HELPING ALL AMERICANS SERVE THEIR COUNTRY

BARACK OBAMA'S PLAN FOR UNIVERSAL VOLUNTARY CITIZEN SERVICE

For Barack Obama, public service has not been just the slogan of a campaign; it has been the cause of his life. Obama began his career by moving to the South Side of Chicago to direct the Developing Communities Project. Together with a coalition of ministers, Obama set out to improve living conditions in poor neighborhoods plagued by crime and high unemployment. After graduating from law school, Obama passed up lucrative law firm jobs to head Project Vote, which helped register 150,000 new African American voters in Chicago, the highest number ever registered in a single local effort. Michelle Obama was founding executive director of Public Allies Chicago, a leadership development program that identifies and prepares talented young adults for careers serving the public good. Obama believes public service is transformative, helping both the individuals that serve and the communities that benefit.

Obama believes the American people are ready to serve their communities, but not enough have been asked or know how. His presidential campaign has been at the leading edge of citizen engagement. Campaign supporters have performed more than 6,400 community service events such as tutoring, building playgrounds, and volunteering at shelters, using the organizing tools at My.BarackObama.com. As president, Obama will work to inspire Americans from all walks of life to serve and will help build the architecture for them to do it. Obama's plan will:

- Encourage national service to address the great challenges of our time, including combating climate change, extending health care, improving our schools and strengthening America overseas by showing the world the best of our nation.
- Expand AmeriCorps to 250,000 slots and double the size of the Peace Corps.
- Integrate service-learning into our schools and universities to enable students to graduate college with as many as 17 weeks of service experience under their belts.
- Provide new service opportunities for working Americans and retirees.
- Expand service initiatives that engage disadvantaged young people and advance their education.
- Expand the capacity of nonprofits to innovate and expand successful programs across the country.
- Enable more Americans to serve in the armed forces.

I. ENABLE ALL AMERICANS TO SERVE TO MEET THE NATION'S CHALLENGES

Expand Corporation for National and Community Service: Since 1994, more than 500,000 people have served their communities through AmeriCorps. They have mentored inner-city children, weatherized homes, cared for the elderly, combated poverty and helped communities prepare for and recover from natural disasters. Thousands of them have been on the front line rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast after Katrina.

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AmeriCorps and its umbrella agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service, not only engage young people in full-time service that prepares them with experience and job skills, they also enlist experienced Americans for part-time service. Every year, AmeriCorps programs turn away tens of thousands of applicants because of limited funding. As president, Barack Obama will expand and fund AmeriCorps from 75,000 slots today to 250,000 and he will focus this expansion on addressing the great challenges facing the nation. These additional slots will enable AmeriCorps to establish five new Corps:

Classroom Corps to help teachers and students, with a priority placed on high-need and underserved schools. The Corps will enlist retired or mid-career engineers and scientists to provide support for math and science teachers in the form of mentoring, student tutoring, curriculum development, and technology support. It will recruit neighborhood civic, business and faith leaders to offer after-school programs and community service opportunities. And the Corps will enlist parents, grandparents, college students or community members to mentor and provide one-on-one assistance to students, and assist with classroom activities under the direction of teachers.

Health Corps to improve public health information and outreach to areas with inadequate health systems such as rural areas and inner cities. Participants will provide basic health information and would be trained to assist health professionals including by helping to enroll people eligible for, but not enrolled in, government-sponsored health insurance programs such as the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Corps members will help organize health fairs, conduct health outreach into underserved communities and provide additional personnel to community health facilities.

Clean Energy Corps to promote energy independence through efforts like weatherization, renewable energy projects and educational outreach. Participants will also work to clean up polluted land and water, plant trees, and work for the environmental health of our nation's natural areas.

Veterans Corps to help keep America's sacred trust with its veterans. The Corps will make a special effort to recruit veterans of all ages to participate. These participants will assist veterans at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities, nursing homes, homeless shelters and elsewhere.

Homeland Security Corps to help communities plan, prepare for and respond to emergencies. Participants will include full-time members who work with communities to help them plan and prepare for emergency response as well as a cadre of volunteers who can be mobilized to help in a national disaster. The Corps would draw on the experience of the National Civilian Community Corps, and work in cooperation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). As a U.S. senator, Obama introduced legislation to create a national emergency health professional volunteer corps to ensure there is a ready pool of volunteer doctors and nurses who are willing, trained, and certified to serve in times of disaster. Obama's planned Homeland Security Corps would build on that effort.

Engage Retiring Americans in Service on a Large Scale: Older Americans have a wide range of skills and knowledge to contribute to local and national public service efforts. New efforts are needed particularly to tap the idealism and experience of the baby boomer generation – the largest and healthiest generation to enter retirement in history. Every day, 10,000 boomers turn 60. Obama will challenge boomers to help meet the challenges in our communities and our country.

Obama will expand and improve the Senior Corps programs of Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions and RSVP that connect individuals over the age of 55 to local volunteer opportunities. He also will strengthen the AmeriCorps VISTA program to give experienced individuals additional service opportunities. Experience Corps is a good model that should be expanded beyond reading and mentoring to other challenges on which

national service will be focused. Obama will work to provide additional income security, including assistance with retirement and family-related costs, and continuation of health care coverage, for people who participate in citizen service.

Expand the Peace Corps: President John F. Kennedy hoped the Peace Corps would grow to 100,000 volunteers, but the program peaked at 16,000 in 1966. Today, there are roughly 7,800 volunteers. Barack Obama will double the Peace Corps to 16,000 by its 50th anniversary in 2011 and push Congress to fully fund this expansion. He will work with the leaders of other countries to build an international network of overseas volunteers so that Peace Corps volunteers work side-by-side with volunteers from other countries to address poverty, combat diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria, and reduce the global education deficit. Obama will make the Peace Corps an integral part of his vision of American leadership that understands the security and well-being of every American is tied to the security and well-being of those who live beyond our borders.

Show the World the Best Face of America: Barack Obama will set up an America's Voice Initiative within the State Department to rapidly recruit and train Americans who are fluent speakers of local languages (Arabic, Bahasa Melayu, Farsi, Urdu, and Turkish) with public diplomacy skills. These Americans will go overseas to ensure our voice is heard in the mass media and in our efforts on the ground.

Obama also will extend opportunities for older individuals such as teachers, engineers, and doctors to serve overseas. This effort will include a Global Energy Corps to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions overseas and promote low-carbon and affordable energy solutions in developing nations. One of this century's great challenges will be promoting the use of green energy in developing countries, which will face exponential increases in energy demand. This Corps will be composed of scientists and engineers who will work with local partners overseas.

Leveraging Technology for Service: Many Americans who want to serve are not aware of service opportunities that fit their interests or schedules, aren't sure how to distinguish among various opportunities and don't know how to sign up. Technology can help. Existing sites like USAFreedomCorps.gov and VolunteerMatch.org represent a good start. Obama will build on that foundation and leverage technology to increase awareness of and participation in service opportunities. There will be a comprehensive, easily searchable web presence with information about service opportunities, and a full strategy to ensure that people interested in opportunities can find them. This will essentially be a craigslist for service. Best practices from the private sector will be imported, including user ratings and social network features. Users will be able to rate their volunteer experiences, and those requiring service will be able to specify skill sets and time commitments required. Users will also be able to track their hours of service if they choose and perhaps compete for awards from local chambers of commerce or foundations. Obama will also use technology to make service opportunities available for people who may prefer to work out of their homes or at unusual hours. Obama has said he would appoint the first U.S. Chief Technology Officer. Leveraging technology to expand national service will be a goal of the Chief Technology Officer.

II. INTEGRATE SERVICE INTO EDUCATION

Barack Obama calls his years working as a community organizer in Chicago's South Side the best education he ever had. He believes that all students should serve their communities. Studies show that students who participate in service-learning programs do better in school, are more likely to graduate high school and go to college, and are more likely to become active, engaged citizens. Schools that require service as part of the educational experience create improved learning environments and serve as resources for their communities. Obama's plan sets a goal for all students to engage in service, with middle and high school students performing

50 hours of service each year, and college students performing 100 hours of service each year. Under this plan, students would graduate college with as many as 17 weeks of public service experience under their belts.

Expand Service-Learning in Our Nation's Schools: In November, Barack Obama laid out a comprehensive plan to provide all Americans with a world-class education and give our schools a substantial infusion of funds to support teachers and principals and improve student learning. That plan conditions that assistance on school districts developing programs to engage students in service opportunities. Obama believes that middle and high school students should be expected to engage in community service for 50 hours annually during the school year or summer months. He will develop national guidelines for service-learning and community service programs, and will give schools better tools both to develop successful programs and to document the experience of students at all levels. He will encourage programs that engage with community partners to expand opportunities for community service and service-learning opportunities, so that students can apply what they learn in the classroom to authentic situations that help the community. These programs will also involve citizens from the community engaging students in service opportunities through the Classroom Corps.

Connect Disadvantaged Youth to Service Opportunities: There are 1.7 million low-income 16 to 24 year olds out of school and unemployed, and an additional 250,000 in prison. Thus there are a total of two million low-income young adults in need of an opportunity to resume their education, find productive employment and rebuild their lives. Barack Obama's national service plan includes:

> **Green Job Corps:** Obama will create an energy-focused youth jobs program for disconnected and disadvantaged youth. This program will provide participants with service opportunities to improve energy conservation and efficiency of homes and buildings in their communities, while also providing practical experience in important career fields of expected high-growth employment. It will also engage private sector employers and unions to provide apprenticeship opportunities. The program will also work closely with Obama's proposed Clean Energy Corps to help participants find additional service opportunities after they complete the Green Job Corps.
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> **Expand YouthBuild Program:** Since 1994, 76,000 YouthBuild students have produced 17,000 units of affordable housing in 226 of America's poorest communities. Currently the YouthBuild program offers 8,000 low-income young people a chance to learn housing construction job skills and complete their high school education. Participants gain valuable job skills as they construct and rehabilitate affordable housing for low-income and homeless families. By simultaneously addressing multiple issues facing low-income communities, YouthBuild is a critical tool in fighting poverty in America. Seventy-five percent of these highly disadvantaged youth surveyed up to seven years after completion of YouthBuild were in college or employed at an average wage of $10/hour. Ex-offenders who go through the program experience recidivism rates of 5 to 24 percent, significantly lower than the national average of 67 percent. Unfortunately, 14,000 youth were turned away in 2005 and more than 1,000 communities have applied to bring YouthBuild to their communities but were unable due to lack of funds. Obama will work with YouthBuild to grow from 8,000 slots today to 50,000 slots over the next eight years in order to meet the demand from young people and communities for this valuable program.

Require 100 Hours of Service in College: Barack Obama will make college affordable for all Americans by creating a new American Opportunity Tax Credit. This fully refundable credit will ensure that the first $4,000 of a college education is completely free for most Americans, and will cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university. Recipients of this credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of public service a year, either during the school year or over the summer months.

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Promote College Serve-Study: The Federal Work-Study program provides nearly $1 billion dollars a year to about 3,400 colleges and universities to subsidize part-time jobs for students. Under current law, at least 7 percent of that funding is supposed to go to community service jobs like tutoring. Unfortunately, many institutions fall short of even this modest requirement, instead using much of this low-cost workforce to supplement staff on campus, such as in libraries and dining halls. Barack Obama believes we need to move now to raise the service threshold to 25 percent so that more students can afford to engage in public service. This will help more than 200,000 college students a year complete part-time public service while they are in school. Obama will work to help colleges and universities reach the goal of 50 percent in serve-study advanced by Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and by General Colin Powell as the chair of America's Promise.

III. INVEST IN THE CAPACITY OF NONPROFITS TO INNOVATE AND EXPAND SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

In recent years, social entrepreneurs have been the catalyst for much social innovation in education, economic development, health and the environment. By developing innovative solutions to important social issues, social entrepreneurs provide many of the important services that address human needs, improve our quality of life, and make democracy work better. Barack Obama believes the federal government should invest in this approach by strategically leveraging public and private sector investment; cultivating higher levels of competition, innovation, and accountability in the nonprofit sector; inspiring a new generation of Americans to engage in service; and unleashing the potential of existing high-impact organizations.

In the private sector, companies get this type of support through an institutionalized and significant dedication of resources to research and development. This activity is supported by the federal government with up to $7 billion a year in R&D tax credits. In contrast, R&D in the nonprofit sector is limited, with a disconnect between charitable foundations that can fund innovation and the organizations on the ground that can test new concepts and bring them to scale. As a result, there is little to no marketplace where innovative solutions in the nonprofit sector can start, grow and have a significant impact on the tough issues we face.

Obama will create a new partnership between the federal government, private sector investors and the nonprofit sector. By leveraging federal dollars, Obama will foster the use of best practices of the private sector to nurture innovation in the nonprofit sector. This will help identify programs that work and expand them to be scalable in other markets, which will increase the efficiency and impact of the nonprofit sector as a whole. Obama believes that our problems are not too big, our solutions are currently too small and as president, he will support an agenda that identifies and scales the best solutions to some of our most pressing problems.

Social Investment Fund Network: Barack Obama will create a Social Investment Fund Network. This will be a government-supported nonprofit corporation, similar to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, that will use federal seed money to leverage private sector funding to improve local innovation, test the impact of new ideas and expand successful programs to scale. The fund will operate through a network of funds that will be rooted in the private sector at the community level, with local decision-making informed by a shared network of best practices. For example, a successful nonprofit organization could apply for funding to study ways to improve or expand the organization to other locations. Or an angel investor could work with the fund to identify high-quality nonprofits that should be expanded to other locations and invest in that expansion. The network of funds would bring experts skilled at analyzing data, picking winners, measuring results, and building capacity to work, and would be driven by the following key principles:

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- **Results-Focused**—Funds would provide financial capital to nonprofit organizations based on rigorous criteria and analysis to ensure the highest likelihood of results, particularly projects that would yield a return on investment, such as savings on future public services.

- **Community-Directed**—Funded efforts would respond to specific community-identified priorities. For example, one community might focus on crime prevention while another might choose education.

- **Cross-sector**—Strategies that engage volunteers and businesses would receive special emphasis; a private sector board of local leaders, including business, government, community organizations, and the target beneficiaries would make funding decisions with assistance from analytical experts.

- **Long-term—**Investments would occur over a period of years to increase the likelihood of success and sustainability.

At the national level, the Social Entrepreneurship Agency (below) would oversee the fund network to ensure that they meet these criteria. The agency would also help the funds learn from one other, enabling them to build a body of effective practices and expand their knowledge of possible solutions to the problems they seek to address.

Social Entrepreneurship Agency for Nonprofits: Barack Obama will a create an agency within the Corporation for National and Community Service dedicated to building the capacity and effectiveness of the nonprofit sector. The agency will be charged with:

- Improving coordination of programs that support nonprofits across the federal government.
- Fostering nonprofit accountability.
- Streamlining processes for obtaining federal grants and contracts, and eliminating unnecessary requirements.
- Removing barriers for smaller nonprofits to participate in government programs.

The agency will make grants to build the infrastructure of the nonprofit sector and capacity of nonprofit organizations, including their ability to ensure accountability, manage volunteers, and improve outcomes.

IV ENABLE MORE AMERICANS TO SERVE IN THE MILITARY

Before the 2000 election, George Bush and Dick Cheney famously told our military "Help is on the way." Today, the active Army is short 3,000 captains and majors, and 58 percent of recent West Point graduates are choosing to leave the force – double the historic average. We do not have a single combat brigade at home in reserve, ready for an unexpected crisis. Our National Guard and Reserves have only half the equipment levels they need, hampering their ability to respond to crises, foreign and domestic. As president, Barack Obama will strengthen the military and enable more men and women to serve their country in the armed forces.

Expand to Meet Military Needs on the Ground: A major stress on our troops comes from insufficient ground forces. Barack Obama supports plans to increase the size of the Army by 65,000 troops and the Marines by 27,000 troops. Increasing our end strength will help units retrain and re-equip properly between deployments and decrease the strain on military families.

Solve Recruitment and Retention Problems: A nation of 300 million strong should not be struggling to find enough qualified citizens to serve. Recruiting and retention problems have been swept under the rug by

lowering standards and using the "Stop Loss" program to keep our servicemen and women in the force after their enlistment has expired. Even worse, the burdens of fixing these problems have been placed on the shoulders of young recruiting sergeants, instead of leadership in Washington. America needs a leader who can inspire today's youth to serve our nation the same way President Kennedy once did—reaching out to youth, as well as the parents, teachers, coaches, and community and religious leaders who influence them. Barack Obama will make it a presidential imperative to restore the ethic of public service to the agenda of today's youth, whether it be serving their local communities in such roles as teachers or first responders, or serving in the military and reserve forces or diplomatic corps that keep our nation free and safe.

Rebuild the Military for 21st-Century Tasks: As we rebuild our armed forces, we must meet the full spectrum needs of the new century, not simply recreate the military of the Cold War era. In particular, we must focus on strengthening the ground force units and skills that military officers have dubbed "High Demand/Low Density." The U.S. military must:

- Build up our special operations forces, civil affairs, information operations, engineers, foreign area officers, and other units and capabilities that remain in chronic short supply.

- Invest in foreign language training, cultural awareness, and human intelligence and other needed counterinsurgency and stabilization skill sets.

- Create a specialized military advisors corps, which will enable us to better build up local allies' capacities to take on mutual threats.

Guarantee Our Ground Forces Have the Proper Training for New Challenges: Obama will ensure that Soldiers and Marines have sufficient training time before they are sent into battle. This is not the case at the moment, where American forces are being rushed to Iraq and Afghanistan, often with less individual and unit training than is required.

Ensure the Care and Dignity of Our Troops When They Come Home: As the shameful events at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the recent reports on growing numbers of homeless and unemployed veterans show, we are not taking proper care of our wounded warriors and veterans. As a grandson of a World War II veteran who went to college on the G.I. Bill, and as a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Barack Obama has fought to improve care for troops recovering from injuries, to combat homelessness among veterans, and to make the disability benefits process more equitable. He is also the sponsor of the Wounded Warrior bill to improve care for wounded troops recovering at military hospitals. In August 2007, Obama laid out his comprehensive plan as president to build a 21st-century Department of Veterans Affairs, so that we will be able to uphold America's sacred trust with our veterans.

Update GI Bill: Barack Obama has been a long-time supporter of the bipartisan legislation signed into law in June 2008 to update GI Bill benefits for the 21st Century. He disagreed with opponents of the bill who claimed it was too generous and too expensive. The new GI Bill will allow veterans who served after 9/11 to receive payments covering tuition up to the cost of the most expensive in-state public school, plus a monthly stipend equivalent to housing costs in their area and additional benefits. It also would extend the period of time vets could use the benefit. It was designed to minimize loss of retention and will encourage recruitment across the country.

Create a "Green Vet Initiative": The renewable energy economy is exploding in the United States. In terms of venture capital alone, private investment in the sector topped $2.6 billion dollars in 2007. At the same time, more than 837,000 troops who served in Iraq or Afghanistan are now veterans. As president, Barack Obama

will ensure that more of our veterans can enter the new energy economy. He will create a new "Green Vet Initiative" that will have two missions: first it will offer counseling and job placement to help veterans gain the skills to enter this rapidly growing field; second, it will work with industry partners to create career pathways and educational programs.

Lift the Onerous Burdens on Our Troops and Their Families: Our military is built on families, and troops decide whether to re-enlist based largely on how their families are faring. We must better support those families of whom we are asking so much. An Obama administration will:

- **Create a Military Families Advisory Board**: Consisting of experts and family representatives from each service, it would help identify and develop actionable policies to ease the burden on spouses and families. The board would provide an institutionalized conduit (presently missing) for the evolving concerns of military families to be brought to the attention of senior policymakers and the public.

- **Work to Bring Pay Parity:** more in line with that of the private sector, as measured by the employment cost index (ECI).

- **End the "Back Door Draft" policies:** that allow an individual to be forced to remain on active duty after his or her enlistment has expired.

- **Establish regularity in deployments:** so that active duty and reserves know what they must expect, rather than the current trend of changing the deployment schedules after they have left home, which harms the morale of troops and their families.

Restore the Deployment Policies Under Which the Reserve and Guard Enlisted: America should recommit to the broken promises made to the men and women who serve in the Guard and Reserves. An Obama administration will:

- Limit lengthy deployments to one year for every six years,
- Restore the 24-month limit on cumulative deployment time,
- End the "Stop-Loss" program of forcing troops to stay in service beyond their expected commitments.

Ensure the Guard and Reserves Can Meet their Homeland Security Missions: The poor readiness of America's Guard and Reserve forces threatens our ability to respond to natural disasters or terrorist attacks at home. We saw this, sadly, after both Hurricane Katrina and the tornadoes in Kansas. Because of the depletion of its resources in Iraq, the National Guard is less ready today than it was on 9/11. Nearly 90 percent of units have serious equipment shortages; many have less than 1/3 of the equipment they require. A particular focus of Obama's plan will be to reverse the trend of "cross-leveling," the cannibalizing of soldiers and machines from units back home for missions abroad.

Make the Reserve and National Guard Components Whole: Today, the selected Reserve makes up 37 percent of the total force, but only receives 3 percent of the equipment funding and 8 percent of total DOD budget. Barack Obama will resource and equip the Reserve and Guard to meet their missions not only overseas, but also at home. Barack Obama's administration will consult regularly with governors of the 50 states on the needs of their Guard units.

Give the Guard a Seat at the Table: Too often, top-level military decisions, which impact the National Guard, are made without its input. Obama cosponsored legislation to elevate the Chief of the National Guard to the rank of four-star general and make the chief a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top military advisory panel to the president. As president, Obama will sign this legislation into law.

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Treat our Citizen Soldiers with the Respect They Deserve: In a 2007 survey, 50 percent of employers report that they are now less likely to hire reservists. As President, Barack Obama will:

- Fight Guard/Reserves Employment discrimination. Unlike what is happening today, Barack Obama will not allow his Justice Department to ignore the ongoing abuse of reservists' employment rights.

- Ensure that reservists and Guard members are treated fairly when it comes to employment, health, and education benefits, including ensuring that they can keep the education benefits that they gain while in service (currently, reservists must forfeit them, once their active deployment time ends).

Help Military Families Cope with Deployments: When a guardsman or reservist is called away for active duty, their spouses have to make a tremendous transition and often struggle to balance work and family obligations. Barack Obama will expand Family Medical Leave to include reserve families facing mobilization. This will allow workers whose spouse is called to active duty to get their affairs in order, without losing their jobs.

Improve Transition Services: As president, Obama will ensure that the military and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) coordinate to provide a truly seamless transition for service members from military to civilian life, including for reservists. Obama's plan will be modeled on legislation he introduced to standardize electronic records for active duty and transitioned them intact to the VA upon separation and to enhance military and VA outreach to separating members of the National Guard and Reserves.

V. A COMMITMENT TO FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Barack Obama's national service plan will cost about $3.5 billion per year when it is fully implemented. He will maintain fiscal responsibility and prevent any increase in the deficit by offsetting cuts and revenue sources in other parts of the government. This plan will be paid for in part by cancelling tax provisions that would otherwise help multinational corporations pay less in U.S. taxes starting in 2008 by reallocating tax deductions for interest expenses between income earned in the U.S. and income earned abroad. The rest of the plan will be funded using a small portion of the savings associated with ending the war in Iraq.

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