



Written by [Gary Benoit](#) on November 19, 2008

## Obama's Plan for "National Service"

When discussing the "problem," the blueprint highlights three areas: the Bush administration supposedly squandered an opportunity to "mobilize the American people" following 9/11 (a "mistake" Obama apparently would not make); not enough federal money is being spent to support service (the blueprint laments that every year tens of thousands of people are turned away from AmeriCorps because it lacks sufficient funding); and there isn't enough research and development being carried out by the non-profit sector.

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The first point outlined in Obama's service plan to fix the alleged problems he discusses is to expand the Corporation for National and Community Service. This would include expanding AmeriCorps from its current 75,000 positions to 250,000 slots and doubling the size of the Peace Corps to 16,000 by 2011.

He also plans to create a variety of new programs including a Classroom Corps to help teachers and students, particularly those in "underserved" schools; a Health Corps to enroll more people in government-funded programs and "improve public health outreach"; a Clean Energy Corps that will supposedly work on renewable energy projects; a Veterans Corps to help veterans; and even a Homeland Security Corps to "help communities plan, prepare for and respond to emergencies."

Another part of his plan calls for engaging retiring Americans in service "on a large scale." To accomplish this, the new administration will expand and improve programs for "volunteers" over the age of 55.

In addition, Obama and Biden plan to set up an "America's Voice Initiative" that would project America's voice internationally — as defined by the Obama administration of course. Under this far-reaching initiative, the administration would: "rapidly" recruit and train foreign language speakers to go abroad with the State Department and "ensure our voice is heard in the mass media and in our





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efforts on the ground"; ask teachers, engineers, and doctors to serve overseas; and create a "Global Energy Corps" to help other countries reduce their green-house gas emissions.

On his campaign website, Obama calls for the creation of a new position: U.S. Chief Technology Officer. The new position would be involved in helping set up what Obama says would essentially be like a "craigslist for service."

The next platform of Obama and Biden's plan is to "integrate service into learning." The first aspect of this integration would be to require middle- and high-school students nationwide to perform at least 50 community service hours per year and 100 hours for college students. This would also include the development of national guidelines for "service-learning" and providing "better tools" for schools, in addition to a "substantial infusion of funds."

Also on the agenda for young people is the creation of a "Green Job Corps" to provide "disadvantaged" youth the opportunity to weatherize buildings and get practical experience in green jobs. Another part of the plan is to massively expand from 8,000 to 50,000 the federal "YouthBuild" program that uses young people to help build low-income housing.

Obama would also establish a new American Opportunity Tax Credit worth up to \$4,000 in exchange for 100 hours of community service by college students (that works out to up to \$40 per hour for the "community service").

Still another national-service proposal listed in the "Blueprint for Change" is to invest more federal money in the non-profit sector. The new administration plans to create a "Social Investment Fund Network," a government-supported non-profit corporation, to "improve local innovation," test out new ideas and "expand successful programs to scale." Also, Obama and Biden plan to create a "Social Entrepreneurship Agency for Nonprofits" within the Corporation for National and Community Service. The new agency would be charged with everything from "improving coordination of programs that support nonprofits across the federal government" to "streamlining processes for obtaining federal grants and contracts, and eliminating unnecessary requirements" and even helping smaller non-profits participate in government programs.

The national-service section of the Obama campaign's website discusses expanding the military — a clear indication that Obama views the military as an important component of a broader national service program. He notes that National Guard and Reserve troops only have half the equipment that they need to respond to foreign or domestic crises and then goes on to say that he will expand the Army by 65,000 troops and the Marines by 27,000. Also mentioned is that Obama plans to invest in "cultural awareness" and other skill sets troops might need, in addition to the creation of a "Green Vet Initiative" that will help veterans with counseling and job placement, including the creation of career pathways and educational programs for veterans in the renewable energy sector. Obama will also create a Military Families Advisory Board composed of experts and family representatives from each service to "help identify and develop actionable policies to ease the burden on spouses and families." He also plans to ensure that the National Guard and the Reserves "can meet their Homeland Security Missions," explaining that the forces' "poor readiness" "threatens our ability to respond to natural disasters or terrorist attacks at home."

Viewing military service in the context of a broader national service program that becomes increasingly more compulsory (a necessity for being able to attend college, for instance) could suggest how the Obama administration may hope to fill military recruitment quotas should our military missions become



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further extended.

The campaign website expects all the new service programs to cost about an additional \$3.5 billion per year, a price tag that seems unrealistically small considering the scope of what Obama envisions. The money would supposedly come from taxing corporations more heavily and also from "a small portion of the savings associated with ending the war in Iraq." He promises not to let the deficit get any worse when implementing his new programs, but making this promise is one thing and honoring it while spending more money for national service and many other government programs is something else entirely.

Obama will soon take an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution, but where national service is authorized within the Supreme Law of the Land is never mentioned.

In his "Blueprint for Change," Obama has a section dedicated to his "Lifetime of Service," during which he helped to register 150,000 African American voters in Chicago with Project Vote. He also draws attention to his wife's record including helping to identify and train young adults for "careers serving the public good." The "public good" would best be better served by a government that obeys the Constitution, but apparently Obama doesn't agree.

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