

**Testimony for the
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
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Hearing Entitled:

"Renewing America Through National Service and Volunteerism"

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Let me first thank Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon for convening this hearing on national service and volunteerism. It is important and timely for every American and is an issue that defies partisan boundaries. Citizen service belongs to no party, no ideology. It is above all an American idea in which Americans can find common ground.

Today, I speak on behalf of the Experience Wave, supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies. Experience Wave is a campaign to advance state and federal policies that tap the reservoir of time, talent, skills and abilities of the boomer generation and enable older adults to stay engaged in work, civic life, and service.

In President Obama's words, we find one of the compelling reasons to embrace citizen service:

Through service, I found a community that embraced me; a church to belong to; citizenship that was meaningful; the direction I'd been seeking. Through service, I found that my own improbable story fit into a larger American story. ("A Call to Serve," Cornell College, Iowa, December 5, 2007)

The call to service is one that I helped issue nearly half a century ago when I worked with President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver to create the Peace Corps, and, later with Sargent Shriver, on the Foster Grandparent Program.

Today, the three programs of the Senior Corps -- Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), together tap the talents of one-half million older Americans in service to their communities and their neighbors. As all three programs have done so well for many years (which I saw first hand as CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service) Foster Grandparents work with at-risk children, Senior Companions provide a lifeline to homebound seniors, and the RSVP program engages hundreds of thousands of volunteers in an array of community service: in disaster relief, homeland security, environmental

action, including help to other older Americans needing education against telemarketing fraud, in the prevention of falls, and for new involvement in a green economy. These programs provide good ways for seniors to contribute and make a real difference for individuals, nonprofits, and faith-based and other community organizations throughout the United States. They should be expanded.

I just returned from India with a Congressional delegation led by John Lewis and Spencer Bachus. We retraced the trip made fifty years ago by Martin Luther King, Jr. He was a man of service who said, "Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, at nearly four score and three years, I am still trying to practice what Dr. King prescribed. In that spirit I am here to support legislation that will encourage anyone at any age to serve. The GIVE Act and other legislation you are considering does that.

Creating service opportunities for fellow Americans is one of the most important needs of the nation. I have been lucky to be a part of many efforts to do this - in the 1980s as the initiator of Pennsylvania Governor Bob Casey's Office of Citizen Service and in the 1990s as CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, and now in this new decade as a spokesperson for the Experience Wave.

Unfortunately, many view the coming population of older Americans as a burden. Instead, we need to see them first of all as an asset of tremendous potential, a great force for the common good. And they need to see themselves in that light.

To crack the atom of citizen service and release its full potential, we will all need to recognize that citizen service is ageless, that it spans the generations and connects the generations.

The experience wave *is* coming. In 2006, the first of the 77 million "boomers" (Americans born between 1946 and 1964) turned 60 and the wave began. By comparison, there were 48 million people born from 1963-1978, the so-called "Generation X."

As the boomer generation begins to retire and leave vacancies, employers in all sectors will be pressed to replace them with younger workers who may lack the skills and experience the older workers brought to the workplace. This knowledge and experience gap will hit some industries and sectors particularly hard.

The boomers represent the most active, healthy, and educated retiring generation in the history of the United States. This presents a great opportunity for businesses, communities, and non-profit organizations to engage mature and older

workers in continued employment or charitable service. We can't afford to miss this opportunity.

The boomer generation wants to give back to society, to be useful. Many know they want to try their hands at second careers, whether in part-time or full-time work, or in volunteer service. As the idea of encore careers spreads, many more will want to undertake them.

For this to happen we will need to create programs to retrain or expand the skills of boomers so they can take on new or expanded responsibilities. Charitable work will often need to be restructured. With the right preparation, this generation can mentor or tutor young people, prepare tax returns, give advice on health, and perform a variety of high-skill services.

With labor shortages in health care, engineering, education, government, and other sectors, it is in our national interest to usher the generation that invented computers and modern medicine into another phase of life that may include flexible paid work as well as charitable service or pro bono work.

In addition to delivering high quality, crucial service, older adults can improve their own lives. Two recent studies by Washington University and Johns Hopkins University find that service in the Experience Corps program, in which people over 55 now tutor and mentor disadvantaged elementary school students in 23 cities, provides a sustained boost in health and well-being for the tutors themselves.

Experience Corps members are a diverse group. The average age is 65, but the ages range from 50 to 87. Their income and education covers a wide range as well. Over half the members are African American and 39% are white. Findings in the two studies showed a sustained increase in levels of activity, greater engagement in social and community events, greater support for public education, a wider circle of friends and a better outlook on life.

Research also indicates that adults who are active and engaged are healthier longer and less reliant on federal programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. So service can be a preventive medicine to help preserve our budgets. And there are all these benefits for those who serve, while kids' reading scores improve, the homebound receive assistance, the forgotten are remembered, and a multitude of others are helped.

A critical factor to recognize is that many, if not most, boomers will need to work for pay or some other income support because their retirement savings or income is insufficient. A recent AARP survey of 1,200 boomers found that more than 80 percent expect to work at least part-time in their retirement years.

Unfortunately, many barriers discourage people from continuing to work. Some employer pension plans require retirement by a certain age and many workplaces do not offer flexible schedules that many older workers seek.

This committee can address these challenges, sustain the good works of current programs and expand other opportunities for boomers to meet the evolving needs of our communities, boomers, and other older Americans.

So I offer my warm support to last year's GIVE Act. The Act promotes programs to encourage boomers and older adults to volunteer with a range of opportunities including:

- Next Chapter Grants to fund organizations such as community colleges and other nonprofits to serve as one-stop resources for finding paid or volunteer jobs that provide service to the community;
- Time Banking which would create local service exchanges where both parties are compensated with reciprocal amounts of volunteer service and no money changes hands;
- Requirements that states develop comprehensive plans to tap the resources of boomers and older adults for volunteer and paid work;
- Bilingual Volunteer Recruitment to enhance outreach for senior volunteer programs so that bilingual volunteers are recruited; and
- The creation of additional programs to help ensure that low-income Americans, including older adults, have opportunities to serve, including Silver Scholarships.

In addition, your colleagues in the Senate have addressed the issue with program expansions and innovations which should be supported by both chambers of Congress and by both sides of the aisle:

- Senators Kennedy and Hatch have introduced the comprehensive Serve America Act which includes the Senior Corps; and new Encore programs; and
- Senator Dodd and Congresswoman DeLauro have written the Encore Service Act which includes the Silver Scholars program -- highlighted by Congressman Sestak -- an initiative that encourages older adults to continue lifelong learning and apply it to new careers and goals.

The potential for drawing millions of boomers into serving local communities is one of the promising elements in national service legislation. We know that 10,000 boomers turn 60 every day. Some of them have already retired, some are facing involuntary retirement due to the economic downturn, and some will continue to work full-time for many years. National service should offer all of them an attractive menu of opportunities to do what most of them already say they want to do – help others. They should be able to serve for one or many years, there should be part-time and full time opportunities; education awards should be available for transfer to a grandchild or a child they have tutored or mentored. It is important for the outreach, recruitment and program design for this population to be tailored to what is known about Boomers.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that the following documents be placed in the record: a letter to the Obama transition team from some of our nation's service leaders, a letter from the Age

for Change coalition supporting service legislation, and an op ed that Representative Lewis and I wrote that was published on inauguration day.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I remind you of the good work you have done with the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA). Now all boomers are protected by it. Your committee can now help the boomers become or remain engaged in valuable employment and volunteer work by moving these national service bills forward this year.

In difficult economic times, the power and value of volunteer service is greater. You have passed the Recovery and Reinvestment Act to help jump start the economy. In the next series of actions, we hope you will enact legislation, such as the GIVE Act, to provide an intergenerational investment – allowing more people to help their communities and their fellow Americans who are in need.

But also please visit the Experience Wave website at www.experiencewave.org. You'll see that there is a great deal of activity around stimulating service opportunities at the state level. Thank you for moving forward on the Federal front.