

## Senate Passes Historic Bipartisan Expansion of National Service

President Obama called for passage of national service legislation in his joint address to Congress on February 25, and the House and Senate have responded with swift bipartisan action. The legislation would reauthorize the Corporation and its programs, create new opportunities for Americans of all ages to serve, increase efficiency and accountability, support social innovation, strengthen the nation's volunteer infrastructure, and help usher in a new generation of service for America.

"At this time of economic crisis, we need service and volunteering more than ever. This bill will help unleash a powerful new wave of service and civic action to help tackle our nation's toughest challenges," said the Corporation's Board Chair Alan Solomont. "We thank the Senate for taking this historic bipartisan step for national service. We are especially grateful to Senator Hatch, Senator Mikulski, and Senator Enzi for their outstanding leadership, and to Senator Kennedy, who exemplifies the ideal of public service and who has been our friend and champion for decades."

During four days of debate, numerous Senators explained how their own service experiences in the military, Peace Corps, and other organizations taught them valuable lessons and set them on a lifelong path of service. Senators shared real-life examples of volunteers and national service participants in their states providing vital services to address illiteracy, homelessness, disasters, poverty, and other social ills.

"Today's Senate passage of the Serve America Act demonstrates welcome bipartisan agreement on the often neglected but indispensable value of citizen service in addressing some of the most urgent challenges facing America and the world. The bill is a major expansion of existing national and community programs. Its goal is to tap much more deeply into Americans' enthusiasm to serve, and direct it to areas and issues where it can make the biggest difference," Senator Kennedy said.

"The passage of the Serve America Act is a significant milestone for our country. By increasing opportunities nationwide for Americans to serve and, thus, enabling private citizens to do more for their communities, personal and community responsibility will take the place of direct government aid," said Senator Hatch. "This is truly a bipartisan piece of legislation. In my opinion, it is probably the most bipartisan bill we will see on the Senate floor this year. At every stage, Republicans and Democrats have been working together to craft this legislation in order to bring it where we have it today."

"Even in the midst of the greatest economic crisis in a generation, Americans everywhere are looking to serve and give back to their country. They want to know how they can give and how they can help. They want to be part of an effort

to improve society,” Senator Mikulski said. “This bill makes use of this new, invigorated spirit to serve, while putting people to work in specific areas of national need. This is a public investment that will pay dividends long beyond anything we can imagine.”

“A comprehensive reauthorization of our national service statutes is long overdue,” Senator Enzi said. “This is a fiscally responsible bill that will improve accountability, reduce bureaucracy and eliminate waste in our national service programs. This bill will leverage the efforts of a few to mobilize millions of faith-based organizations, church groups, non-profits, and individuals to volunteer their time and energy freely to serve their communities.”

The bill contains a wide range of provisions to expand service opportunities and strengthen program management, including:

- Puts AmeriCorps on a growth path from its current level of 75,000 to 250,000 annual members, with focus on priority needs including advancing student achievement and graduation, providing economic opportunity, increasing energy efficiency, improving health care access, and enhancing service opportunities for veterans.
- Increases the amount of the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award that AmeriCorps members receive after their completing their term of service from \$4,725 to the Pell Grant amount of \$5,350.
- Strengthens the nation’s civic infrastructure through creation of a Social Innovation Fund to provide seed money and scale up innovative and evidence-based initiatives and a Volunteer Generation Fund to award grants to nonprofits and states to recruit, manage, and support volunteers.
- Provides incentives for middle and high school students to engage in service through a Summer of Service program and authorizes higher education institutions to be eligible for grants to encourage students to engage in service during school and in their future careers.
- Expands service opportunities for older Americans by expanding eligibility for the Senior Companion and Foster Grandparent programs, introducing competition into the Retired Senior Volunteer Program to better position the program for expansion, and creating other opportunities for Baby Boomers and other older Americans to transition into post-career service opportunities.

The early focus on bipartisan national service legislation comes as the economic downturn increases demands on the nonprofit sector and as AmeriCorps experiences a spike in applications and interest. Last month there were 9,731 applications submitted to the AmeriCorps online application system, more than triple the 3,159 submitted in February 2008.

“We are grateful to the Senate for passing this legislation at an unprecedented moment of need and opportunity for national service,” said Acting Corporation CEO Nicola Goren. She noted the bill's provisions to strengthen accountability, increase cost-effectiveness, provide flexibility, and simplify requirements, stating,

"This legislation will allow us to grow national service in a responsible and effective way to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to meet pressing community needs."

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year, the Corporation engages four million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America programs. For more information, visit [www.NationalService.gov](http://www.NationalService.gov).