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A Call for National Service

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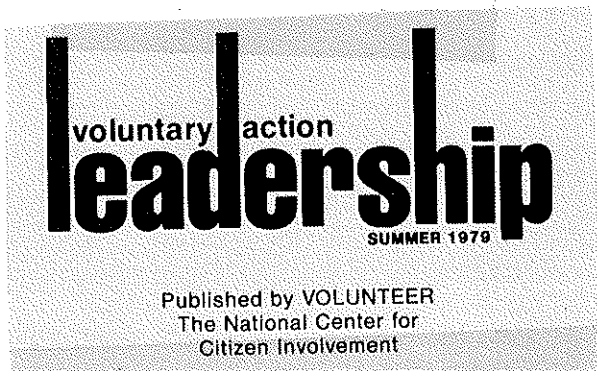
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A Call for National Service

By Donald J. Eberly

There is a growing interest in a national youth service for this country. A Gallup poll conducted earlier this year revealed a positive response (77 percent) by young people in the 18- to 24-year-old age group to a system of voluntary national service, which would offer them an opportunity to serve in the military or do nonmilitary work for one year.

Don Eberly is a senior policy analyst in ACTION's Office of Policy and Planning. He also is a member of the Committee for the Study of National Service and executive director of the National Service Secretariat. This article represents his personal viewpoints on national service.

portunity to serve in the military or do nonmilitary work for one year.

In February, Rep. Paul McCloskey, Jr. (R-Calif.) and 14 other representatives introduced a National Youth Service bill (HR 2206). The proposed legislation offers four options to all 18-year-olds, including military service, civilian service or a combination of the two. Then, on May 30, Rep. McCloskey announced he would introduce an amendment to the Defense Department Procurement bill (HR 4040), which would "pave the way [through a study] for a National Youth Service alternative instead of resumption of the straight draft."

May 30 also marked the convening of a two-day National Service Conference held in a suburb of Washington, D.C. The meeting was sponsored by the Committee for the Study of National Service, which recently completed a 20-month study of national service. The 250 conference participants agreed that national youth service is worthy of "a thorough national debate with strong participation by young people." While there was no consensus on what form national service should take, many individuals offered their own ideas and models.

One participant, Donald Eberly, has been an advocate of a national youth service for years. He presents here his personal views on national service, suggesting a model based on this country's past experience with the concept.

THE UNITED STATES NEEDS A FULL-SCALE program of national service. The need can be found among its 2-1/2 million 16- to 24-year-olds, who are unemployed and looking for work. Many cannot get a job simply because they never have held a job. The government can break this cycle by becoming the employer of first resort, offering our young people a full year of work experience.

The need can be found in such areas as education, health, conservation and housing, where millions of young people can be engaged effectively to tackle related problems.

The need can be found by examining the bond of trust that exists between young people and their government in a healthy society. In the past 15 years, that bond has become seriously corroded. A properly conceived, well-run program of national service would help restore this bond.

Finally, the need can be found in the idealism of young people. Many believe or want to believe that what needs to be done, can be done. A system which denies millions of

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young people jobs of any kind, let alone jobs that young people believe would contribute to meeting society's needs, is a system that sends them an unmistakable message: "Forget about your hopes and ideals. They cannot be realized."

It is this last point that most sharply differentiates a jobs program from a service program. As material resources and opportunities for economic growth decline, as automation increasingly takes care of the production of goods, human needs and the way they are met will take on increasing importance. If the current generation of young people gains the experience of delivering such services, they will have the confidence and know-how to meet the needs of the future.

The Military Service Issue

For most of this decade, some 400,000 young men and women have enlisted each year in the all-volunteer military force. With the approaching decline of the youthful population, however, and with no expectation of a decline in our military establishment, continuation of the All-Volunteer Force in its present form seems unlikely. The government probably will be forced to choose between increasing the ante, thereby adding to inflation and inviting charges of a mercenary force, or cutting back severely on youth employment programs so as to increase the attractiveness of military service to more young people.

A third choice would be a return to the draft. If that happens, the national service alternative would describe the need for young people to serve in both civilian and military capacities, invite them to volunteer for a period of service before they are 25 years old, and restrict the draft to those who had not volunteered for any kind of national service. No one would be drafted except for military service.

Some national service advocates, notably Amitai Etzioni and Reverend Theodore Hesburgh, contend that a long-run program of voluntary national service would obviate the need for a draft, since it would generate a spirit of service among young people that would result in a sufficient number of volunteers for military service.

A National Service Proposal

Ideally, a program of national service should be derived from the mutual responsibility that should exist between a state and its young people. The state, out of concern for its

National service is not a new concept . . .

- **William James** laid the theoretical foundation for national service in 1906 in an essay entitled "The Moral Equivalent of War." If young men were conscripted to do much of the toughest nonmilitary work that had to be done, James argued, they would develop self-confidence and "would be better fathers and teachers of the following generation."

- **The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the National Youth Administration (NYA)** were organized in the '30s as two of President Roosevelt's responses to the depression. More than 2-1/2 million young men enrolled in the CCC, which was perceived to be the most successful of Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Its purpose was two-fold: to transfer money to the poor (through allotments sent directly to the families of CCC enrollees) and to perform needed conservation work.

The NYA was larger than the CCC but received less acclaim. Also, the NYA was less distinctive in several respects. It enrolled 16- to 24-year-olds of both sexes and had programs for students and nonstudents. NYA participants worked in their home towns. Over the life of the NYA, from 1935 to 1943, there were 4.8 million participants, about equally divided between male and female.

- **The GI bill** is readily acknowledged as one of the best investments ever made by the U.S. government. By returning to the tax coffers several times as much money as the \$15 billion spent on education and training under the GI Bill from 1945-54, it was a sound economic investment. By producing what was generally conceded to be the best group of students ever found on American campuses, it was an investment in the quality of education. By greatly broadening the socio-economic profile of persons going on to higher education, the GI Bill was an investment in democracy.

Initially, there were predictions that the returning GIs would require a great deal of counseling and would not accept the authority of the educators. Instead, the GIs demonstrated the value of an experience-loaded interlude to formal education.

Also, the magnitude of response was vastly underestimated. Although experts predicted that less than one-tenth of the veterans would utilize the GI Bill, the total enrollment came to 7.8 million persons, or 50 percent of those eligible.

- **The Peace Corps**, created in 1961, disproved the predictions of those who called it a "kiddie corps" or compared it with the Children's Crusade of the Middle Ages. Where the assignments

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future, should encourage and enable all young people to contribute a period of service on the frontiers of human need. Young people, out of respect for their heritage, should feel a responsibility for a period of service on the frontiers of human need.

Based on past experience (see chronology), a national service program could be designed with the following characteristics:

- It would be open to *all* young people.
- It would require a transition period of about three years, allowing time for growth and experimentation.
- Participation would be arranged by a contract, voluntarily entered into by all parties.
- It would be based on the need for having services performed.
- Maximum local support for national service would be encouraged with underwriting guaranteed by the federal government.
- Service would be for no more than four years.

After Service

How will such a program provide for its enrollees after completion of service? First, national service should be a source of information about jobs and education. The program could provide a newsletter, job information sheets, opportunities for counseling and referrals to such institutions as the Employment Service and the Community Education-Work Councils proposed by Willard Wirtz.

Second, national service should certify the work performed by the participant. The certification should be descriptive, rather than judgmental, and should enable outgoing participants to get beyond the initial hurdle to jobs for which they are qualified.

Third, national service should offer participants an educational entitlement—a GI Bill for community service—along the lines of one proposed by Elliot Richardson and Frank Newman in 1972. At a time when the GI Bill for military service is changing its character, and financial support packages consisting of loans, grants and work-study programs are making opportunities for higher education almost universal, this is a complex issue. But if the nation wants to construct incentives for participation in national service, an associated educational entitlement is one of the most consistent ways to do it.

Fourth, the Women in Community Service and Joint Action in Community Service programs of the Job Corps

were manageable, as with teaching and agriculture, the work of the volunteers generally ranged from good to outstanding. Infrequently, where the assignments tended to be vague and the objectives unrealistic, the record was less satisfactory.

While in practice the Peace Corps did not quite live up to the hopes of its early advocates, it continues to stand as a small-scale model of a program where government expresses its trust in young people, where young people respond positively to this trust, where they do good work under difficult circumstances, and where they return with a quality of understanding and wisdom that could be achieved in no other way.

● A **presidential commission**, in 1966, examined national service and seemed to be on the verge of recommending it when White House officials told the commission there would be no money for such a program. Consequently, the commission simply recommended experimental programs to test the idea.

At that time, the national service issue was perceived narrowly, e.g., "Will a national service alternative make the draft more equitable?"

Nevertheless, the national service concept was examined more closely than it had been for many years. Apart from the draft issue, the following rationale emerged:

- There are vast needs for service in the U.S.
- Young people can meet many of these needs.
- Many young people want to meet these needs.
- In meeting these needs, young people may develop self-confidence and civic pride, gain work experience, explore career possibilities, engage in the world outside the classroom and away from TV, discover the rewards of serving others.
- Since the national interest is served by promoting the general welfare as well as fostering constructive growth opportunities for young citizens, the government should guarantee opportunities for all young people to contribute a year or two of service to their fellow man.

There were, of course, variations of this rationale. Some believed the case for national youth service was so strong it should be required of all young people. Some began the argument with the needs of young people for service experience. Either way, it was difficult to satisfy those persistent one-dimensional questioners, who asked, "What are you *really* trying to do, help kids grow up or serve the needs of the community?"

● **Service-learning**, the integration of a service experience with educational growth, has been evolving gradually for several decades. It is a special form of experiential learning, derived directly from the philosophies of William James and John Dewey.

The need can be found in the idealism of our young people.

should be adapted for utilization by national service. These programs utilize volunteers to recruit enrollees for the Job Corps and to counsel and help place them in jobs when they graduate. It is a service that could provide special help for low-income young people without having a stigmatizing effect on the program.

A Five Percent Fund for Experimentation

If such a model youth service program were adopted today, it might prove too rigid to meet unforeseeable demands five or ten years from now. Needs might be anticipated better if sufficient experimental funds—perhaps five percent of the total budget—were allocated to the national service program. This money could be used to test new forms of youth service programs, such as ones similar to Canada's Katimavik or Israel's several modes of youth involvement. Certain cultural and public works projects also could be tested under the experimental program.

Evaluation

A close and continuing evaluation of national service is essential. Among the more obvious elements to be assessed are

- Participation rates by demographic sectors
- Value of service performed
- Impact on youth employment
- Impact on national service participants over time.

As the national service program continues, and teenagers view it as a live option for their post-high-school years, it will be of great interest to observe the choices they make. Will they continue to enter into marriage, employment and educational institutions at the current rate, or will there be marked shifts in the pattern?

Also, what will be the economic effects of national service? Will it prove the hypothesis that it is a counter-cyclical program? Will it produce substantial savings in welfare and unemployment expenditures? Will national service lead to greater productivity in such areas as health and education? Will it be possible to discern changes in the crime rate?

These questions can be debated endlessly, but can only be answered by operating national service for several years. To undertake such an initiative requires trust in young people and hope for the future. From what this observer has seen of young people, such an experience of trust will manifest itself in a better future.

Before the service-learning experience, a student is asked to consider its learning potential and to develop a set of possible learning outcomes. During the experience, the student maintains a daily log, records peak experiences, consults with faculty advisors, and attends occasional seminars. At the conclusion, the student submits to the teacher a portfolio of his/her learning experiences. The teacher assesses the learning acquired by the student and awards academic recognition as appropriate.

The 1969 Atlanta Service-Learning conference was a milestone in stimulating nationwide interest in service-learning. Participants in national service would be encouraged, but not required, to have service-learning contracts.

● **Program for Local Service (PLS)**, with only 1,200 participants over a two-year period, is the smallest government-sponsored youth service program in this review. It may yet prove to be the most significant. It was launched in 1973 as a test of the national youth service idea by two strong advocates, Joseph Blatchford, then head of ACTION, and Daniel J. Evans, then governor of Washington state.

The Program for Local Service was open to everyone aged 18 to 25 living in a specified area in and near Seattle. It offered full-time, one-year community service positions for a stipend equal to 90 percent of the minimum wage. There was no particular effort to sell PLS. It was simply presented as an opportunity to serve for a year.

A survey revealed that 20 percent of the eligible population was aware of the program. Ten percent submitted applications; one of four entered the program. The profile of PLS participants is essentially the same as the profile of applicants, thus indicating no discrimination in the placement process. It shows an above average proportion of women, minorities and persons from low-income families. Surprisingly, the education level of participants was higher than average. The most common denominator among participants was their employment status—70 percent were unemployed and looking for work.

Unlike most other programs in this review, PLS was not for a particular class of people, such as veterans, college students or the poor. It was open to everybody in the age range. Participants included mentally retarded persons, ex-convicts, a veteran classified as 100 percent disabled, and several persons with master's degrees.

The evaluation found the worth of service performed by the average participant to be \$7,000, almost double the unit cost to ACTION of funding the program. It also found the unemployment rate to have fallen from 70 percent at entry to 18 percent six months after completion of service.

—Don Eberly

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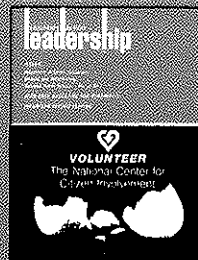
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VAL Center for Voluntary Action with the National Information Center on Volunteerism is good news for VAL readers as well as the entire volunteer community. Already, we have transferred our circulation function from Washington, D.C., to Colorado, taking advantage of our Boulder office's experience with computerized mailing lists and membership services.

While the merger means the loss of one of VAL's most popular departments—NICOV Takes a Look at...—the gain is more diverse input and feedback on magazine content. An enlarged staff experienced in all aspects of volunteer administration, and a board of nationally prominent and skilled volunteer leaders, will streamline our efforts to keep you informed of the latest trends and techniques in volunteer program management.

* * *

As VAL's new publisher, VOLUNTEER acquaints us with new friends while maintaining an attraction for

old supporters. In this issue, three recent NCVA staffers contribute articles and resource information. Donna Hill, now a free-lance writer, and Feroza Allee, an editorial assistant with a national association, both worked on the one-year Volunteers from the Workplace project. Their stories appear in the news section. Martin Miller, who consulted with us on an efficient circulation transfer from Washington to Boulder, continues his free-lance writing and consulting. He compiled the Tool Box for this issue.

* * *

Another long-time supporter of NCVA and VAL, Joyce Black, is our guest editorialist for this issue. Now a member of VOLUNTEER's executive committee, Black's involvement in the volunteer community spans innumerable voluntary, nonprofit board memberships, including appointments by three different governors of New York and four different mayors. Her views on the state of the voluntary sector at the end of the '70s (As I See It) create a fitting reflection for the beginning of a new organization in a new decade. "If this ['I got mine, who cares about you?'] attitude increases," she writes,

"I wonder how great are the survival chances for the voluntary sector."

* * *

Although merger is the talk of the day, the ten pages of volunteer issues presented here we hope will provide a forum for discussion and long-range policy planning. As with any movement that organizes and grows, volunteering bares a number of thought-provoking, sometimes controversial, aspects. Beginning with Steve McCurley's thoughts and warnings on volunteer-union relations (Advocacy), we present the views of those with first-hand experience in the continuing debate over volunteers in strike situations, woman's role in volunteering, and a voluntary national youth service.

CANDID COMMENTS



Connecticut is actively working to instill in its young people the spirit of volunteerism and mutual assistance that ... will become a life-long value. Today's high school involvement will serve as the education for a concerned adult in tomorrow's society.—Governor Ella Grasso at a statewide conference of Connecticut high school students to launch a series of volunteer efforts, April 1977.

When I invited the first students to come to the capitol to talk with me about the pressing problems I saw as governor, I asked for their help for people in Connecticut who were going to be suffering terribly during a fiercely cold winter

With all the power of the governor's office, with all of our state and local officials working overtime to try to solve these critical human problems, I thought there was a resource in our communities that could accomplish what none of us could do alone. The tremendous response to our challenge to youth from students all over Connecticut has made me a believer in the fact that youth make a difference—Governor Grasso at the Fourth Statewide Youth Action Conference, January 1979.