of the members of our community of every faith and belief, or perhaps no faith at all, who served the needs of others. It was just what everyone did. After my time in the United States Army, I entered into public service at the county and state level with the steadfast belief that I could and should try to embrace a purpose larger than myself and make a difference in the life of my community. There were millions of other people just like me who believed and did the same thing.

I remember when President George H.W. Bush created the Commission on National and Community Service, followed by the efforts of President Clinton and Congress to renew and enlarge the nation's commitment to national and community service through the establishment of the Corporation for National and Community Service in 1993. Thereafter, throughout my time serving as Montana's governor and beyond, I was engaged with the Corporation in the advancement of national and community service and was privileged to be nominated by President Clinton to serve a four year term on the Corporation's board of directors. It is worth noting that my colleagues during that time, among them Governor Bush of Texas, overwhelmingly manifested their clear commitment to the work of the Corporation. It is well-known that President Bush continued to keep faith with his commitment to national service and to reignite the call to service throughout his presidency.

I have also served as Chairman of Jobs for America's Graduates, a national high school dropout prevention program, and succeeded Secretary of State Colin Powell as chairman of America's Promise.

I offer this history to confirm the notion that government, for generations, has played an entirely appropriate role in advancing the imperative of public service. I also refer to that history with the singular purpose of

sharing what I believe each of you have also discovered as a result of your own unselfish service to your individual states and to our beloved nation. I could lay before you an encyclopedia of statistical information that would confirm that the public service ethic of our country and communities remains strong: more than 1 billion volunteer service hours generated by Senior Corps volunteers, more than 400,000 individuals served through AmeriCorps, and more than 1 million high school students participating annually in service-learning initiatives provided under the auspices of Learn and Serve America. Those accomplishments are clearly important and impressive. They have immeasurably enriched the public and social infrastructure of this country and rightly should be praised and recognized as convincing evidence of our responsibility to remain committed to our national and community service efforts.

But, there is something more that commands our attention and justifies the involvement of government in our efforts to preserve and expand national and community service opportunities, and that is to recognize what those efforts do to refresh and inspire the spirit and soul of this country. The endurance of this nation and our freedom depend upon the decency and humility of every American. People cannot be commanded nor ordered to live in freedom. They must choose it for themselves. We are bound together and we endure as a nation because we choose as Americans, hundreds of times every day, to respect the rights and liberties of our fellow citizens. Democracy and freedom cannot exist without the voluntary choice of every American to embrace the values of discipline, decency and mutual respect. And that's where national and community service comes in: it is service that promotes decency and mutual respect. It is service that provides the glue that holds us together and preserves our way of life. It is what separates us from tyrants and terrorists. And surely its enrichment is an appropriate function of our government as it sets about to preserve, protect and defend the United States of America.