

The Serve America Act

A Legislative Initiative to Expand and Improve Domestic and International Service Opportunities for All Americans

Introduced by Senator Edward M. Kennedy
and Senator Orrin Hatch

Themes

- Expand opportunities for people to serve at every stage of life.
- Use service to meet specific national challenges. Put service to work to solve our most pressing challenges, such as tackling the dropout crisis and strengthening our schools; improving energy efficiency; safeguarding the environment; improving health care in low-income communities; expanding economic opportunities for low-income individuals; and preparing for and responding to disasters and emergencies.

I. Ask Many More Americans to Give a Year to Solve Specific Challenges:

Building on the success of AmeriCorps, the legislation will create new, effective “Corps” focused on areas of national need. It will ask 175,000 Americans to give a year of service through these corps as part of a new national commitment to solve these challenges, expanding the number of national service participants to 250,000.

II. Increase Opportunities to Serve by People of All Ages:

- For Students, Increase Service Early in Life: Service early in life will put more and more youth on a path to a lifetime of service. The legislation will improve opportunities for young people in low income, high-need communities to engage in service to improve their own communities.
- For Working Adults, Encourage Employers to Let Employees Serve, by establishing a tax incentive for employers who allow employees to take paid leave for full-time service.
- For Retirees, Value Their Skills and Make Service Work for Them. Many retiring citizens are ready, willing, and able to be involved in service and have

skills the public needs – but none of the current service programs are structured with their needs in mind. The legislation will enhance incentives for retirees to give a year of service through the Corps, and will establish “Encore Fellowships” to help retirees who wish to transition to longer-term public service.

- For Americans of All Ages, Increase Volunteering. Not all Americans can make a significant time commitment to service, but many volunteer in other ways. The legislation will expand the volunteer pool by establishing a “Volunteer Generation Fund” to help nonprofit organizations recruit and manage more volunteers.

III. Support Innovation in the Nonprofit Sector:

Social entrepreneurs who have launched innovative nonprofit organizations such as Teach for America and Citizen Schools in Boston are experimenting with new solutions to pressing problems. The legislation will recognize and support the role of effective social entrepreneurs in solving our national challenges:

- Establish a Commission to study and improve how the federal government, nonprofits, and the private sector work together to meet national challenges effectively.
- Apply Effective Business Strategies to the Nonprofit Sector, by establishing a network of “Community Solution Funds” that are basically venture capital funds to help the nonprofit sector seek talent and put it to work.

IV. Improve and Expand International Service and America’s Respect in the World

- Support for Short-Term International Service Opportunities: We must expand the Peace Corps so more Americans can provide critical assistance to people across the globe while promoting America’s international standing. But many skilled Americans are unable to give two years. The legislation will strengthen the current “Volunteers for Prosperity” program, which coordinates and supports short-term international service opportunities for skilled professionals to serve in developing nations.

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