

**Statement of Stanley A. McChrystal, Robert M. Gates,
Condoleezza Rice, Stephen J. Hadley, and John M. Bridgeland**

**National Commission on Military, National and Public Service
June 17, 2019**

Dear Chairman Heck, Vice Chairs Gearan and Wada, and members of the Commission:

It is an honor to submit testimony as the Commission considers its policy options with respect to creating an expectation of national service in America and a 21st century national service system to match it.

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Robert M. Gates is Co-Chair of the Serve America Together campaign; former U.S. Secretary of Defense to President Barack Obama and President George W. Bush; former President of Texas A & M University; Chancellor of the College of William & Mary; and former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Condoleezza Rice is a member of the Serve America Together campaign; former U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor to President George W. Bush; former Provost of Stanford University; the Denning Professor in Global Business and the Economy at the Stanford Graduate School of Business; a Professor of Political Science at Stanford University; and the Thomas and Barbara Stephenson Senior Fellow on Public Policy at the Hoover Institution.

Stephen J. Hadley is Chairman of the U.S. Peace Institute; former National Security Advisor and Deputy National Security Advisor to President George W. Bush; former Partner at Shea & Gardner; and former Principal at the Scowcroft Group.

John M. Bridgeland is Vice Chairman of the Service Year Alliance; Founder and CEO of Civic; former Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council and Director of the USA Freedom Corps under President George W. Bush, where he coordinated policy on national service in the aftermath of 9/11; and former Member of the White House Council for Community Solutions under President Barack Obama.

We strongly support your mission to foster a greater ethos of service to strengthen American democracy. We encourage the Commission to use this unique opportunity to dramatically expand civilian national service opportunities. America is too big, and our challenges too expansive, for small ideas. National service is a big idea whose time has come.

The Case for Universal National Service

America needs universal voluntary national service. America's youth (ages 18-28) should be expected – and given the opportunity – to serve their country as they enter adulthood to help solve

our nation's most pressing problems and, in sharing the hardship and fulfillment that only service can offer, bind themselves to one another and to the nation.

Service makes citizens. In every generation, Americans who have undertaken national service – in the military or in a civilian capacity – have emerged more connected to their generation and more invested in their country. Service compels young people out of their comfort zones and cultivates in them a sense of duty and civic responsibility. Making national service a universal expectation – a new American rite of passage from youth to adulthood – will renew and redefine for this generation the role of citizens in our democracy and promote an understanding of rights and responsibilities. Many of those who serve will discover within themselves unsuspected resources of leadership and emerge with a life-long commitment to their communities and country.

Such service is core to American identity. When Thomas Jefferson penned the right to the “pursuit of Happiness” in the Declaration of Independence, he was also talking about the public happiness – a cooperative enterprise that we help one another achieve that was fundamental to the maintenance of American democracy.¹ George Washington and James Madison were worried that in founding a government so strongly on rights, future generations distant from the American Revolution that secured those rights would need to be reminded of their duties through civic education and service. They proposed founding a national university that would play this role.²

Fostered the Greatest Generation

Service shaped the Greatest Generation. The earliest example of large-scale, full-time civilian national service – the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) – mobilized more than 3 million young, unemployed men to improve our public lands during the Great Depression.³ The experience also showed how quickly the nation could move to create such service opportunities. In March 1933, Franklin Roosevelt called Congress into emergency session to authorize, among other things, the CCC to bring together two threatened resources – young men who were out of work in the midst of the Great Depression and public lands beset by soil erosion and a declining number of trees.

Within five weeks, Congress had enacted the CCC into law and by the first summer, 250,000 young men were serving in more than 2,500 camps in every state.⁴ Over the life of the program from 1933 to 1942, more than 3 million men planted some 3 billion trees, constructed 97,000 miles of fire roads, erected 3,470 fire towers, and helped preserve more than 84 million acres of agricultural land (about the equivalent acreage of our National Park System today). The U.S. Army played a leading role in organizing the effort, including leadership from a young George C. Marshall. It was the first major example of a large-scale civilian national service effort in America that also married the military and civilian communities.

The service ethic fostered during the Great Depression informed the attitudes and habits of a generation. More than 12 percent of Americans went on to serve in the Second World War, while many Americans served on the home front to support the effort.⁵ In the unprecedented prosperity

¹ Adler, Mortimer. *We Hold These Truths: Understanding the Ideas and Ideals of the Constitution*. (Collier Books: 1987)

² Bridgeland, John with a Foreword by General Stanley A. McChrystal. *Heart of the Nation: Volunteering and America's Civic Spirit* (Rowman & Littlefield: 2013).

³ National Park Service. Civilian Conservation Corps. (2015, April 10)

⁴ Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni Association, “Roosevelt’s Tree Army. A Brief History of the Civilian Conservation Corps,” <http://www.justinmuseum.com/cchistory/treearmy.html>.

⁵ Eikenberry, K.W., & D. (2013, May 27). *Americans and Their Military, Drifting Apart*. The New York Times

that followed the war, the Greatest Generation served more, joined organizations more, gave more in charitable contributions, attended church, school, and community activities more, and were active neighbors helping those in need more than the generations preceding or following them. During those same post-war years in which our civic stocks rose, Americans voted more, entered public service in greater numbers, and enjoyed much lower levels of political polarization than we see now.⁶ National service is also a way to express gratitude for a country that preserves our freedom.⁷

A Response to Our Civic Collapse

America today is in a civic health crisis. The latest update of America's Civic Health Index shows disturbing trends. Trust in one another and in key institutions — the media, government, and the courts — are at historic lows. Such trust is critical to a functioning democracy and healthy communities. The percentage of Americans who say others can be trusted fell from 46 percent in 1972 to just 31 percent in 2016, with 36 percent of Whites and 17 percent of Blacks expressing such trust.⁸ In turn, the number of hate groups has more than doubled since 1999.⁹ It is no surprise that communities are fraying in places like Charlottesville, Ferguson, and Chicago. As America becomes more diverse, we need bridges across racial and socioeconomic lines that national service can provide to build inclusive communities with more opportunities for all.

Even though the latest neuroscience tells us we are social animals wired to cooperate, Americans are increasingly isolated. Findings from the University of Southern California show that only 28 percent of Americans say they belong to any group with leaders they consider accountable and inclusive.¹⁰ In turn, 35 million Americans live alone, up 114 percent since 1960.¹¹

Four large-scale, integrating civic institutions built up during the 1900s have shrunk significantly since the turn of the century: churches and other religious congregations; unions; metropolitan daily newspapers; and political parties for grassroots participation sustained beyond specific campaigns.¹² It is unclear what institutions, if any, are taking their place. National service could play a powerful role in civic integration.

Americans are also less active in important ways that undergird a healthy democracy. Regular volunteering decreased from about 30 percent of the population in the aftermath of 9/11 through 2005 to less than one-quarter of Americans in 2016, notwithstanding waves of natural disasters that typically inspire Americans to lend a hand.¹³ Voting is down in presidential elections and significantly so in midterm elections since the 1960s.¹⁴ We are encouraged by, but cautious about, a recent uptick in 2018 in volunteering, due, in part we believe, to the anxieties Americans are feeling about the state of their country.

⁶ Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster; Bridgeland, J.M. (2016) *Heart of the Nation*. Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

⁷ See Buckley, W. F. (1990). *Gratitude: Reflections on what we owe to our country*. New York: Random House.

⁸ Atwell, M., et al, *Civic Deserts: America's Civic Health Challenge* (2017) Civic Enterprises, National Conference on Citizenship & Tufts Johnathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, citing findings from the USC Understanding America Study.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey. March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

¹² Atwell, M., et al., *Civic Deserts: America's Civic Health Challenge*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

This gloomy picture is moderated by some hopeful trends. There is a strong civic core of millions of Americans who do most of the voting, volunteering and community projects, with low-income Americans being the most likely to help strangers in times of need.¹⁵ A recent survey of Millennials shows they are ready to take bolder action since the 2016 presidential election on issues such as civil rights, job creation, and health care reform.¹⁶ We also read daily of grassroots groups galvanized by our current troubles into taking action to reverse civic decay.

When trends in social fragmentation, cultural narcissism, political polarization, and economic inequality are examined together since the beginning of the 20th century, those trends have moved in virtual lockstep. There was increasing economic equality, political comity, social cohesion, and cultural solidarity from about 1900 to 1965, with a sharp U-turn in the 1960s, followed by plunges toward extreme inequality, polarization, fragmentation, and narcissism, culminating in today's nearly universal agreement that the country "is on the wrong track."¹⁷ We know from history that national service can play a fundamental role in knitting the country back together in common purpose and promoting a stronger culture of "we."

A Small Fraction of Americans in National Service as Demand Outpaces Supply

In recent years, we have minimized both the expectation and opportunities to serve the nation. Even as highly effective and enduring efforts – such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, Senior Corps, Youth Build, and AmeriCorps – have sprouted since the Second World War, our opportunities for national service have dangerously narrowed. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan represented the first time in history that less than half of 1 percent of our population served on active duty during wartime.¹⁸ With limited opportunities for full-time service, the rising generation seeks additional outlets for its patriotism or desire to give back, but is perennially stymied: studies show that 1 million Americans would serve each year if asked and positions were made available, but only 66,000 full-time civilian national service opportunities exist today.¹⁹ This gap represents wasted democratic energy and squandered idealism. But it also indicates that a renewed emphasis on national service could yield dramatic results.

Americans Support National Service

The evidence shows that four in five voters support national service in which people would be given opportunities to serve in a military or civilian capacity for one year and receive a living allowance and education award. Support is high across subgroups: 88 percent of Democrats; 76 percent of Independents; and 74 percent of Republicans.²⁰ Voters strongly believe national service would benefit the country by assisting military families and veterans in adjusting back into civilian life (93 percent); mentoring/tutoring students in low-performing schools to keep them on track (91 percent); helping communities prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters (91 percent); cleaning up rivers, parks, and blighted public areas (91 percent); and providing job training and career advice to low-income Americans (90 percent).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Putnam, R & J. Bridgeland, *America Needs Big Ideas to Heal Our Divides. Here are Three.* (October 19, 2017). PBS NewsHour

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Pew Research Center. (2011). *The Military-Civilian Gap: War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era.* Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2011/10/veterans-report.pdf>.

¹⁹ Data from Roll Global survey, 2014.

²⁰ A 21st Century National Service System: Plan of Action (2013). The Franklin Project

In addition, strong majorities of voters support policy proposals the Commission may be considering: 79 percent support creating a system modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps by setting up programs focusing on specific needs, such as the Education Corps, Health Corps, and Conservation Corps; 78 percent support amending the current Selective Service System so that every American receives information about opportunities to serve in the military or in a civilian national service capacity; 75 percent support encouraging nonprofits, colleges, universities, and faith-based institutions to join a national service system by offering positions for Americans to serve for a year through their respective organizations; and 71 percent support amending the GI Bill to permit veterans to use a portion of their GI Benefits to support their performing a full year of civilian national service.

We conducted a two-year study of a mandatory national service system in the United States. The compound question we answered was: “*Respecting the citizens, states and local communities of the United States, under what conditions could compulsory national service prove to be (A) sound constitutionally; (B) feasible administratively; (C) actionable politically; and (D) cost-effective financially while: (1) yielding pro-social and pro-civic benefits generally associated with compulsory national service or its service counterparts; (2) contributing measurably to social and civic problem-solving; and (3) minimizing perverse and unintended consequences, including measurable negative social and civic outcomes?*”

While we support mandatory national service and found that a compulsory national service system could be structured in a manner that would not run afoul of the 13th, 5th or 1st Amendments, and could be developed to meet important public needs, public support for a mandatory system is extremely low. Each year, a Member of Congress introduces legislation to create such a system and it gathers almost no support. We have provided a copy of our report, *Mandatory National Service in the United States* (March 2017), to the Commission for review. Encouragingly, the public strongly supports a large-scale *voluntary* national service system with government investment, and this is something that could be achieved.

Full-Time National Service is a Good Return on Investment

A study of the economic value of youth national service shows a high return on investment that improves communities and develops the next generation of leaders.²¹ The economic benefits of youth national service are nearly four times greater than the costs of producing these programs. Longitudinal studies show that those who participate in national service programs have strong competencies, work habits, social and civil skills, and behaviors that persist into adulthood.²² As national programs increase in scale, their average cost falls, but their average benefit rises. And evidence across many issue areas shows that national service effectively addresses public challenges, from the high school dropout problem to reintegrating veterans into society.

A 21st Century National Service System: A Common Expectation & Opportunity

The centerpiece of any policy recommendations set forth by the Commission should be the mobilization of young people to serve full-time in a national service corps, the linkage of military and civilian national service, and support for communities that commit to make a year of service a common expectation and opportunity. We encourage the Commission to recommend policy proposals that will ensure that:

²¹ Belfield, C. (2013) *The Economic Value of National Service*. The Franklin Project.

²² See *Serving Country and Community: A Longitudinal Study of Service in Americorps*. (2007). Americorps.

- ✓ **Everyone** has the opportunity to serve;
- ✓ National service **brings together youth of different backgrounds** in common purpose;
- ✓ Everyone can **choose** how to serve their country, whether civilian or military;
- ✓ Full-time national service is **rewarded** with increased opportunity;
- ✓ Private resources are **leveraged** and communities are engaged;
- ✓ **Communities** lead to ensure that local priorities are honored; and
- ✓ The **infrastructure builds on** existing federal, state, and local efforts with significant funding at all levels of government.

Specifically, we propose the following policy proposals to enable all young adults to give a year or more of full-time military or civilian national service to their country:

- ✓ **Dramatically increase the number of new national service opportunities** starting with a short-term goal of increasing the number of service years in civilian national service from 66,000 per year to 200,000 to match the number of people who enter the military each year. We support increasing such opportunities to 1 million by July 4, 2026 – the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence to honor Jefferson’s notion of citizen engagement and the public happiness;
- ✓ **Link military and civilian national service** as two sides of the same coin and provide information on military and civilian national service to all 18-28 year-old men and women;
- ✓ **Invest in local communities** and drive resources to communities that raise their hands and agree to test the power of national service to solve problems, change lives, and transform their communities;
- ✓ **Link national service to college access** by making the education award equivalent to the full cost of a year of public education in a corps member’s home state for every year of national service performed by the corps member;
- ✓ **Recognize national service as a “civic apprenticeship”** that prepares young people for the workforce and a life of active citizenship, and connects national service to credentials with value in the employment marketplace, including by granting noncompetitive eligibility to everyone who completes at least one year of service;
- ✓ **Establish Federal and State agency corps** by calling on federal agencies to develop civilian national service opportunities that strategically advance their missions and build their workforce pipelines, and by providing incentives for states to do the same;²³

²³ Since 9/11, both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama Administrations looked at the opportunities to expand national service within existing departments and agencies of the federal government, often performing public missions at lower cost to taxpayers. A Medical Reserve Corps, FEMA Corps and School Turnaround Corps were all created through domestic agencies and a Volunteers for Prosperity, working on HIV/AIDS and malaria, was created through U.S. AID. The Service Year Alliance worked with the Governor of Iowa to issue an executive order instructing state departments and agencies to use existing resources more efficiently to create the Iowa Reading Corps, Iowa Energy Corps and other such efforts to solve public problems in the state with civilian national service.

- ✓ **Democratize national service opportunities through Service Year Fellowships, which would unleash civil societies for national service** by recognizing systems to certify positions created by colleges and universities, nonprofits, and faith-based institutions that are not provided federal funding for national service positions and enable their equitable participation in a universal national service system;²⁴
- ✓ **Strengthen the GI Bill** to permit veterans to use a portion of their existing benefits to perform up to a year of civilian national service to help address problems in communities and improve the transitions of veterans back home;²⁵
- ✓ **Expand existing national and international service programs** by fully implementing the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which authorizes 250,000 AmeriCorps positions annually and establishes various corps to address public challenges; making YouthBuild positions available to meet demand; fully implementing the recently enacted 21st Century Conservation Service Corps legislation; and fulfilling the promise of international service by expanding the Peace Corps, Volunteers for Prosperity, and Global Service Fellowships to a total of 100,000 international service positions annually;²⁶
- ✓ **Expand the traditional appropriations process** and identify non-traditional funding sources, such as a voluntary tax contribution option for federal taxpayers to remind all Americans of their opportunity and duty to serve their nation;²⁷ and

²⁴ In his February 1961 memo to President Kennedy on the establishment of the Peace Corps, Sargent Shriver outlined various options. He envisioned running national service through colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations and agencies at all levels of government. The civic infrastructure to achieve that vision in 1961 did not exist; today it does. Taking that vision forward, the Service Year Alliance has created a technology platform, ServiceYear.org, that enables tens of thousands of national service opportunities to be posted online to connect with young people whose profiles match interest in those positions. Such national service programs are certified if they meet these criteria, among others: engages one or more corps members in direct service or indirect “capacity building” for direct service programs at least 32 hours per week over the course of 9 to 24 months total; addresses unmet community needs and specifies intended outcomes; provides a monthly living allowance; provides ongoing training, supervision and mentoring to corps members to build their skills and opportunities, increase their ability to provide quality service, and ensure they benefit from their service experience; and identifies specific skills, certifications, and other learning outcomes that corps members will attain through the program. Colleges and universities, nonprofit and faith-based institutions, and other organizations are creating new national service positions and becoming certified national service organizations through this system.

²⁵ Research shows that civilian service is a tested strategy for successful reintegration of veterans, and veterans have a strong desire to serve at home. Bridgeland, J., and Yonkman, M.M. (2009). *All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service*. Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises.

²⁶ President John F. Kennedy envisioned that the Peace Corps “would be truly serious” when a 100,000 Americans were serving every year, and 1 million over a decade. He believed such service would have a dramatic impact on America’s foreign policy, national security and place in the world. The only large-scale nationally representative survey of 11,000 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers from 1961 through 2010 shows that President Kennedy’s vision for the Peace Corps was shared by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, who believe it had a significant impact on national security and peace-building. See Bridgeland, J., Harris Wofford, et al., *A Call to Peace: Perspectives of Volunteers on the Peace Corps at 50* (Civic Enterprises, National Peace Corps Association, and Hart Research Associates: September 2011).

²⁷ In addition to providing sufficient appropriations to bring national service to scale, governments and the private sector can support national service growth through nontraditional funding. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia operate state lotteries, and a portion of most of these lotteries goes to support state programs in education, environmental protection, crime control, and more. State policymakers should

- ✓ **Ask local, state and national leaders to issue calls to service** to remind young Americans that with rights come responsibilities, and that service can heal divides, solve public challenges, and promote skills relevant to the workforce and a lifetime of civic engagement. Research shows that being asked to serve is a major reason for doing so.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Commission. The Service Year Alliance has mobilized leaders from the military, civilian, and public service communities, from business, nonprofit, and philanthropy, and from communities across the United States. We stand ready to help the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service fulfill the promise of universal national service.

explore opportunities to dedicate a portion of these lottery funds to support national service positions to help address their state and local challenges. Additionally, 41 states give residents the ability to donate added funds when they pay their taxes to support specific programs. States should create a voluntary tax contribution option to provide additional support to national service programs.