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National Service: The Overview

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NATIONAL SERVICE: THE OVERVIEW

Scope of the Problem:

- An INDEPENDENT SECTOR national survey report indicates that many Americans are not being asked to volunteer. Among the 41 percent who were asked to volunteer in the past year, 87 percent actually did. Among the 57 percent of those who were not asked, only 30 percent volunteered. These findings suggest that if more Americans are asked to volunteer, the proportion of the population that volunteers can be measurably increased.
- Community service has been an important institution in America since the founding of the colonies, including serving in such groups as local militias and volunteer fire brigades.

Current Policy:

- ACTION, the federal domestic volunteer agency, which includes the VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program, received \$191,292,000 million in appropriations in fiscal 1991.
- On October 24, 1990 Congress passed S. 1430, the National and Community Service Act, sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. Augustus Hawkins (D-Calif.), and it has been cleared for the president's signature. This bill authorizes \$62 million for fiscal 1992 to enhance national and community service.



Sen. Kennedy (D-Mass.)

Policy Options for Addressing National Service

•School-Based Service

This model for national service would incorporate community service requirements into the curricula of the country's 16,700 public and 2,200 non-public high schools. The National Service bill recently passed by Congress supports this option by allocating money to a Commission Board to give grants to states for school-aged service programs. \$16.8 million was authorized to be appropriated for these programs through this bill.

•Military Draft-Based Service

This model of service would restore a compulsory draft and add a civilian service alternative. France, Spain, Denmark, and West Germany are examples of countries that currently have compulsory national service programs centered around participation in the military. There has been no mandatory draft in the United States since 1973, though a system of registration was enacted in the late 1970s.

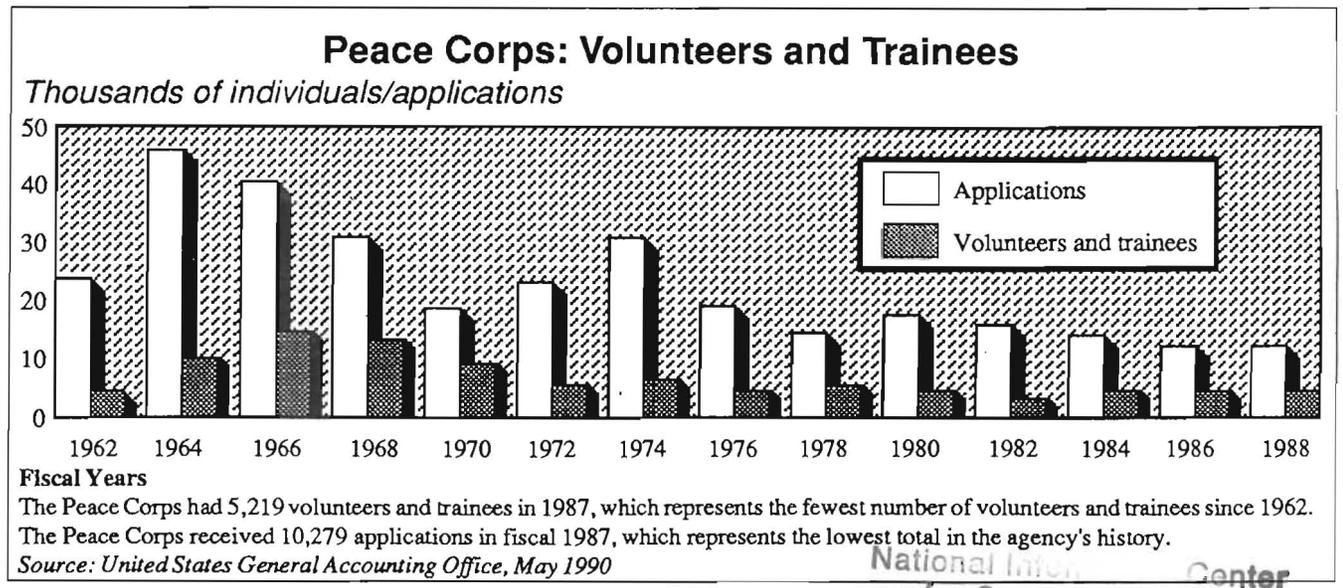
•Voluntary Service

This model for service is completely voluntary and would include programs such as conservation corps, Peace Corps, VISTA, the National Guard, and any number of state and local initiatives. Support for this option was given by Congress when it passed the National Service bill which authorizes \$16.8 million to be appropriated to conservation and youth service corps for fiscal 1991.

•Universal Service

This model of service would require all citizens above a certain age to engage in a set period of military or civilian service, or to pay a fee in lieu of service. The Citizenship and National Service Act of 1989, sponsored by Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Okla.) and Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.) is an example of this model. The bill would have required citizens to perform two years of military or one year of civilian service in order to be eligible for certain federal aid programs such as student loans; in return for service, the individuals would receive vouchers.

Primary Source: Joe Cummings, "Perceptions of National Service and the New Initiatives for 1989," *Future Choices: Toward a National Youth Policy* (Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1989) p. 53-61.



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