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**EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**

**Congressman George Miller, Chairman**

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Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On  
“Renewing America Through Service and Volunteerism”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “Renewing America Through Service and Volunteerism.”*

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I'd like to welcome everyone to today's hearing on how service and volunteerism can help us build a stronger, vibrant America.

We are at a critical moment in our nation's history. With our nation being tested by unprecedented challenges – the economic crisis, the energy crisis, struggling schools and more – our public needs are greater than ever.

These tests also present an enormous opportunity to make Americans a part of the solution by tapping into their patriotic spirit and desire to serve.

Service has been a key part of America's story since 1961, when President John F. Kennedy first challenged a generation of Americans to ask “not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”

He inspired millions of Americans to make a difference at home and around the globe by establishing the Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America programs.

In the fifty years since, hundreds of millions of Americans have helped build a powerful legacy.

In 2008, over 61 million adults volunteered. From 2002 to 2007, the number of volunteers across the country grew by more than a million, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service.

There are many ways to serve – from nonprofit and community organizations to the military to public service. According to the Partnership for Public Service, the federal government currently needs to fill thousands of service jobs in critical fields, including medicine, public health, foreign languages, and information technology.

And, for many Americans, military service has opened new doors to careers in addition to serving the country during times of war and peace.

As many of you know, we have a new President who has a personal interest in service: President Obama began his career by volunteering in the South Side of Chicago.

Last night, I was gratified to hear him make national service a key part of his bold agenda to revive and rebuild our country. To help get more students to college, he proposed making college more affordable for Americans who serve or volunteer.

He called for Congress to take urgent, bipartisan action to launch a new era of American service for current and future generations – making it clear that improving service must be one of the next actions we take to help lift our economy out of this crisis. I look forward to working with all members of this committee to deliver him this legislation as quickly as possible.

The economic recovery plan he enacted was a good first step toward rebuilding our service capacity.

It invests \$200 million to create as many as 13,000 new service opportunities with AmeriCorps – one of several programs we'll hear about from today's witnesses.

AmeriCorps, along with VISTA, Senior Corps, Learn and Serve America, and others, has become a successful model of public and private partnerships.

In neighborhoods across the country these programs are integral partners with business and local government, helping meet vital needs from mentoring programs for children of prisoners to feeding the hungry to providing independent living services to seniors.

These programs yield proven, measurable benefits. They can foster inspiration, teach valuable skills, and prepare Americans for jobs. They also provide the resources needed to tackle great challenges – like improving student achievement or rebuilding cities in times of disaster. For example:

- In Harlem, Brian McClendon has volunteered with Children's Zone for 12 years, an AmeriCorps program that helps improve the quality of life for children and adults in some of New York City's most impoverished neighborhoods.
- The program not only provided McClendon with a job – but also helped him stay away from drugs, gangs and violence while growing up in Harlem.
- In Jacksonville, Florida, Thelma "Granny" King, a retired registered nurse, helps emotionally and academically challenged inner-city students through SeniorCorps. She uses auditory, cognitive and kinesthetic skill-building activities to help students with no linguistic ability learn to communicate using their bodies.

Her success with these children has helped raise their graduation rates by 82 percent.

I've seen similar benefits in my district, where I love walking trails that are managed by the California Association of Local Conservation Corps – an AmeriCorps program that engages disadvantaged youth in rebuilding parks and trails and encourages them to become stewards of the environment.

The young people involved in this program often come from challenging communities. They have every obstacle in their way and every odd working against them.

And yet, this program is making a real difference in their lives – providing a sense of ownership, confidence and purpose while introducing them to the green jobs of the future.

We need more programs like this.

Today we'll hear from witnesses from across the service spectrum about innovative approaches to engage youth and older Americans in green jobs and other service opportunities.

They'll share their perspective on the power of service in changing communities and how we can leverage these opportunities as we move forward.

And they will help inform our efforts as we start working immediately, in a bipartisan basis here in this committee and with the Obama administration, to deliver the President bipartisan legislation that reinvigorates America's spirit of national service.

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