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Twenty years ago, this Committee put together demonstration legislation to test a simple premise: Would young Americans serve their communities full-time for a year, or part-time for a longer period, in exchange for money for college?

The answer was an overwhelming “yes.” Building on the success of this experiment, a few years later, AmeriCorps took this concept to the next level, engaging more than 540,000 Americans in service over the last fifteen years.

Today you are considering legislation that would not only build on this strong track record, but expand other types of service as well. It could not come at a more critical time for our nation. As unemployment rises, particularly among young people, community needs are also soaring. Demands on the nonprofit organizations that develop our youth, feed the hungry, and rebuild distressed neighborhoods are staggering. The work of groups that protect the environment, preserve our culture, and educate our children is needed more than ever.

Fortunately, Americans are coming forward, ready to roll up their sleeves to solve these problems. The number of applicants for AmeriCorps programs and volunteer trainings have doubled or tripled over previous years.

Now is the moment.

I am honored to appear before you, and urge you to move the Serve America Act to respond to these tremendous needs and great opportunity. I speak to you as a person who has been deeply involved in national service policy – initially as a Labor Committee staff person for Senator Kennedy, then as an appointee in the first Bush and Clinton Administrations, and now, as a fellow at the Center for American Progress, and as a consultant to many organizations that run national service programs.

Over the last two decades, we have learned that serving changes lives. In fact, a longitudinal study of AmeriCorps members, after eight years, clearly demonstrates that AmeriCorps members are more connected to their communities, have a better understanding of community problems, and are more involved in civic activities such as attending public meetings and writing to newspapers. Former AmeriCorps members were significantly more likely than the comparison group to enter careers in public service such as teaching, public safety, social work and full time military service. AmeriCorps members experienced significant increases in their work skills, showing their experience

better prepared them for the future. And importantly, the study shows that AmeriCorps alumni are more satisfied with their lives in almost every respect than the comparison group who expressed interest but ultimately did not serve.

While it is clear that serving can change the life of the server, we have also learned something even more important – that **service can be a key strategy to solve some of the nation’s most pressing problems**. For example, in the area of education, national service puts talented teachers in the classroom, offers struggling students one-on-one attention, brings supportive services and after school programs to urban schools, and creates a culture that supports learning. This success is documented in evaluations of individual programs and the stories of schools, students, and those who serve. In some cases, service may be the critical ingredient to successful school reform.

Unfortunately, these programs operate on too small a scale. They serve dozens of schools and hundreds of students, when thousands of schools and millions of students need them. A similar story can be told in the areas of energy, opportunity, and health.

It’s time to take the programs showing measurable outcomes to scale. That’s why we need **the issue-focused corps** in Serve America. Balancing the flexible, community-determined programming of regular AmeriCorps with these new targeted corps provides the right combination of flexibility and focus for the next stage of national service. We will be able, if these corps are authorized and funded, be able to document the impact of service on these national challenges and better understand the role that service plays in solving our most pressing problems. We will also benefit from the engagement of Baby Boomers, a valuable national resource, through the **Encore Service Program** in the Act.

Another notable and surprising success of AmeriCorps is the contribution it has made to **innovation in the social sector**. When an organization takes an out-of-the-box approach to solving a problem, it often finds few sources available for sustainable funding. AmeriCorps, because it doesn’t specify the strategy for problem-solving or the presumptive provider, has been a flexible source of funding and human capital to grow some of the country’s most promising organizations, including Jumpstart, Citizen Schools, Experience Corps, and Habitat for Humanity.

The Corporation for National and Community Service has been an agency that appreciates social entrepreneurs and the contribution they make to social innovation. Unlike other federal agencies, it supports organizations in a wide-variety of fields, and fosters cross-issue solutions that combine, for example, education and health, or environment and job training. For this reason, it makes sense that Serve America includes funding to support a social innovation fund network, called the **“Community Solutions Funds Pilot Program,”** that will use federal dollars to leverage other public and private sector contributions to take our most innovative and effective organizations to scale. It will operate like this: Existing grantmakers – like community foundations, United Ways, or venture philanthropy funders – may, together with state commissions or local government partners, apply for a grant to establish a Community Solutions Fund that focuses on a specific issue (like increasing economic opportunity or reducing crime)

or geographic area (like a neighborhood or a set of rural counties). These grantmakers will match the federal funds dollar for dollar, and then make substantial, multi-year grants to enable organizations that have strong track records to grow. These organizations will raise additional matching funds of one dollar for each dollar they receive. In this way, federal dollars will make it possible for communities to attract or expand the organizations achieving the best results against their highest priority needs. This concept, initially proposed by the America Forward coalition, could transform the way we address public problem solving in America to allow us to support the highest return strategies in a wide variety of areas.

I am also excited to see the **Commission on Cross-Sector Solutions to America's Problems** included in the legislation. The government has become highly reliant on the nonprofit sector to deliver its services. As noted in the Forward Together declaration, signed by more than 100 civic sector leaders, nonprofits are full “partners in public service sheltering the homeless, training the unemployed, educating our youth, building affordable housing, counseling families, delivering health care, giving voice to the powerless, lifting our spirits with arts and culture, and serving uniquely as vehicles for citizen initiative in support of the common good. In the process, they contribute powerfully to our economy, employing 11 million paid workers--more than the construction industry (7.2 million), finance (5.2 million), transportation (5.1 million), real estate (2.1 million), and, with volunteers, more than all branches of manufacturing (14.4 million).”

Indeed, today's nonprofit sector has reached record size, with the number of organizations doubling in the last 25 years. Employing one out of every 10 individuals, the sector is the nation's fastest growing employer, outstripping the rate of growth for government and business alike. Nonprofits engage one in four Americans as volunteers and two out of three families as donors, and account for more than five percent of our gross domestic product.

This bipartisan Commission will take on the challenge of exploring the relationship of the federal government with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, as well as business, to achieve better outcomes and utilization of resources. This examination is long overdue.

There are several other important provisions I want to highlight. First, while AmeriCorps and the ServeAmerica corpsmembers will play an important role in recruiting and supervising volunteers who do not receive education awards, there is still a need to support volunteer management in other ways. The **Volunteer Generation Fund** in the Serve America Act would improve the capacity of nonprofit, faith-based, and other civic organizations and state service commissions to engage new volunteers. It is also designed to spur innovation in volunteer recruitment and management practices, with a goal of increasing the number of volunteers each year.

Second, I'm glad that service-learning is expanded in the legislation, through the **Youth Engagement Zones and Campus of Service Programs**. Over the last decades, a substantial body of evidence has emerged to demonstrate that service-learning promotes positive youth development like few other programs can, motivating students to achieve and teaching personal, social, and civic responsibility. Unfortunately, research also shows that the young people who need this the most are also the least likely to be engaged. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, disadvantaged teens are far less likely to volunteer than their peers from more advantaged backgrounds, by a 43 percent-to-59 percent margin. However, those disadvantaged youth who do serve hold more positive civic attitudes, discussing politics, believing that they can make a difference, and planning to go to college at higher rates than their low-income peers who do not volunteer.

Two other important legislative changes could advance service-learning. First, **expanding and modifying the existing Learn and Serve America legislation** should be a high priority, particularly increasing the funds available for strategic investments that would build capacity for service-learning, especially in schools serving disadvantaged students.

Second, Senators Dodd and Cochran have sponsored legislation to create a **“Summer of Service”** to offer students making the transition from middle to high school an opportunity to participate in a structured community service program over the summer months. The summer months between middle school and high school can be a particularly testing time, when children are redefining themselves, and in the process making decisions that may well determine who they will be as adults, for better or worse. For working parents, too, summer months are a particular challenge. Their kids are too young for paid jobs and too old to be “babysat.” Economically well-off families can afford a host of summer camps offering learning opportunities from language immersion to lacrosse. But in too many communities, offerings for older youth are limited and prices steep, making summer a time of particular peril.

Middle schoolers who perform a “summer of service” under the bill would earn a \$500 scholarship. At a time in life when students and their families need to begin thinking about college, this feature would positively brand participating youth as college material—even those who never considered the possibility—and could set these students and their families on a course of saving and planning for college. By making the summer service experience a “rite of passage” for young people in transition to high school, whole communities could be transformed.

Third, the alumni of AmeriCorps and other national service programs represent a growing and capable resource that can meet the workload surge following a disaster and provide needed service in targeted issues of local and national concern. We saw this after Hurricane Katrina, but alumni could be more easily engaged to respond to crises and other priority national needs if a database, training and deployment systems were developed and if funding were available for living and travel expenses for Alumni

volunteers ready to be called back into service. The **National Service Reserve Corps** would build such a system.

Finally, I would be remiss in not stressing to the Committee the need to reauthorize the programs authorized under the National and Community Service Act and Domestic Volunteer Service Act. These programs have not been revisited for fifteen years and are badly in need of updating. For example:

We need to **increase and index the Segal Education Award**. For a year of full-time service, an AmeriCorps member receives an education award worth \$4,725, which may be used for higher education or to pay back student loans. This amount, which is fully taxable, was established in 1993 and equaled tuition, fees, and room and board at a two-year higher education institution in 1995, the first year in which an AmeriCorps member would have been eligible to use the award. Today higher education costs have increased dramatically, with two-year institutions charging more than \$7,000 annually and four-year institutions costing \$17,447 in 2007. It is time to adjust the Segal Education Award to ensure it remains a means of educational access for those who make a year-long commitment to service.

We also need to move to a system of **fixed price grants** in AmeriCorps to eliminate complex accounting requirements that contribute neither to accountability nor program quality. By specifying a flat amount per member, and requiring that grantees raise any additional amounts they need to operate a program, the same amount of leverage can be attained without forcing programs into a needlessly complex system.

The Senior Corps programs are also in need of updating, particularly the **stipend provided to Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions**. The low-income adults who serve in these programs receive just \$2.65 per hour of service, an amount that should be increased and indexed.

Finally, we all know that public service spans a very large range, from a volunteer commitment of a few hours to a lifetime of service. Our nation needs both – people who take a day out of their business career to do pro bono work or build a playground, and people who, like you, choose to make a career of serving the American people through government. We can attract more of the best and the brightest to federal service by granting AmeriCorps members the same **noncompetitive eligibility for federal service** available to Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers and supporting programs like the proposed **Roosevelt Scholars Act**, which would create an ROTC-like scholarship program to fund graduate-level education in mission-critical fields in exchange for a federal service commitment.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee today. With your leadership, we can take the next giant step toward solving many of our most pressing problems by better deploying the time and talents of Americans of all ages to serve their communities and the country.