

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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**Chairwoman McCarthy Statement at Subcommittee Hearing on
“Renewing the Spirit of National and Community Service”**

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 “Renewing the Spirit of National and Community Service.”*

I am pleased that the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee is holding its second hearing on national service during National Volunteer Week. Congress celebrated National Volunteer Week through a resolution that was introduced by my colleague, Congresswoman Shea-Porter, and was passed by a floor vote yesterday. I hope that during this week there are celebrations of volunteering in each community across the nation.

No one can dispute the importance of volunteering and service to the lives of those who are the recipients of the service, nor can we dispute the benefits experienced by those serving others. I would like to thank our very distinguished panelists today for their testimony and for their commitment to service.

We have seen a rise of volunteering in the United States over time, with strong growth and momentum after 9/11 and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. To this day there is a strong volunteer presence in the Gulf region working on recovery. We will hear today about the impact of volunteering in the Gulf region and about how using one’s occupation and dedication to service can raise the level of awareness of volunteering and service in our nation.

Last year 61.2 million Americans volunteered in the United States – or 26.7 percent of our population – serving an estimated 8.1 billion hours. Some have put a dollar value on the volunteer’s time and estimated last year’s service to be worth \$152 billion.

We are a giving people. In fact, 5.3 million Americans worked with their neighbors to improve their communities without going through a formal organization and perhaps did not even consider that they were volunteering or doing service. They were just doing what needed to be done. It is in our nature to help each other, to work together to keep our communities safe, clean, and inviting, and to offer service and assistance to those around us in the highest need.

However, disturbingly, more people volunteered in 2005 than did so in 2006. In fact, one-third of those who volunteered in 2005 did not volunteer in 2006. It is time for us to renew our sense of service.

Volunteering and service are quite possibly the way we will solve some of our communities' and our nation's most challenging problems. For example, to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy, we must reignite the enthusiasm for science and technology and its importance to our daily lives among our entire citizenry, but most importantly among our students. One indicator of this is that NASA is concerned that in the future it will be unable to hire enough scientists, engineers, and technicians to fill the positions held by our soon-to-be retired Baby Boomers.

Education is clearly part of the solution, but we cannot place all of this on teachers. We must look to those Baby Boomers – and their peers – to start volunteering now in after-school programs, Saturday programs, and summer programs that engage youth in math, science, technology, and yes, service. I think that if these scientists and engineers heard the call to civic duty and had the clear sense that they were directly affecting student lives and the future of our nation, they would compete with each other for any service or volunteer placement offered. Today we will hear of programs that do just that: give scientists, engineers, technicians, and mathematicians the chance to serve and to remain in service to our youth, and therefore our nation.

Service must be meaningful, create positive change in our communities, and be completed within a well managed program with necessary training and recognition for the service completed. We must give volunteers and those who serve a reason to return and serve again. Today we will hear of work being done in Atlanta to engage AmeriCorps alumnae after their year of service has ended to continue to live by the AmeriCorps commitment to service. I hope that from that testimony we can apply ideas to as many service programs as possible.

I am looking forward to learning from this and other hearings that we will hold on this issue on 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.

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