

National Service—Whether or Not

With the possibility—some say threat—of military conscription looming over our nation's youth, the notion of an alternative civilian service to the country is again receiving wide attention. The idea of a national youth service first came to prominence during the Vietnam war, when conscientious objectors and others opposed to

the draft proposed that youths be allowed other options of service which would provide more direct benefits to our society. Interest in it is being revived in view of the President's intent to re-establish the draft. In the midst of legislative tackling of the issue, we present two diverging opinions on the establishment of national service.

For . . . is Senator Paul E. Tsongas (D., MA)—a returned Peace Corps Volunteer—who recently introduced a Senate bill calling for the creation of a Presidential Commission on National Service (see p. 5). The Senator also worked with a Peace Corps training center in the Virgin Islands. He served in Congress from 1975 to 1978, and began his term in the Senate on Jan. 1, 1979.



Against . . . is Sar A. Levitan, an economist and Director of the Center for Social Policy Studies of the George Washington University in Washington, DC.

In the 1970s, as the numbers of our teenagers reached their highest levels ever, society found it even more difficult to provide

National Service is an old idea that has never been more timely or more practical. National service has the potential to meet many human needs at home and overseas. In addition, I believe that a national program of service by Americans can help make ours a more cohesive, caring society.

The benefits of service to others are shared between the recipient and the provider. This fundamental aspect of the service experience has been proven to me—and to thousands upon thousands of volunteers—powerfully and personally. My two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in a small Ethiopian town were a learning experience that surpassed any formal study before and after it. There I lived and learned with students whose lives had been vastly different from my own. I was a Peace Corps teacher, but I hope my Ethiopian friends know how much they taught me.

We had a very personal sense of depending on each other, so it was natural for us to know that nations also must depend on each other. Nothing before or after that time has shaped my view of the world so deeply.

The experience of service puts us in touch with problems on a human scale. Too often public policy is made in a bureaucratic dreamworld. The real impact on people's lives is lost. But living in and learning about another's culture—whether in Ethiopia or in Appalachia—brings understanding and an approach which embrace the human element. Volunteers do not forget their experiences with VISTA and Peace Corps. They carry the experiences with them into future careers.

National service would help young Americans understand the complexity of chronic problems. A new, national commitment to service could be the right medicine for our ailing national spirit. It might help turn our society away from the extremes of the "me generation" of

See Tsongas, page 13

suitable activities for so many youths. While the American economy was generating an unprecedented number of new jobs in the latter part of that decade, it had not created enough employment opportunities for inexperienced and frequently deficiently educated youths.

Government has been making attempts to offer some youths a second chance by providing them training and employment opportunities. These efforts are geared for teenagers who have failed in school and have not acquired skills preparing them for gainful employment and a productive niche in society.

Obviously, governmental intervention can help to ease problems facing our youth. But government help alone cannot eliminate the problems and certainly cannot provide cure-alls. In fact, some governmental interventions should be discouraged.

One of those interventions currently suggested is the establishment of a national youth service program, whether voluntary or compulsory. This is an idea whose time has long passed, if there ever was room for it.

Since 1973, when Congress terminated the military draft, little has been heard about compulsory national service. But once the element of compulsion is rejected, a voluntary national youth service becomes a hazy concept with confusing, if not conflicting, goals. The program is now proposed alternatively as a "meaningful" option for all youth and as a means to employ poor teenagers.

In a society where pluralism is dominant, the case for a voluntary national service sponsored by the federal government is far from clear. The United States abounds with voluntary organizations doing good work. They are known as churches, fraternal organizations, and a multitude of other groups helping advance worthy causes. In line with past practices and still widely held values, good works should best be left to individuals, private organizations, and, indeed, youths as well as adults, each to serve the nation, their communities, and

See Levitan, page 5

National Service Legislation

McCloskey's National Service

On Feb. 15, 1979, Representative Paul McCloskey (R., CA) introduced bill HR2206, whose goal is to "establish a National Service system under which the young people of the United States shall have the choice of either entering voluntary military or civilian service or being subject to induction into military service by random selection." Title I of HR2206 requires men and women to register at age 17. It requires the government to provide information to the registrants about the options available to them at the age of 18. At 18 they would choose one of these options: to enter military service sometime in the next six years, to enter civilian service sometime in the next six years, to become a conscientious objector, or to make no choice. Those making no choice would be placed in a pool that would subject them to the draft ahead of those who chose other options.

Those choosing civilian service would receive VISTA-level stipends through grants from the National Youth Service Foundation.

The bill has not yet been acted upon.

Cavanaugh's Public Service

Representative John Cavanaugh's (D., NB) bill HR3603 was introduced on April 10, 1979, to "establish a Public Service system under which young people shall be subject by random selection to induction for civilian, military, or military reserve service." The bill provides authority to draft young men

and women for civilian as well as military service. All civilian service would be directed by federal agencies. Work for private nonprofit, municipal, and state agencies would not substitute for mandatory induction.

The bill makes provisions for young people to volunteer in advance of the lottery for either civilian or military service. Others would choose a six-month period during which they would be exposed to the lottery for military and civilian service. Hearings were held in 1980, but no action has been taken on the bill.

Tsongas's Presidential Commission on National Service

Senator Paul E. Tsongas (D., MA)—who expresses his views on national service on p. 2 of this issue—proposes the creation of a Presidential Commission on National Service to "examine the need and the desirability and feasibility of establishing a comprehensive national service program to meet a broad range of national and local needs." Bill S2159, introduced on Dec. 20, 1979, proposes that young people should comprise at least one-quarter of the Commission's membership.

Hearings were held in the Senate in March and, by the end of the month, it had been reported out unanimously by the Senate Subcommittee on Child and Human Development. It is attached as a rider to the Domestic Violence Bill and is expected to reach the floor this summer. A companion measure (HR6868) has been introduced in the House by Representative Leon Panetta (D., CA), and was scheduled for hearings on June 4, 1980.

Levitan, from page 2

their neighbors in different ways. This can be best achieved without government intervention and by encouraging youths to exercise the available options.

Advocates of the national youth service point to the support the concept receives in the polls. Rather than rely upon vague and doubtful surveys, it would be best to look at the record. The fact is that the voluntary national service efforts have been elitist and have attracted very few persons. Indeed, the volunteer national service organizations have experienced difficulty in filling their limited available slots. Whether the benefits of the Peace Corps, VISTA, and related efforts have exceeded their costs remains a matter of judgment, although the argument can be made that the exposure received by future national leaders justifies the government outlays.

The advocates of national youth service propose, however, not a few thousand highly selected enrollees. They favor a national youth service enrolling hundreds of thousands and possibly even millions. In these proposals, universal service by youth gets confused with welfare goals. Whatever the name of such an agency, it will require the establishment of a federal bureaucracy to administer the program.

If the youths are to perform needed services, costs become crucial. If the volunteers are to be housed in residential centers, then the costs are likely to mount. Even at a subminimum stipend, the annual cost per person—based on the experience of the Job Corps, the Young Adult Conservation Corps, and the military—would be at least \$12,000. If the costs amortization of the needed facilities were to be included, the bill would mount even higher.

Most of the volunteers may not require residential facilities and would be able to reside in their parents' homes. In that case, the wage becomes controlling. On the basis of equity, however, it hardly would be appropriate to urge youths from impoverished homes to serve for less than the minimum wage and to have their families subsidize their services to the public. It is also highly doubtful whether many youths will be attracted to that kind of an activity, and exhortation is not likely to help. Whatever the number of volunteers the program would attract, its administrators would find it difficult to prevent the program from exerting a wage-depressant effect, limiting work opportunities to the lowest level jobs.

Continued on next page

If the wage is to be raised, then the national youth service would be competing with the military as well as private employers. The government would also find it difficult to employ—even if it is called voluntary service—hundreds of thousands of youths while their elders are seeking similar jobs.

The question also should be raised about the services that a youth-oriented voluntary service could offer. Experience under the Neighborhood Youth Corps and annual summer job programs for youths (intended to provide work experience to youths from impoverished homes) does not leave much room for optimism. One recurring problem has been that the managers of the employment projects did not enforce any discipline in the workplace, and little work was done in too many cases. The work experience programs became little more than income maintenance programs providing few services to their communities and doubtful future help to the participating youths.

There is also the question of what would the youths do. Granted that society's work is never done, and there

are lots of added chores that can be performed. But given the propensity of youths to job-hop, and as long as the national youth service is going to remain a voluntary activity, the question should be: will the youths who enroll in the agency stick with it for a year or for whatever hitch they sign up? The experience of the Great Society's programs would suggest that such is not the case. The average stay of youths in the Job Corps, for example, is about six months. And more than a third depart from the centers within 90 days after enrollment.

In brief, there is no question that the United States has experienced a job deficit for youth. Society has made various efforts to provide for a growing number of socially useful activities which employ teenagers. A strong case can be made for expanding the number of jobs that the government has created for them. But it is not clear that the needs of the youth should receive priority over the claims of other sectors in society. And whatever new interventions the federal government may support for youth, a volunteer national youth service is not the way to go.

National Service Overseas

There are about 30 countries which offer their young men—and, sometimes, women—some form of

national service. Although in most countries national service is the only alternative to mandatory mili-

tary service, in a few it is totally dissociated from the military.

The latter often prosper by providing their youth with training and work experience, thus equipping them to enter the kinds of jobs to which they aspire. Such is the case of Kenya's National Youth Service, which is designed primarily for school dropouts. Others make national service mandatory for certain segments of the population, as is the case with Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps, which requires university graduates to complete one year of service prior to obtaining employment.

In countries where it can be substituted for military service, it is commonly reserved for men, as women are exempt from the military. Israel and China are notable exceptions; in both all young people are required to serve in military, military support, or civilian service.

The table below illustrates some alternative service programs in five industrialized countries, all of which have mandatory military service for men only.

Country	Age group	Duration of military service (in months)	Duration of alternative service (in months)	Type of alternative service
Austria	18-35	6 + periodic training in reserves	12	Domestic or overseas work
Finland	18-fulfillment	8-11	8-12	No established program exists; service may be performed in community work
France	18-28	12	16-24	Highly selective overseas development programs, or domestic two-year social service programs
Sweden	18-45	10-15	14	Conscientious objectors may work in unarmed military service, fire fighting, hospital work, rescue squads, social work, etc.; some overseas work in disaster relief
West Germany	18-27	15	16	Domestic programs include civil service, established emergency relief, and community service; highly selective overseas programs must be applied for before mandatory term of military is imminent.

*Information obtained from military attaches of embassies of countries concerned.

Missing in ACTION?

Nearly 100,000 former VISTA and Peace Corps volunteers are not on our mailing lists. Inform your ex-volunteer friends about *Reconnection*. We can be reached toll-free at (800) 424-8580, ext. 84 or 76.

Contact

In this month's *Contact*, we are providing a list of sources of information on national service.

Inside ACTION

Office of Policy and Planning. Conducted the two national service pilot projects described on p. 3 of this issue. The Office is about to publish a new report on these two projects. It keeps abreast of the national service debate.

National Center for Service Learning. The Center has a particular interest in the potential educational value of the national service experience. It frequently includes articles on national service in its publication *Synergist*.

Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation. Conducts studies of overseas programs of national service and study service. The Office provides technical assistance to countries interested in starting national service programs.

Outside ACTION

American Civil Liberties Union. The Union is concerned with the implications that a mandatory service program would have on civil liberties. It has submitted congressional testimony in opposition to national service. Address: 132 W. 43rd St., New York, NY 10036.

Potomac Institute. The Institute is host to the privately funded Committee for the Study of National Service, which has issued two reports: "Youth and the Needs of the Nation" (1979), and "National Youth Service—What's at Stake" (1980). Address: 1501 18th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

National Interreligious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors. Frequently describes the potential dangers of national service

in its several publications. Offers technical assistance to persons interested in becoming conscientious objectors. Address: 15th St. and New York Ave., Washington, DC 20005.

National Service Secretariat. Prepared the first comprehensive national service plan in 1966. The Secretariat has also prepared estimates of the cost of national service, its employment, and educational implications. It issues a newsletter. Address: 5140 Sherier Place, NW, Washington, DC 20016.

Study-Service Workshop Secretariat. Provides technical assistance to third-world countries interested in setting up programs of national service or study service. It conducts research and evaluations, and issues policy guidelines. Address: P.O. Box 753, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Tsongas, from page 2

the 1970s, with many young Americans growing up to be fashion conscious, but unconscious—apparently unaware—that other Americans are struggling for basic needs.

It is an astonishing irony that, while many young people feel their lives lack meaning, many unmet social needs are crying for help. Day-care centers go unstaffed. Elderly citizens are shuffled away to inadequate homes because there is no one to care for them. Local communities have many projects—energy conservation and neighborhood cleanups to name but two—which desperately need manpower.

The list of human needs could go on. But in analyzing how participants in a national service program might be apportioned among potential recipients, we must look at both the benefit to the so-called recipient and the benefit to the person who serves. In service, all the participants gain. The education that the service provider gets is a fundamental reason why I support a program of national service for America's youth.

It is clear that the idea of national service has tremendous potential for the United States in the 1980s and beyond. Despite limited opportunities for full-time volunteer service at present, young people participate effectively in public and private programs.

With the potential for greatly expanding the opportunities for services so impressive, we owe it to ourselves and future generations to confront the unanswered questions that surround national service:

What types of service would be most beneficial? What should be the duration of service? What incentives for participation should be used? How can involvement of youth from all ethnic, economic, and regional back-

grounds be assured? How much would it cost? How could existing programs be used to offset the costs of national service? How would coordination among different levels of government and with the private sector be managed? Should national service be limited to youth?

Two of the most fundamental issues are voluntary service versus mandatory service, and the service program's relationship to military service.

I personally favor a volunteer service plan. I feel that the benefits derived from the national service experience would be seriously compromised by compulsory service, whether civilian or military. The idealism of Peace Corps volunteers, for example, has a major bearing on the quality of their work. The wonderful learning, sharing process that providers of service to others experience cannot be expected from an unwilling worker in national service.

Regarding the military aspect, there is much confusion and much dissent. I oppose mandatory service, and so I oppose the draft. A system of national service should not be used as a "back door" method of filling the ranks of the all-volunteer armed forces. Fear that a service program will be compulsory has caused strong popular opposition. At the present time, I believe that a program of voluntary national service is more practical and is based on better principal.

The idea of national service has widespread support among young Americans now, nearly 70 years after William James first wrote in favor of it. James predicted that young Americans would get "the childness knocked out of them and would come back . . . with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas." As a new decade begins, our situation cries out for the values inherent in national service.