

## Connecticut Debate Association

September 23, 2017

### Novice Scrimmage: Greenwich High School

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**Resolved: Every citizen should complete one year of national service.**

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#### Lincoln's Call to Service—and Ours

The Wall Street Journal, By Stanley McChrystal, May 29, 2013 7:03 p.m. ET

A proposal that would help young Americans understand that civic duty is not restricted to the military.

My father first took me to Gettysburg when I was 12 years old. He was a lieutenant colonel in the Army, home from the first of two tours in Vietnam. I remember in particular the hundreds of obelisks poking over the berms, the oxidized plaques attached to rocks and the statues lining the roadways. All spoke for the thousands of men and boys who had died in the grass and dirt serving their nation.

I was young, but I recognized the gravity of the place.

Though I went on to have a career in the military, the visits to Gettysburg with my father were not preparation for soldiering as much as they were early lessons in citizenship—a particular understanding of citizenship that President Lincoln defined and challenged us to fulfill when he delivered his famous address there. It's a citizenship that does not simply reflect upon the sacrifices of others, but that honors their sacrifice through action: "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced."

Today, as ever, the task is unfinished. Yet the duties of citizenship have fallen from the national agenda. Talk of service is largely confined to buoyant commencement ceremonies. And too often it is just that: talk.

Less than 1% of Americans serve in the military—a historic low during wartime—leading to a broad, complacent assumption that serving the nation is someone else's job. As we've allowed our understanding of service to be so narrowly limited to the uniform, we've forgotten Lincoln's audience: With the armies still fighting, the president exhorted a crowd of civilians on their duty to carry forward the nation's work.

It is right that we send off the young Americans graduating this month from high school, college and professional schools with speeches. They should be congratulated for completing the many exams now behind them. But we must remember another test—Lincoln's test of citizenship—and begin to mark these important junctures in life not just with words, but with real-world commitment.

Universal national service should become a new American rite of passage. Here is a specific, realistic proposal that would create one million full-time civilian national-service positions for Americans ages 18-28 that would complement the active-duty military—and would change the current cultural expectation that service is only the duty of those in uniform.

At age 18, every young man and woman would receive information on various options for national service. Along with the five branches of the military, graduates would learn about new civilian service branches organized around urgent issues like education, health care and poverty. The positions within these branches would be offered through AmeriCorps as well as through certified nonprofits. Service would last at least a year.

Returning military veterans would be treated as the civic assets they are and permitted to use a portion of their GI Bill benefits to support a period of civilian national service, since such service helps them transition to life back home.

The new service opportunities would be created in accordance with the smart rules that have guided AmeriCorps since its founding in 1994, which allow that program to field tens of thousands of service members without displacing workers and who fill vital niches their paid colleagues do not.

Serving full-time for a year or two needs to be a realistic option for all young Americans, regardless of their family's finances. So civilian service positions would be modestly paid, as AmeriCorps positions are now. (Most AmeriCorps service-members receive a \$12,100 stipend for the year, and if they complete their term of service, a \$5,550 scholarship to help cover tuition or to pay off student loans.) Government agencies focused on the challenges that these service-members address, as well as the corporations that will benefit from employing Americans whose leadership will be cultivated by service, should step up to fund these efforts.

Instead of making national service legally mandatory, corporations and universities, among other institutions, could be enlisted to make national service socially obligatory. Schools can adjust their acceptance policies and employers their

hiring practices to benefit those who have served—and effectively penalize those who do not.

More than most Americans realize, the demand to serve already exists. In 2011, there were nearly 600,000 applications to AmeriCorps—a program with only 80,000 positions, only half of which are full time. The Peace Corps received 150,000 requests for applications but has funding for only 4,000 new positions each year. This gap represents democratic energy wasted and a generation of patriotism needlessly squandered.

Some, particularly after having just observed Memorial Day, might think that only war is capable of binding a generation and instilling true civic pride. But you don't have to hear the hiss of bullets to develop a deeper claim to the nation. In my nearly four decades in the military, I saw young men and women learn the meaning and responsibilities of citizenship by wearing the uniform in times of both peace and war. They were required to work with people of different backgrounds, introduced to teamwork and discipline, unified by common tests, and brought even closer by sacrifice. Some discovered, often to their surprise, that they were leaders.

This transformation is not exclusive to the military. Those who disagree need only visit young teachers working 18-hour days together in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans. In rural Colorado health clinics, in California's forests, or Midwest neighborhoods devastated by tornadoes, skeptics would see teams of young people—affluent and poor, college-educated and not—devoting their days to a singular, impactful mission.

Universal national service would surely face obstacles. But America is too big, and our challenges too expansive, for small ideas. To help stem the high-school dropout crisis, to conserve rivers and parks, to prepare for and respond to disasters, to fight poverty and, perhaps most important, to instill in all Americans a sense of civic duty, the nation needs all its young people to serve.

Whatever the details of a specific plan, the objective must be a cultural shift that makes service an expected rite of citizenship. Anything less fails Lincoln's test.

Gen. McChrystal, a former commander of U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan and of the Joint Special Operations Command, is the chairman of the Leadership Council of the Franklin Project on national service at the Aspen Institute.

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## **Compulsory National Service Would Undermine the American Character**

US News and World Report, By Matthew Spalding, Opinion Contributor | Oct. 19, 2010

Compulsory National Service Would Undermine the American Character

Government-directed “volunteerism” belittles authentic volunteerism.

Americans have always exhibited a strong sense of compassion toward their neighbors and those less fortunate. Volunteerism, what Alexis de Tocqueville called our “spirit of association,” is in the national DNA. Policymakers have long recognized the importance of citizen engagement and philanthropic volunteerism to a thriving civil society.

But government should not attempt to compel its citizens to engage in these worthwhile endeavors. Its proper role is merely to energize a culture of personal commitment to those in need as a way of strengthening the natural grounds of citizenship and community.

The goal of citizen service should be to protect and strengthen civil society. Tocqueville observed that one of American society's great virtues is its tendency to create local voluntary associations to meet the most important needs of the people. Other nations handled these needs through and by government; but in the United States, private individuals of all ages, conditions, and dispositions formed associations.

“I have often admired the extreme skill with which the inhabitants of the United States succeed in proposing a common object to the exertions of a great many men, and in getting them voluntarily to pursue it,” Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America*. “What political power could ever carry on the vast multitude of lesser undertakings which American citizens perform every day, with the assistance of the principle of association?” He added, “The more [government] stands in the place of associations, the more will individuals, losing the notion of combining together, require its assistance.”

The traditional associations of civil society—families, schools, churches, and voluntary organizations—sustain social order and public morality, moderate individualism and materialism, and cultivate personal character.

The concept of national service is altogether different.

Government programs, like AmeriCorps, do not encourage sacrificial giving of time and resources, which has the character-forming effect of teaching compassionate responsibility. Instead, they suggest that “volunteerism” could just as well mean a paid job with benefits—or worse, a mandatory obligation. Such government-directed “volunteerism,” by encouraging individuals and associations to look to the state as the provider of assistance, belittles authentic volunteerism, the process by which individuals choose without economic benefit to help their neighbor. It also threatens

the independence of the private associations that have always been the engine of moral and social reform in America. The American way. The call to service is best answered not by government, but by the citizens in voluntary associations, local communities, and private organizations that are at the heart of American charity. Last year alone, 63.4 million Americans volunteered, well exceeding the 500,000 involved in national service. Total private giving is estimated to exceed \$300 billion a year, with individuals accounting for 75 percent of that, overwhelming the Corporation for National and Community Service's budget of just under \$1 billion. One organization, the Knights of Columbus, made charitable contributions of over \$150 million and generated some 70 million volunteer service hours. The depth of private American charity and the vast potential to expand these great activities ought to be highlighted and strongly encouraged.

These private voluntary organizations thrive today precisely because their work is privately organized, highly decentralized, and directly focused on community needs and local conditions.

At a time when Americans are volunteering in unprecedented numbers (and ways), policymakers should reject the model of government-centered national service, which undermines the American character and threatens to weaken private associations.

The better course is to bolster the call to service by encouraging a true and voluntary citizen service that is consistent with principles of self-government, is harmonious with a vibrant civil society, and promotes a service agenda based on personal responsibility, independent citizenship, and civic volunteerism.

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## **Compulsory National Service Would Strengthen American Citizenship**

US News and World Report, By William A. Galston, Contributor | Oct. 19, 2010, at 10:02 a.m.

There's more to citizenship than simply asserting your rights.

There are different kinds of rights. Some we enjoy simply because we are human beings—the rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, for example. Others are linked to a particular status: American citizens possess some rights that noncitizens do not. We do not have to earn human rights, and no one can take them away from us. By contrast, we may have to perform specified acts to obtain citizenship rights (that's what naturalization laws are about), and we may act in ways that lead to forfeiture of some of those rights, at least temporarily, as in the case of convicted criminals not being allowed to vote.

Citizenship, then, is a package of rights and responsibilities. But there is no theory that tells us exactly what is or should be in that package. It's up to us to decide.

In recent decades, we've expanded old rights and created new ones. While often controversial, that process has in many respects made us a fairer and more inclusive society. We've spent less time on the other half of the equation—the responsibilities that citizens share for the well-being of others and for the country as a whole. It's time to redress the balance.

Citizens' due. Some responsibilities are not controversial, such as obeying duly enacted laws. Another example: Most people recognize that the right to trial by a jury of our peers exists only on paper unless we appear for jury duty when summoned. No doubt the summons can arrive at an inconvenient moment, but we can't take the position that mandatory jury duty is an illegitimate limitation on individual liberty without threatening the basis of our justice system.

In the past, we have regarded military service as a responsibility of citizenship. After Vietnam, in which the fairness of the draft emerged as a major issue, we turned toward all-volunteer armed forces. In many respects the shift has been a success. The military has attracted a steady stream of highly qualified recruits, and the skills and discipline of our armed forces have never been higher.

But we have paid a price: A small percentage of Americans do the fighting for the rest of us, creating a wedge between military professionals and average citizens. Many elected officials lack military experience, and few have children in uniform. For most of us, defending our country is something we watch on television. Little in the lives of young Americans helps them understand that citizenship is more than a list of rights to which they are entitled.

There's something we can do about this. Suppose that upon high school graduation or reaching the age of 18, every American were given a randomly selected lottery number based on their birthday and that a certain portion were selected for civic service. They would be offered a choice—two years of either military or civilian service. Those doing civilian service would receive stipends large enough to pay living expenses, as members of AmeriCorps do today.

This system would produce a number of desirable results for the country, as it would benefit from such service, but also for those who perform it. By the time they entered high school, young people would know that they might be asked to serve, and they would begin to talk to their older siblings or relatives about their options. They would begin to

understand that there's more to citizenship than simply asserting their rights.

Those called to serve would spend time helping their country in their communities, in hard-hit areas far from home, or overseas. They would meet people unlike themselves, members of other classes and ethnic groups, with different aspirations. Some would begin to reshape their conceptions of how to spend their lives, opting for military, nonprofit, or public service careers. Most would form enduring friendships; all would have formative experiences they would never forget.

Some will object to this proposal as an unwarranted limitation on liberty, and surveys probably would show a majority of high school students opposed. But we have to ask ourselves whether we're satisfied with the condition of American citizenship today and, if not, how we're prepared to strengthen it. This is a national debate we should all welcome.

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## **The Case Against Universal National Service**

The Atlantic, CONOR FRIEDERSDORF JUN 26, 2013 POLITICS

Everyone has an obligation to give back, but a one-size-fits-all program could never be implemented justly.

The push for "national service," or compelling young people to spend a year or two doing deeds on behalf of America, is beginning anew. Entrepreneur Arianna Huffington filed a dispatch yesterday from Aspen, Colorado, where she'll be participating in an effort "to make universal national service a new American rite of passage." She is one of several high profile participants in the Franklin Project, "formed after General Stanley McChrystal's call at the 2012 Aspen Ideas Festival for a national service program." Here is the 2012 conversation that started it all:

McChrystal went on to publish a Wall Street Journal op-ed on the same subject:

Here is a specific, realistic proposal that would create one million full-time civilian national-service positions for Americans ages 18-28 that would complement the active-duty military--and would change the current cultural expectation that service is only the duty of those in uniform. At age 18, every young man and woman would receive information on various options for national service. Along with the five branches of the military, graduates would learn about new civilian service branches organized around urgent issues like education, health care and poverty. The positions within these branches would be offered through AmeriCorps as well as through certified nonprofits. Service would last at least a year.

He subsequently wrote that "instead of making national service legally mandatory, corporations and universities, among other institutions, could be enlisted to make national service socially obligatory." As he envisions it, "schools can adjust their acceptance policies and employers their hiring practices to benefit those who have served--and effectively penalize those who do not." He's back in Aspen this year to keep advocating for some type of universal national service program. I'm also at the Aspen Ideas Festival, which The Atlantic co-sponsors with the Aspen Institute. I'd like to offer some constructively criticism of this policy idea -- and note some common ground too.

As a teen, I was compelled to complete 80 volunteer hours in order to graduate from the Catholic high school that I attended. I logged those hours at a sports camp put on by a wheelchair tennis organization, as well as at Special Camp for Special Kids, a San Juan Capistrano, California, charity that endeavors to give special needs kids the summer camp experience that would otherwise elude them (and to give their parents a brief, much needed break). Volunteering proved very rewarding, and probably wasn't something I would've done otherwise. Many (though not all) of my peers were ultimately enthusiastic about the forced volunteering, which advanced the religious, pedagogical, and college-resume-burnishing missions of our high school. Were I in charge there, I would certainly retain the "service hours" requirement.

My younger sister followed in my footsteps as a volunteer at Special Camp, attended college, joined the administrative ranks of that organization, and then helped to run Camp Painted Turtle, a Paul Newman charity equipped to give a summer camp experience to kids with a staggering variety of severe medical problems. She's since left that wonderful organization on good terms. (I'm heartbroken to report that this summer's session has been cancelled due to damages sustained in a wildfire -- the nonprofit is scrambling to raise money in hopes of reopening.)

All over America, there are private schools, religious organizations, civic groups, non-profits, and businesses that either require or enable volunteerism. Many of their programs are worth celebrating and emulating. So why not mandate that every American do national service for one or two years at age 18 or 22?

There are a number of factors that should give us pause:

- 1) The educational and career demands of modern society are already causing people to delay marriage and child-bearing. I wouldn't want to coerce anyone to wed and procreate early. But building another one or two year lag into "coming-of-age" could have unintended consequences.

2) A one-size-fits-all mandate inevitably does serious harm to some people in a society as diverse as ours. Working for Uncle Sam might not cost the average person much at age 18 or 22. But think of how important that precious year of youth is to some people -- for example, the thousands of Americans who make their careers in professional athletics, whether the NBA or Olympic badminton. They've got a limited number of years to pursue their passion. If you're LeBron James, a year of service when you're age 40 makes a lot more sense! If you're a young Mormon couple with religious obligations to your community and a desire to have a really big family, an extra volunteering burden in your early 20s matters a lot. Maybe it means you have to have one less kid. The Washington, D.C., wonks who write the laws won't think of these minorities.

3) Lots of people fulfill obligations beyond themselves that aren't "public service" as we generally understand it: helping to support their single mother and younger siblings; taking care of a sick parent or grandparent; working so a significant other can afford law or medical school; babysitting for a neighbor while she finishes her master's degree on Wednesday nights; helping a talented but disorganized friend complete her application for art school. Is it proper to compel those people to reallocate their time, so that they're serving "the public" rather than their family, friends or neighbors? Of course, any opt-out clause for people in the circumstances I've described would make national service so easy to avoid that it wouldn't be universal. People "give" in lots of different ways. Why should one of them be elevated and made compulsory?

4) After college, I pursued a different path than my sister: I took a job as the beat reporter in Rancho Cucamonga, California. The stories I wrote for a community newspaper were often the only record of important civic happenings in a city of 100,000 people -- a huge responsibility, especially for a 22-year-old, and one that caused me to happily work extremely long hours for very modest pay. Given my skills at the time, as well as my notion of the good, there was no place in America where I would've been of greater value to my fellow citizens than the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin. That job also helped me build skills I've made use of ever since in my career. As a personal matter, delaying the start of my journalism career would've had a significant negative impact on my life (perhaps I'd feel differently if my path to magazine journalism was the Harvard-or-Yale-undergrad-to-internship route; it wasn't). As a matter of principle, I resist the notion that my job had no public service component. Would "professional reporter" ever count as national service? On what basis would we decide? If some jobs count, then the state must bless some and diminish others. I certainly question whether various jobs advance the public interest in any way, but I don't think my judgment or the polity's should be decisive.

5) Based on seeing the work that my sister and her colleagues did at Special Camp and Camp Painted Turtle, I submit to you that they were insanely undervalued in our socio-economic system. It frustrates me every time people speak about workers at nonprofits as if toiling for a good cause should entail everyone cheerfully forgoing salaries commensurate with their skills. (A few weeks ago, I was reading a local newspaper that had a gift guide for college graduates. Rather than generic gifts, it suggested using a grad's intended career path for inspiration. Its gift idea for folks going into the non-profit sector: donate to their favorite charity in their name. Its gift idea for folks going into finance: give them money to invest. Why is working to help others taken as a signal that you don't value financial remuneration?) I fear that universal service would further entrench the notion that there are some things Americans do professionally, as "serious" careers -- lawyer, accountant, college professor -- and other things, like nonprofit work, that many people do free for a couple years, before moving on to something "real," (even as a small minority of wrongly lower status people keep serving others for a living). I'll believe that America values serving others when the people doing it are respected and paid as if they're valuable, not when older Americans vote en masse to force younger Americans to serve, doing various jobs deemed insufficiently important to pay a skilled employee.

6) Along the same lines, it's crazy that we expect soldiers to "serve" so much -- the gulf between their sacrifice and their compensation is a scandal, as is their suicide rate. I understand that military personnel sign up partly or even mostly for love of country. That doesn't mean they shouldn't get paid based on the costs they're bearing and the value they're adding as they defend us and complete missions. Yes, a draft would raise the cost of the military to all Americans, and perhaps make us more careful about how we use the military. But so would paying our volunteer force better. It's important that we retain the service component of soldiering -- I'm uneasy about private military contractors for that reason -- but part of the problem is that we overemphasize "service" in a way that causes us to exploit their patriotic impulses.

7) Proponents of national service worry that there's nothing binding all Americans together anymore. Actually, our ties are as strong as they've ever been: thanks to telecommunications advances, easy travel, and the enduring mobility of the American people, we live in a country with far more shared experiences than the America of 1776, 1876, or 1976, when a Californian would have little idea of what South Carolinians were seeing, arguing about, or doing every day. What's actually atrophying is local ties. As Alan Jacobs writes, "A great deal of suffering in America today is caused by the evacuation of intermediary structures: the church, the family, voluntary organizations. These intermediary structures are in desperate need of renewal and that can only happen if there is a systematic shift of power, wealth, and influence from



state and national governments to local units." I am loath to empower a national service bureaucracy that standardizes, regulates and eventually displaces the diverse volunteerism already taking place all over America. Volunteer organizations are one of the few parts of American life that remain decentralized, with strong roots at the community level, and that is a good thing. Do we really want to slowly give it over to national administrators in Washington, D.C.?

8) Conceptually, why should the state put its thumb on the scale in favor of young people serving "the United States," as opposed to individuals in their lives who need help, or people in their cities, or the global structure of their religious congregation? Is it better to serve the United States than to travel abroad to build houses for poor Mexicans, or to provide education and birth control to Rwandan women, or to be Mormon missionaries to French people? Different individuals ought to be able to make different value judgments about these sorts of questions.

9) If the state is going to coerce young adults to spend a year of their lives doing something -- and I don't think it should -- wouldn't the nation and the world benefit more from making them spend a year living abroad somewhere? I think so.

10) Of course, a cosmopolitan, coastal elite like myself would think that a year abroad is more valuable for young people than a year of service. And guess what? While my particular brand of policy preferences might not be captured in national service, make no mistake that the rules will be co-opted by ruling class elites to serve their ends. Everyone will be forced to serve, but some will serve in ways that reward them personally more than others. The system will be gamed by the wealthy, the well-connected, the folks with the social capital to figure out how things work -- and national service will be set up in a way that serves their ends and reflects their values and preferences.

11) Think of your age. Now imagine if Congress was considering mandatory national service for all Americans a year older than you are now. Think of all the reasons you'd think that was a bad idea.

12) Compulsory national service would seem to violate the 13th Amendment: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." FYI, the definition of servitude: "a condition in which one lacks liberty especially to determine one's course of action or way of life."

13) There are some things, like defending the nation and collecting taxes, that government must do. If barbarians march up to the gates with knives drawn, someone must go out and defend the city. And their weapons cost money. Military drafts for wars of self-defense and taxes are necessary evils -- necessary to avoid free-riders, and evil because they entail that the state use force to compel some human beings to do things that they really do not, in fact, want to do. Unlike maintaining a military, maintaining a force of 18-year-olds doing national service is not a necessity. Indeed, we've managed to be one of the wealthiest, most powerful, most free nations in history without it. If something is unnecessary, it's arguably immoral to force adults to spend months of their lives doing it (even if a good many of them would thank you afterward).

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Those are many, though not all, of the reasons that I would oppose any vote to implement universal national service. But there is one other line in McChrystal's WSJ op-ed that's worthy of note:

More than most Americans realize, the demand to serve already exists. In 2011, there were nearly 600,000 applications to AmeriCorps--a program with only 80,000 positions, only half of which are full time. The Peace Corps received 150,000 requests for applications but has funding for only 4,000 new positions each year. This gap represents democratic energy wasted and a generation of patriotism needlessly squandered.

Presuming that they're well run programs, I'd happily support expanding AmeriCorps and The Peace Corps so that more people who want to serve in that manner are afforded the opportunity. Enabling Americans to work for the greater good as they see it -- whether that means peace corps or starting a business or joining the military or working for a big corporation -- is a true strength of our country. Compelling everyone to follow a single path would reduce the value we create as a nation, devalue diversity, and transgress against the right to liberty.

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## A Time To Serve

Time, By Richard Stengel, Thursday, Aug. 30, 2007

As the Constitutional Convention of 1787 came to a close, after three and a half months of deliberation, a lady asked Dr. Franklin, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" "A republic," replied the Doctor, "if you can keep it."

— ANECDOTE FROM THE RECORDS OF THE FEDERAL CONVENTION OF 1787, ED., MAX FARRAND, VOL. 3, APPENDIX A, 1911

A republic, if you can keep it. The founders were not at all optimistic about the future of the Republic. There had been only a handful of other republics in all of human history, and most were small and far away. The founders' pessimism,

though, came not from history but from their knowledge of human nature. A republic, to survive, needed not only the consent of the governed but also their active participation. It was not a machine that would go of itself; free societies do not stay free without the involvement of their citizens.

Today the two central acts of democratic citizenship are voting and paying taxes. That's basically it. The last time we demanded anything else from people was when the draft ended in 1973. And yes, there are libertarians who believe that government asks too much of us — and that the principal right in a democracy is the right to be left alone — but most everyone else bemoans the fact that only about half of us vote and don't do much more than send in our returns on April 15. The truth is, even the archetype of the model citizen is mostly a myth. Except for times of war and the colonial days, we haven't been all that energetic about keeping the Republic.

When Americans look around right now, they see a public-school system with 38% of fourth graders unable to read at a basic level; they see the cost of health insurance escalating as 47 million people go uninsured; they see a government that responded ineptly to a hurricane in New Orleans; and they see a war whose ends they do not completely value or understand.

But there is something else we are seeing in the land. Polls show that while confidence in our democracy and our government is near an all-time low, volunteerism and civic participation since the '70s are near all-time highs. Political scientists are perplexed about this. If confidence is so low, why would people bother volunteering? The explanation is pretty simple. People, especially young people, think the government and the public sphere are broken, but they feel they can personally make a difference through community service. After 9/11, Americans were hungry to be asked to do something, to make some kind of sacrifice, and what they mostly remember is being asked to go shopping. The reason private volunteerism is so high is precisely that confidence in our public institutions is so low. People see volunteering not as a form of public service but as an antidote for it.

That is not a recipe for keeping a republic.

Another reality the founders could not have possibly foreseen was that a country that originally enslaved African Americans would be a majority non-white nation by 2050. Robert Putnam, the famed Harvard political scientist who wrote about the decline of civic engagement in *Bowling Alone*, recently released a new study that showed the more diverse a community is, the less people care about and engage with that community. Diversity, in fact, seems to breed distrust and disengagement. The study lands in the midst of a rickety immigration debate, but even if all immigration were to cease tomorrow, we would still be diverse whether we liked it or not. Yet the course of American history, Putnam writes, has always given way to "more encompassing identities" that create a "more capacious sense of 'we.'"

But at this moment in our history, 220 years after the Constitutional Convention, the way to get citizens involved in civic life, the way to create a common culture that will make a virtue of our diversity, the way to give us that more capacious sense of "we" — finally, the way to keep the Republic — is universal national service. No, not mandatory or compulsory service but service that is in our enlightened self-interest as a nation. We are at a historic junction; with the first open presidential election in more than a half-century, it is time for the next President to mine the desire that is out there for serving and create a program for universal national service that will be his — or her — legacy for decades to come. It is the simple but compelling idea that devoting a year or more to national service, whether military or civilian, should become a countrywide rite of passage, the common expectation and widespread experience of virtually every young American.

In 2006 more than 61 million Americans dedicated 8.1 billion hours to volunteerism. The nation's volunteer rate has increased by more than 6 percentage points since 1989. Overall, 27% of Americans engage in civic life by volunteering. Dr. Franklin would be impressed. The service movement itself began to take off in the 1980s, and today there is a renaissance of dynamic altruistic organizations in the U.S., from Teach for America to City Year to Senior Corps, many of them under the umbrella of AmeriCorps. In a 2002 poll, 70% of Americans thought universal service was a good idea. And while it's easy to sit back and say this to a pollster, the next President can harness the spirit of volunteerism that already exists and make it a permanent part of American culture.

At various times in American history, public service and private effort went arm in arm. After Pearl Harbor, Rosie the Riveter and Uncle Sam exhorted people to help the war effort, and Americans responded. But since F.D.R., and especially since J.F.K.'s launching of the Peace Corps, national service has been seen by some as a Democratic or liberal idea. In the '90s, Newt Gingrich argued that the rise of big government programs robbed people of their initiative to volunteer. After Bill Clinton signed the bill to create AmeriCorps in 1993, then Senator John Ashcroft called it "welfare for the well-to-do."

But these days there is a growing consensus on Capitol Hill that the private and public spheres can be linked. Democrats understand the need to support programs outside of government; Republicans understand that voluntary programs can be helped by government. In his first State of the Union address after 9/11, President George W. Bush called for Americans to give 4,000 hours of service and established the USA Freedom Corps. One of the early critics of

AmeriCorps, John McCain, has since become a devout supporter. "National service is an issue that has been largely identified with the Democratic Party and the left of the political spectrum," McCain wrote in a 2001 Washington Monthly essay. "That is unfortunate, because duty, honor and country are values that transcend ideology...National service is a crucial means of making our patriotism real, to the benefit of both ourselves and our country."

It may seem like a strange moment to make the case for national service for young Americans when so many are already doing so much. Young men and women have made their patriotism all too real by volunteering to fight two wars on foreign soil. But we have battlefields in America, too — particularly in education and health care — and the commitment of soldiers abroad has left others yearning to make a parallel commitment here at home.

## **THE PLAN**

So what would a plan for universal national service look like? It would be voluntary, not mandatory. Americans don't like to be told what they have to do; many have argued that requiring service drains the gift of its virtue. It would be based on carrots, not sticks — "doing well by doing good," as Benjamin Franklin, the true father of civic engagement, put it. So here is a 10-point plan for universal national service. The ideas here are a mixture of suggestions already made, revised versions of other proposals and a few new wrinkles.

### **1. Create a National-Service Baby Bond**

Every time an American baby is born, the Federal Government would invest \$5,000 in that child's name in a 529-type fund — the kind many Americans are already using for college savings. At a rate of return of 7% — the historic return for equities — that money would total roughly \$19,000 by the time that baby reaches age 20. That money could be accessed between the ages of 18 and 25 on one condition: that he or she commits to at least one year of national or military service. Like the old GI Bill, the money must be used to fund education, start a business or make a down payment on a home. The bond would preserve the voluntary nature of the service but offer a strong incentive for young people to sign up for it. Says City Year CEO and co-founder Michael Brown: "It's a new kind of government philosophy about reciprocity. If you invest in your country, your country will invest in you."

### **2. Make National Service a Cabinet-Level Department**

Right now, the Corporation for National and Community Service — created in 1993 to manage AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve America — is a small, independent federal agency. Find a catchier name, streamline its responsibilities and bring it up to Cabinet level. This would show that the new President means business when it comes to national service and would recognize that service is integral to how America thinks of itself — and how the President thinks of America. And don't appoint a gray bureaucrat to this job; make it someone like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Mike Bloomberg, who would capture the imagination of the public. In fact, the next President — whatever party — should set a goal to enlist at least 1 million Americans annually in national service by the year 2016.

### **3. Expand Existing National-Service Programs Like AmeriCorps and the National Senior Volunteer Corps**

Since 1994, 500,000 people have gone through AmeriCorps programs tutoring and teaching in urban schools; managing after-school programs; cleaning up playgrounds, schools and parks; and caring for the elderly. After Katrina, AmeriCorps participants descended on the Gulf Coast within 24 hours and have since contributed more than 3 million hours of service. AmeriCorps members earn a small stipend for their volunteering and receive education awards of up to \$4,725 per year. Right now, says David Eisner, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, "AmeriCorps is the best-kept secret in America." But under this national-service proposal, the program would more than triple in size, from 75,000 members each year to approximately 250,000. "We don't need to reinvent this nascent infrastructure," says Brown. "We need to take it to scale."

Presently, AmeriCorps is a catch-all initiative for a variety of different programs. Here are four new branded corps and other programs that could come under the new Department of National Service.

### **4. Create an Education Corps**

The idea here is to create a cadre of tutors, teachers and volunteers who can help the 38% of fourth-graders who can't read at a basic level. The members of the Education Corps would also lead after-school programs for the 14 million students — a quarter of all school-age kids — who do not have a supervised activity between 3 and 6 p.m. on schooldays. Studies show that students who spend no time in after-school programs are almost 50% more likely to have used drugs and 37% more likely to become teen parents than students who spend one to four hours a week in an extracurricular activity. The Corps members would also focus on curbing America's dropout epidemic. Right now, 50% of the dropouts come from 15% of the high schools in the U.S., most of them located in high-poverty city neighborhoods and throughout the South. The Education Corps would focus on those troubled school districts.

### **5. Institute a Summer of Service**

For many teenagers, the summer between middle school and high school is an awkward time. They're too young to get a



real job and too old to be babysat. Well-to-do families can afford summer camps and exotic learning opportunities, but they're a minority. Shirley Sagawa, an expert on youth policy and an architect of the AmeriCorps legislation, is proposing a Summer of Service. One hundred thousand students would volunteer for organizations like City Year, a national volunteering program and think tank, or Citizen Schools, which organizes after-school activities for middle schoolers, and run summer programs for younger students in exchange for a \$500 college scholarship. Senators Christopher Dodd (Democrat, Conn.) and Thad Cochran (Republican, Miss.) and Representative Rosa DeLauro (Democrat, Conn.) have sponsored a bill that would support a service "rite of passage" for students before they begin high school.

#### 6. Build a Health Corps

There are nearly 7 million American children who are eligible for but not enrolled in government-sponsored health-insurance programs. Health Corps volunteers would assist the mostly low-income families of these children in accessing available public insurance offerings like the Children's Health Insurance Program. These volunteers could also act as nonmedical support staff such as caseworkers and community education specialists in underserved rural health clinics — which have less than three-quarters of the nonmedical staffing they need, according to Voices for National Service, a coalition of service organizations that advocates expanding federal service programs. The one-year experience in the Health Corps could lead these volunteers toward careers in nursing or medicine, helping to redress gaps that have left the U.S. with a dearth of qualified nurses and medical professionals.

#### 7. Launch a Green Corps

This would be a combination of F.D.R.'s Civilian Conservation Corps — which put 3 million "boys in the woods" to build the foundation of our modern park system — and a group that would improve national infrastructure and combat climate change. When Roosevelt created the CCC, there were 25 million young Americans who were unemployed. Today there are 1.5 million Americans between 18 and 24 who are neither employed nor in school. These young men and women could address America's well-documented infrastructure problems. The Green Corps could reclaim polluted streams and blighted urban lots; repair and rehabilitate railroad lines, ports, schools and hospitals; and build energy-efficient green housing for elderly and low-income people.

#### 8. Recruit a Rapid-Response Reserve Corps

The disarray and lack of a coordinated response to 9/11 and Katrina tell us there is a role volunteers can play in responding quickly to disasters and emergencies. The new Rapid-Response Reserve Corps would consist of retired military and National Guard personnel as well as national- and community-service program alumni to focus on disaster preparedness and immediate response to local and national disasters. The program would initially train 50,000 members, who could be deployed for two-week periods in response to emergencies and serve under the guidance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

#### 9. Start a National-Service Academy

Picture West Point, but instead of learning how to fire an M-4 and reading *The Art of War*, students would be studying the Federalist papers and learning how to transform a failing public school. Conceived by two former Teach for America corps members, Chris Myers Asch and Shawn Raymond, the U.S. Public Service Academy would give undergraduates a four-year education in exchange for a five-year commitment to public service after they graduate. The idea is to provide a focused education for people who will serve in the public sector — either the federal, state or local government — and thereby create a new generation of civic leaders. Asch and Raymond were so dismayed by the government's response to Katrina that they wanted to create a new generation of people who were idealistic about government. "We need an institution that systematically develops leadership," says Asch. "We need to elevate it in the eyes of young people so we can attract the best and the brightest." The idea has been endorsed by Hillary Clinton and Pennsylvania Republican Senator Arlen Specter, who are co-sponsors of legislation that would allocate \$164 million per year for the envisioned 5,000-student academy.

#### 10. Create a Baby-Boomer Education Bond

Over the next 20 years, 78 million baby boomers will be eligible to retire. That is, if they can afford to — and if they want to. According to an AARP survey, 80% of Americans between 50 and 60 said they were planning to work during retirement. "Many seniors are interested in careers that are influenced by a spirit of service. Over half want to work in the education, health-care and nonprofit sector," says Marc Freedman, founder and CEO of Civic Ventures and co-founder of Experience Corps. Experience Corps is the largest AmeriCorps program for people over 55; it consists of teams of 10 to 15 people working to improve reading for students in kindergarten through third grade. Just as AmeriCorps members receive scholarships, baby-boomer volunteers would be able to designate a scholarship of \$1,000 for every 500 hours of community service they complete. The \$1,000 would be deposited into an education savings account or a 529 fund to be used by the volunteer's children or grandchildren or a student they designate. "There is a

whole trend of people starting second careers with a focus on service," says Freedman. "National service is not just for young people. This is the generation that national service was created for in the first place, whom J.F.K. called on to help and for whom we created the Peace Corps. Many missed their chance and are now getting a second opportunity to ask what they can do for their country."

### **THE COST**

So how much would all this cost? There are about 4 million babies born each year, and if each receives a \$5,000 baby bond, that would be about \$20 billion a year; that is, roughly two months of funding for the Iraq war and about half what the government spends per year on the federal prison system. The government would get \$1 billion in dividends from the investment and would be able to cash in the bonds that people don't use. At the same time, corporate America would need to play a critical role in a plan for universal national service. The private sector has contributed more than \$1 billion to AmeriCorps. The private sector must step up to the plate in funding national service — after all, it benefits too.

People are often skeptical of calls for service, especially from politicians, as they see them as crowd-pleasing rhetoric or a way of avoiding asking people to make a true sacrifice. But Americans are ready to be asked to do something. "People understand the idea that this is a great country, and that greatness isn't free," says Zach Maurin, the co-founder of ServeNext.org, which has launched a campaign to get the presidential candidates to endorse national service.

Between 1944 and 1956, 8 million returning veterans received debt-free education, low-interest mortgages or small-business loans. The GI Bill helped assimilate those young men into a new postwar society and helped turn America into a middle-class nation. A new GI Bill for national service involving men and women, young and old, could help secure America for the future and turn every new generation into a Greatest Generation. The courageous souls who signed the Declaration of Independence pledged "our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." The least we can do to keep the Republic is to pledge a little time.

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