

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

REIMAGINING NATIONAL SERVICE

*Co-hosted by the Brookings Institution and
the Service Year Alliance*

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

PARTICIPANTS:

Introduction:

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President, The Brookings Institution

National service on the ground: Examples from the field on how national service is helping the country “build back better”

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Chief Strategy Officer, Service Year Alliance

JOSH FRYDAY
Chief Service Officer, California Volunteers

TYRA MARIANI
President, Schultz Family Foundation

SONALI NIJHAWAN
Director, AmeriCorps State and National

MARY ELLEN SPRENKEL
President and CEO, The Corps Network

JAIME ERNESTO UZETA
CEO, Public Allies

Keynote remarks:

WES MOORE
CEO, Robin Hood Foundation

Reimagining national service: A roadmap to the service presidency

JESSE COLVIN
CEO, Service Year Alliance

PARTICIPANTS (CONT'D):

Expert panel conversation:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. For those of you I have not yet had the honor of meeting, I'm John Allen. I'm the president of the Brookings Institution, and it is my sincere pleasure to welcome you all to this online conversation on the critical role of national service in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

We have with us a distinguished group of experts and leaders in this field today, whom you'll be hearing from shortly. But we're also pleased and honored to be partnership today with Service Year Alliance. A deep friendship has grown between our two institutions.

But before we begin, let me offer just a few thoughts on this present moment and the top at-hand. We find ourselves slowly starting to recover from the devastating public health, social, and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we're far from the finish line.

We are badly in need of dedicated and selfless young people who are willing to put in the work, the work that it takes to support our most vulnerable communities and populations, rebuild our infrastructure and keep America moving forward through education, internet connectivity, and the exchange of new ideas.

Expanded national service presents an opportunity to assist communities in responding to and recovering from the national health crisis, while also providing jobs and career opportunities to hard working young people, who may be disconnected from the labor force or their continued education as a result of the pandemic.

In addition, our nation remains deeply divided, not just politically, but also socially. And this kind of service presents the opportunity to heal these wounds by bringing together individuals from different walks of life from all over the country and giving them the opportunity to serve their country by doing something bigger than themselves.

It's with great confidence that I can say that if we can harness national service in the coming months and years and turn that into recovery from the pandemic to provide career pathways for young adults and bridge our political and social divide, we will almost certainly build back better. That's a tall order, but it is within the grasp of our people.

To that end, today we are joined by Jesse Colvin, CEO of Service Year Alliance, with a presentation of a new report entitled, "Reimagining National Service: A Roadmap to a Service Presidency," which offers a comprehensive guide to the Biden administration on the steps that it could take to make national service an expectation and an opportunity for all young people in America.

Before we begin, a reminder that we're very much on the record and we're streaming live today. And if you have them, please send your questions to events@brookings.edu; that's events@brookings.edu, or on Twitter using #NationalService.

So, with that, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for taking the time to join us today. And I'll shortly turn the floor over to Kristin Bennett, a dear friend, who serves as a chief strategy officer at Service Year Alliance, who will be moderating the discussion of the group of leaders in this field on their organizations are helping America recover from the pandemic.

After that panel, Wes Moore, CEO of Robin Hood Foundation, one of the largest anti-poverty organizations in the nation will give our keynote address. To close our program with some final thoughts, we'll be joined by Senator Jack Reed, a senior United States senator from Rhode Island.

So, with that, Kristen, thank you and welcome.

MS. BENNETT: Thank you, General Allen. As he said, I am Kristen Bennett, the chief strategy officer at Service Year Alliance, where we are working to make national service a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. We believe national service transforms lives, strengthens communities, and fuels civic renewal.

Over the past year, national service has been central to our country's response to the COVID pandemic. corps members are currently delivering food to the hungry, contact tracing, and supporting vaccine distribution, tutoring students to combat learning loss, and helping with virtual school.

The one billion for national service that was included in the American Rescue Plan Act is a monumental first step toward making national service part of growing up in America, but there is more work to be done.

National service can aid the Biden-Harris administration in accomplishing its key priorities including COVID response and recovery, workforce development, climate change and infrastructure,

racial justice, and healing a divided nation.

As the administration sets its sight on rebuilding the economy, additional investments and innovations in national service can maximize its potential. And today's panelists are perfectly positioned to speak to our national services helping the country build back better.

I am proud to introduce Tyra Mariani, the president of Schultz Family Foundation; Josh Fryday, the chief service officer of California; Jaime Ernesto Uzeda, the CEO of Public Allies; and Solani Nijhawan, the director of AmeriCorps State and National.

These panelists represent national service organizations, philanthropy, and federal agencies who are already doing incredible work. And we are eager to hear from them about their visions for reimagining national service, as we all strive to make national service a key part of President Biden's legacy. Audience watching today online, you can ask your questions to the panelists on Twitter using #NationalService, or by emailing events@brookings.edu.

And, with that, I want to kick off the panel with one question that I'd like each panelist to answer. How is your organization and national service, more broadly, helping America recover from the COVID pandemic and play a critical role in building back better?

Sonali, why don't you kick us off?

MS. NIJHAWAN: Thank you, Kristen, for that great question. I'd just like to start by thanking you and your team at Service Year Alliance, at the Brookings Institution, for putting this incredible event together.

It's so wonderful to be joining this esteemed group of panelists, who include leaders of the impactful AmeriCorps programs, a state commission, and a critical philanthropic leader that has supported the work of our grantees and commission partners. So it's wonderful to be here with all of you, and I really look forward to this discussion.

So, Kristen, you asked how national service can help America recover from the pandemic, and how we can play a role in meeting President Biden's charge to build back better. And when I think about this question, I personally reflect on my start as a AmeriCorps member serving in my hometown of Chicago. This year experience was both challenging and rewarding in ways that I could

never expect and it really put me on this life trajectory in public service, which I also honestly didn't expect.

And it's interesting to me how that service -- or it's eye opening to me how that service experience opened up a new world for me and new opportunities where I was able to launch a new site for a national AmeriCorps program, and most recently had the privilege of launching and leading a placed-based initiative in Stockton, California.

And I share this personal perspective and these experiences because they have provided me with a unique perspective that I feel privileged to bring to this role as the director of AmeriCorps State and National. And that's the perspective of a corps member, of a grantee, and most recently as an individual who was working to bring AmeriCorps resources to a new community.

And this last experience in Stockton was one that really brought all of my service experiences together and helped me gain this knowledge of how a bold, long-term investment could give voice an agency to community members who historically had experienced decades of disinvestment.

And in launching this incentive and facilitating a design process with community voice at the forefront, I was quickly reminded that if we are to identify solutions to community challenges we need to engage the voices of those closest to the problem. And, in my opinion, AmeriCorps programs across the country try to do just that.

And I think we saw this in the way AmeriCorps programs stepped up and showed up to respond during the pandemic from supporting food banks, which you shared on staffing vaccination centers and supporting students through their virtual school experience.

I mean that's just to name a few. And I know my fellow panelists will talk more about the great work that they have been able to lead with their respective programs in their respective communities.

But truly I think AmeriCorps programs have been able to adapt and to respond to needs of our community. And in seeing this, I think, and recognizing this profound impact of our programs, I think it's natural to think about the potential for growth. It's natural to think about: how do we maybe have more members?

And while we think about that growth, I do think it's important -- and I'll say this is a perspective that I look to bring to our work that when we're thinking about growth and we're thinking -- it's important that, first and foremost, we're putting, we're placing a priority around equity and access.

So while it is important that we have -- or so while I'd like us to be able to think about how we have more members, I think it's important that we're thinking about how we put equity and access first.

And to me that means focusing on how we treat and invest in our members, so thinking about the benefits they receive, and the experience that they have, how we support our grantees, and how we meet the needs of communities historically underserved or underinvested in by AmeriCorps.

I could take more time to share more information and my perspective on this, but I think I'll stop there for now and just -- and look forward to sharing more throughout.

MS. BENNETT: Great, thank you, Sonali. I'd like to go to Josh, the same question.

MR. FRYDAY: Wonderful. Well, thank you, Kristen, and thank you everyone for having us today. As someone who has been a proponent and advocate for national service since I served in the Navy, it's just so exciting to be in the moment that we're in, to see the energy around this issue, largely because of the leadership of organizations, like, Service Year and Brookings.

So grateful to you all for pushing this and for having California participate and be a part of this. Because the truth is, and I'm very lucky to be in a position, as chief officer for the state of California. I'm fortunate that we have a governor who believes deeply in the power of service, who believes deeply in the power of engaging everyone in our state to solve our biggest challenges, whether it's poverty, or climate change, or anything that comes our way.

And what better issue than a pandemic that literally effects everyone to show us that we have to have the infrastructure and the resources and the opportunities to literally engage everyone to get through this together?

And so from the very beginning of the pandemic in California, I was put in charge of the food task force for the state, which was largely set up to keep food banks operational and support other programs around California dealing with food insecurity, helping seniors who are isolated, who are asked to stay home, dealing with the skyrocketing need at food banks that we all saw across the country.

And from the very beginning, from the very beginning of pandemic, Governor Newsom called on Californians and said, "We're going to need conversation corps members. We're going to need AmeriCorps members. We're going to need every Californian to step up to help us get through this together."

And we launched, which has become our approach to how we're dealing with, not just COVID, but really with all of the issues that we're applying a national service strategy towards -- we created what we call a pyramid of engagement. And if I could show you, if you guys will allow me the clunkiness of trying to share my screen, what you'll see is, we launched Operation Feed, which was a mission to keep our food banks running and to support food programs around the state that really looks to engage and asked literally every California to step up in some way with national service programs being at the tip of the spear and being the catalyst for empowering the rest of our communities.

And since then, I'll just give the punchline, because you can see it there, since we have launched in California, we have served over 300 million meals to those in need. We have generated thousands and tens of thousands of volunteers, and at our food banks we have helped support over a million hours of service because of this program.

And, really, if you look at what we call the pyramid of engagement, at the top, is national service. So we deployed AmeriCorps members to food banks; we deployed NCCC teams to food banks; we deployed the National Guard; we deployed VISTA, thanks to an idea from a good friend of all of ours, John Gonfords (phonetic), about putting VISTA members literally in every food bank in need, to make sure that they were helping us do the volunteer generation that we needed; and then we launched California For All, an initiative to actually call on volunteers to step up.

And so this is how we're approaching it where that the last, at the bottom of the tier, literally, a call to action to every Californian. We launched a neighbor-to-neighbor campaign to ask every neighbor to help with dealing with food insecurities, especially with those neighbors who are isolated. And I share this slide just to demonstrate how seriously our governor and our state takes the power of national service to solve problems and bring people together.

And, Kristen, just, lastly, in conclusion, to answer your question of, how national service

is helping California build back better with the Biden administration? California last year launched a Climate Action Corps, a statewide program to use national service to engage our communities around climate action.

I was just last week in Fresno with a few of our climate action organizers, who are AmeriCorps members, who were building a community garden in a food desert for a low-income community that has no access to fresh food.

And they are doing it literally so that not only could they provide fresh food, but so that community can then use the community garden to sell food at the local farmers market creating local economic opportunity. And that's the example of the infrastructure that we're able to build when we create these kinds of opportunities around national service. So thank you.

MS. BENNETT: Wonderful, thank you. I would like to take a moment to welcome Mary Ellen Sprenkel, the president and CEO of the Corps Network. We sometimes have trouble locking in in this virtual world. (Laughter) So welcome to our panel.

I am going to go to Tyra next. Tyra, would you like to address how national service is helping the, you know, communities recover during the COVID pandemic and playing a critical role in building back better?

MS. MARIANI: Sure, good morning, and thank you for the invitation. And I also want to thank Service Year Alliance for your partnership in the work that we have been doing. As we pivoted to respond to the needs of the COVID crisis, we recognize that our core purpose of creating opportunity for all young people is more pressing than ever.

We know that youth often work in entry level positions, like, frontline jobs in the food service and hospitality industries. And as a result, they're vulnerable to the ups and downs of the economy which we have seen.

We know that the Great Recession of 2008 left this population especially behind, along with BIPOC communities, and we just can't afford to let that happen again; morally, economically, we can't and we shouldn't.

And so, in the fall of 2020, we partnered with Serve Washington, which is a state

commission that coordinates our service efforts to launch the Washington COVID Response Corps, which is a first of its kind youth service program. And so, by combining our resources with federal and state government funding, the Washington COVID Response Corps increased the capacity of our local non-profits to help keep our neighbors fed and healthy, as we have been talking about.

But it also created meaningful service opportunities in AmeriCorps for young people whose education and career pathways were unfairly upended due to the pandemic. So it seemed like an obvious win-win for us that we have our neighbors in need, and we have our young people who are missing out on opportunities they otherwise would have had to put those two together.

So given the flexibility of our philanthropic dollars, our support allowed our collective to pilot new ideas that the public sector might shy away from or just be unable to do. So, for example, we provided funding for our new technical platform equity to distribute emergency funds quickly and equitably to AmeriCorps members.

We also incorporated a dash data collaboration tool into the program which made it easier to track the impact of our efforts. And so, while integrating new partners into the existing programs can be challenging it is often it is an important role that philanthropy can play.

We also sought to alleviate barriers to participating in the program, particularly for smaller non-profits that we know have been critical to reaching underserved communities. So we subsidized 75% of the host site fee to fund AmeriCorps members onsite. And as a result, the number of food banks hosting a member grew from six in 2019, to more than 70, 7-0, in fall of 2020.

And, finally, I mentioned that we prioritize diversity seeking a more diverse Corps and socioeconomics and race and ethnicity. So it took a couple of months to go from idea to execution.

We moved pretty quickly and we had a short runway to launch the program but we had some early learnings which included the importance of partnering with state AmeriCorps leaders. Serve Washington was instrumental in successfully integrating the model into the states' AmeriCorps program.

They had a vision and a desire to create a very responsive model that leveraged the infrastructure, so rather than us trying to do something from scratch there was an existing infrastructure that we could tap into.

And so we hope that by sharing these learnings and recommendations that we can spark conversations in other states similar to what Service Year is doing as well, that states can think about how to replicate a more innovative model and leverage a public-private partnership around national service to do so, to emphasize the best of our respective assets.

The last thing I'll mention, by the way, is that the pandemic is just too daunting for any one of us. We can't expect that philanthropy alone, we can't expect government alone, even for the trillions that we have seen in stimulus, or businesses to solve this problem. So the collaboration will be key, as we continue to think about recovery in this time of crisis.

MS. BENNETT: Thank you, Tyra. And Jaime, will you talk about the experience of Public Allies, at this time?

MR. UZETA: Yeah. Kristen, thank you. I love hearing everybody's descriptions. And, Sonali, want to dive deeper into the work you did in Stockton -- not now, obviously, but soon.

So Jaime Uzeta, and I'm head of Public Allies, and we are one of the original AmeriCorps programs; we operate in 24 cities. Our Corps program is an apprenticeship that focuses on social justice and places young people usually in non-profits and throughout the country, and we have about 8,000 alumni today.

And when I think about COVID and the pandemic, I can't separate where we were organizationally from, you know, even preceding the pandemic. And so, the last couple of years, we have been operating based on the assumption that our country is going through a massive transformation just given alone by the transformation of our economy, and demographic courses, etc., and the idea that a new country was going to emerge and is going to emerge.

We were thinking back then, we were saying, a new country is going to emerge in a decade. And, you know, by default that's going to happen. And our objective was to help guide, do our part to guide that transformation to ensure that what emerged was a more equitable, more just version of ourselves, something that reflects our founding idea as a country.

So we have been gearing ourselves up for that and thinking about all of the different assets including those 8,000 alumni, all of the allies that we have in all of these non-profits and the

non-profit partners themselves to help bring about this sort of change.

So we see it as not just creating the future pipeline of leaders, but also looking at the alumni network and helping it accelerate their career trajectory to ensure that the help in the now, the very, you know, now, very present sort of transformation and remaking that's happening by default in our country.

So, the pandemic and then of course the reckoning on race, really just sort of accelerated this timeframe. So, you know, we went from sort of 10 years into, in our minds, something like six years; this is all a science, you know. But, roughly saying, you know, six years and using that just as a point of reference for us in terms of how we organize ourselves.

And in the context of COVID. You really saw all of the seeds that we have been planting for 30 years, you know, working in AmeriCorps and focusing -- I should mention about Public Allies -- focusing not just on young people in general, but focusing specifically on marginalized communities.

We have been a pioneer in identifying young people from communities where places, where people typically wouldn't look for, and helping them discover and develop their strengths to help their own communities. And the makeup of our allies are 80% of color, 60%, 1 in 25% LGBTQ, and we have a staff that's reflects similar demographics so we have a deep understanding of the communities we serve.

I mention that because this notion of proximate leadership, having folks that are, you know, at the frontlines of the challenges we're facing, being a part of creating that solution and recognizing how critical it is for them to have a place at the table in shaping their own communities and the country is just part of who we are.

And so when you think about it in the context of COVID, what we found was that our allies and alumni were doing everything from filling the gaps that were laid -- that were sort of widened by the crisis, in terms of, you know, mutual aid and networks that they were starting, and contract tracing, a whole range of activities.

We had a COVID cohort of allies that worked over the summer, specifically on COVID-related needs. And then our alumni, on the other end, were literally redesigning the systems that

help to create those steps in the first place -- so everything from declaring, like, David Crowley, our county executive, one of the many elected officials that are allies, alumni of Public Allies, declaring racism in the public health crisis, for example, and a number of other sort of initiatives that took place in localities where we worked.

So that's, both in terms of filling those gaps, and then sort of redesigning, and sort of redesigning systems and help raise awareness and accelerate this awakening that's taking place is where Public Allies and the network have been working.

And, you know, to that end, we see it as, you know, within six years being able to, not just have the right leaders in the right kinds of places, but also have demonstrable examples of what it looks like, what equitable communities actually look like so that we can build on those examples and think about it in terms of, you know, entire ecosystems.

So that's, broadly speaking, how we have been -- our notion of building back better.

MS. BENNETT: Thank you, Jaime. To wrap us up, Mary Ellen, would you like to talk about the Corps Network's experience in addressing the COVID pandemic and the work toward building back better?

MS. SPRENKEL: Yes, I do. Thank you for inviting me to participate on this esteemed panel today, and I am sorry I worked late. You'd think after 13 months of using Zoom I'd be a little bit better with the technology, but we still have our days.

So I'm Mary Ellen Sprenkel, the President and CEO of the Corps Network. The Corps Network is the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps. And today we represent nearly 140 service and conservation corps that operate in all 50 states and in hundreds of communities across the country.

Based on the model and philosophy of the New Deal Era Civilian Conservation Corps, which was established by President Roosevelt to put millions of young people to work during the Great Depression. Today's corps collectively engage more than 20,000 youth and young adults in service projects every year.

Given the unique and challenging circumstances of 2020 and COVID-19, many corps

which are usually engaged in conservation and natural resource projects were able to quickly commit to pandemic response-related service, like, food production and delivery, ventilator distribution, and field hospital construction, which was extremely helpful to communities who were kind of navigating this new landscape without a roadmap for support.

And the corps were able to do it in such a way that their corps members were deploying safely and delivering service safely. And so I am very grateful to all of the corps and the thousands of young people that risks their own health to help their communities deal with the pandemic.

And they also continue to complete the service projects they do that it prevents us (inaudible) to outdoor recreation and mitigates the impacts of climate change and which were equally important as more people sought to get outside and recreate safely.

And, of course, climate change and natural disasters did not get the memo that they were supposed to take a break due to the pandemic, so we had to continue to deal with those issues regardless of what else was going on across the country and across the world.

So this past year, and every year, with funding from AmeriCorps, education and workforce development programs and project sponsors. Conservation corps members planted millions of trees, cleared thousands of acres of hazardous fuel, and endangered species, restored the acres if habitat and developed urban parks and green spaces, built bio wells and rain gardens, installed permeable turf, and installed permeable surfaces that absorbed carbon and stored water, and improved community resilience to climate change and catastrophic weather events.

They also, other corps, installed solar panels and weatherized and retrofitted homes and buildings to improve energy efficiency. And they do it in such a way that expose and prepare corps members to careers in conservation and resource management.

And although that the corps are already accomplishing an impressive amount of work and engaging thousands of young people every year, there is still so much more that needs to be done, both in terms of developing and preparing young people for careers, but also in preparing people in responding to climate change.

And that is one reason we are so excited about the Biden administration's proposal to

launch a Civilian Climate Corps which reminiscent of the original CCC, I think has the opportunity to drastically change the economy and the workforce as we know it, and provides a tremendous opportunity for national service to play a role to make sure that all young people have an opportunity to participate.

And as we think about how to develop this new CCC to ensure it provides opportunities for all youth and young adults of all races, ethnicities, gender, socioeconomic status and education levels, and provides benefits to all communities, and especially those that have been historically under resourced and have borne the brunt of environmental justice, we need to be very intentional about how we think about corps member recruiting, training, and support.

And that includes providing a livable wage or stipend for all corps members and in the selection of projects that are responsive to each community's needs. And that is why I think national service can play such a key role because it is so community-based and can be responsive to individual community needs.

So we are very excited about partnering with our friends at the land management agencies, and the community development agencies, and at the Corporation for National and Community Service, and others here, to help stand up and expand the great work that is already going on.

MS. BENNETT: Great. Thank you, Mary Ellen. So the American Rescue Plan specifically called for including underrepresented communities in an expansion of national service. And I have heard this referenced in most of your remarks, you know, from Tyra, you talked about wanting to make sure we are creating meaningful experiences for young people.

And, you know, Jaime, you highlighted that it was -- that there were seeds planted 30 years ago, right. So this is not an overnight thing that we can accomplish. But how do we do this as a field, right? How can we view an expansion of national service through an equity-lens and make opportunity available to individuals of all backgrounds in the long-term?

So, as we think about this next investment and we think about expanding national service in our programming, how do we ensure that what we do today pays off as seeds planted for the next 30 years to ensure that we're making service more accessible to more populations?

And maybe, Jaime, can I go to you first on that?

MR. UZETA: Right, you know, thank you for doing that.

MS. BENNETT: Yes.

MR. UZETA: I think it's a really important question and it's -- I think it is -- there are a couple of things, there are a number of things that we can do. But I think the way we actually operate within national service -- and when we talk about building back better, we are talking about the actual institutions themselves.

So it's, you know, there is the building back and then the creation of cohorts of young people that are -- and others that are going out to sort of help remake the country, right, and build back.

But it's also the way the institution itself of AmeriCorps actually operations. And the idea of increasing the stipend to ensure that more people can actually participate in the program, right, as opposed to originally it seems like the intent was more around sort of a gap year, a young person, in terms of AmeriCorps being able to participate in the program.

And we know that that's very difficult for a lot of people including myself when I was, you know, when I was going to school. So the idea of, you know, increasing the stipend to make it more feasible, having more flexibility in how the money itself is used, the grant, the stipend, for example, and the different pools money that can be brought together to be creative and innovative in how we expand the opportunity for others to serve are just too, you know, basic examples.

But I think so much of it is around just the basic mental model around who does serve in the first place, right, and really making sure that we eradicate this notion of that it's noble for folks who may not have faced the problem themselves to come in and help others addressing these for social ills.

But it has a multiplier effect significantly if young people from the communities themselves are empowered to help themselves and their own communities and this is just -- we just think that that's foundational and that's just a core tenet of Public Allies.

And I think that's a foundation sort of mental model shift that needs to take place within national service and in a lot of our institutions in general, I would say.

MS. BENNETT: So it sounds, you know, from some of the remarks I have heard, I have got one more question and then we'll go to a question from the audience. But it sounds like we can't do it

alone, right, so that there is many players in this space and there is real value in looking at various partnerships and stakeholders, right?

So I know, Tyra, you talked about the public-private partnership. Josh, on some of your examples, you have shared how different streams of AmeriCorps players have come together to make this work.

So I'm curious to hear from you all, both the role of philanthropy, but also of bringing other sectors together to make this all possible. How do we bring various players to the table to really look at how we expand and reimagine national service?

Maybe, Tyra, do you want to talk about your perspective from philanthropy?

Ms. MARIANI: Yes, I was coming off mute for that. (Laughter) So we know that the devastating effects of COVID-19 will unfortunately continue well beyond this year. So I think your point of looking ahead in the long-view is really important.

And for the upcoming '21-'22 service year -- excuse me -- we're expanding the initiative beyond food insecurity to address community identified needs. So rather than us saying we want to support food, we're asking communities to tell us what they want to support; and then next week we're hosting a roundtable discussion highlighting the impact that public-private -- or public philanthropic partnerships can have in strengthening AmeriCorps programs during beyond this current moment in national response and recovery.

And we're hoping that by bringing together these leaders, philanthropic leaders and state service commissioners that we can share learnings from our programs that have leveraged national service in response to the community crisis so that together we can build on the collective impact to help more communities in need.

I also just want to touch on the brief point that you brought up before around equity to note that we have been reminded, and it's obvious, but sometimes it's not obvious is that meaningful advances in equity take time.

And so, if we want to make it more inclusive and equitable, we said member recruitment goals and we increased the stipend as well, but we didn't get there, you know, unsurprisingly, in the

amount of time that we gave ourselves.

And so, meaningful advances in equity require time to build new relationships to assess existing practices and to make changes that expand how and who the programs are serving. And, in doing that, we have to give non-profits access to tools and training and financial resources to increase their capacity. It's not enough to set the goal and say, go do it. But it is philanthropy's role and others to say, how do we support you in getting there, such as wanting, to add on to Jaime's comment.

MS. BENNETT: Oh, great.

MS. SPRENKEL: If I could just add to that, first of all, I'd like to echo Jaime's point. It's really important that we recruit from within the communities that are receiving the service and that we are building opportunities for young people to stay in those communities when their terms are over. As you said, this is going to be a whole, an all hands on deck sort of, so government funding, federal, state, and local.

We need community input on the projects and sort of the services that they need, as opposed to having outsiders come in and tell communities what they need and what they should be doing. And philanthropy is obviously an extremely critical partner in all of this.

I don't think we should overlook our private partners, businesses. AmeriCorps is currently set up in such a way that it makes it a little bit difficult to do service when it is, in part, or all totally funded by private companies.

But there is definitely a need for power companies to do mitigation work, for companies like the BP Oil spill, which is now funding all kinds of restoration work across the Gulf. And, of course, invasive species, or wildfire, natural disaster doesn't pay attention to whether something is happening on a public or private land.

So I think that there are opportunities to bring a wide variety of players and project partners to the table and we should think about how to do that. As we're also thinking about career pathways and job opportunities beyond service, I think having private business owners and employers at the table is very important.

So I think that there is an opportunity for just about every sector to play a role in building

this next phase of national service.

MS. BENNETT: Great. Thank you, Mary Ellen. I know we're over time, so I'm going to get the hook. So I would go an hour longer, but unfortunately we can't. So I'm just going to say thank you all for your thoughtful insights. It was inspiring to hear about your visions for national service, and we look forward to working with you to bring them to light.

Next, I'm honored to introduce Wes Moore, the CEO of Robin Hood, and the newest co-chair of Service Year Alliance and Serve America Together campaign to make national service a part of growing up in America. We are thrilled to be working with Wes, and national service is lucky to have him as a champion. I will let Wes take it from here.

MR. MOORE: Kristen, thank you so much, and it is such a joy to be here. And I can tell you, I was so enjoying that last panel before. And so, not only did not want y'all to finish because it was not just tremendous insight, but incredibly motivational about the fact that we can do this and we can do this together.

So not just y'all, thank you, Kristen, for the introduction, but also just thank you all for continuing to remind us that we can do this, we can get this done. This does not have to be just an idea or a dream, that this is actually a battle plan. This is what we know we can accomplish together.

And so it is an honor to be able to join you all today and to talk a little bit about just how service has impacted my life and why I believe every single young person in this country should have the opportunity to service, and why I'm so proud to be a co-chair of this remarkable effort.

I also just want to first start off with a huge thank you to my dear friend, Jesse Colvin. The leadership that you have shown throughout this, and even well prior to this, you know, it really just epitomizes the reason why you are one of the more special leaders that we have in this country, and whether it is in uniform or out of uniform you continue to lead the charge.

And so thank you for all you continue to do for General Allen and the team at Brookings, who has just been just absolutely indefatigable throughout this entire process in pushing on the singular goal of being able to establish pathways, and places, and opportunities for all of our young people and those who are young at heart to be able to, not just embrace why this nation is so special, but to be a part

of it and that matters.

And I just cannot thank you enough for what you do. And I'm sincerely looking forward to my fellow airborne brethren, Senator Reed, and his remarks that are going to come later on. And as a proud member of the 82nd, I know his old unit, we're all proud and thankful and cheering for you. So, Senator Reed, thanks for your leadership.

You know, I joined the Army when I was about 17-years-old. In fact, when I first joined the Army, I wasn't even old enough to sign the papers myself; my mom had to sign them. And service in many ways, in that moment, it changed my trajectory and it has defined my life in every way ever since.

And I think about that decision that I had to join the Army, that it was almost entirely shaped by the people around me when I was in military school. Because, you know, while I was in military school -- and I was sent to military school when I was 13-years-old. It was not my choice; it was the choice of others.

But I knew what I learned there were things that I would remember and embrace for the remainder of my life because I had a chance to see values like honor, and values like trust and respect. And it was manifested in all of the people around me that these people knew what it meant to take accountability for your actions; and the fact of whether the response was good or bad, it felt on you; that leadership, the idea of being able to have responsibility for something and someone other than yourself, and to know that you would be held to account for all of those actions, it mattered.

And years later when I had the opportunity and the joy of leading soldiers in combat, in Afghanistan, as a captain with the 82nd Airborne Division, I think about how that experience was not just defined and helped shaped by my experience in military school but that even the experiences I had there have helped to define and shape everything that happened since.

The values that I developed in the Army mirror much of what I saw in military school, and it now mirrors in many ways everything that I continue to see now. I learned that the values that were instilled in us, this idea of honor, and decisiveness, and loyalty, and consistency, and courage that that didn't have to do with a uniform.

Because these are things that we don't only try to model, but these are things that we

expect even now that we are out of uniform. I think back about those moments in Afghanistan where those values were the only thing that we had in common, that we had people who came from big cities like Baltimore, small towns, that our politics spanned the entire spectrum. We were different races, had different faiths, had vastly different backgrounds, different educational experiences, different families.

There were some people who were multigeneration military families. There were some people who had no experience at all. In fact, their family experiences were protesting the military.

But we were all under a common bond, and it didn't matter whether or not we went to college, or voted as Democrats or Republicans, we had a shared mission. We had a common purpose. It kept us moving together and moving forward as a singular force that each and every one of us committed our lives and were willing to give our lives for something bigger.

And so when you serve alongside someone who has that common goal, whether you're on the frontlines of Afghanistan, or whether you're in a classroom in West Baltimore, or whether you're at a worksite shop over in the Eastern Shore of Maryland, you have learned that you put aside your differences and you focus on the similarities because you have no choice but to learn and work and grow together.

And so we know the fact that the military might not be for everybody. In fact, the reality is 71% of young people are not qualified to serve in the military. Seven out of every 10 people in our country, if they were to walk into a military recruiting office or station they'd find that for some reason or another, health or educational attainment, or whatever the case might be, would be turned away.

But within civilian national service we have an opportunity to harness that energy and build a generation of citizens who feel the sense of empathy and understanding with their peers and that is something we need a little more in this country right now, people who can take these assets and this will and their skill, in their own respective ways, and know that they are part of a larger and a bigger solution.

And this idea of public service doesn't just have to be a nice to-do; this idea of public service doesn't just have to be something that some kids get to do. But it's something that we all see as our obligation and our joy, as part of our larger participation in this society.

I mean it's not news that this country is divided. In a recent poll that NBC news did, it showed that, you know, a daunting 82% of people said that this country is divided rather than united.

We know it, we feel it, we see it on the news, we hear it in many of our conversations. We know that there are many people who walk and they exist not looking to be educated or enlightened, but frankly are just looking to be validated. We know that we have watched political statements made out of things that are not political statements.

We have watched how things like vaccines or masks have somehow become political ideologies. We know this and none of us are saying that we claim to have the perfect answer to the way that we are going to address this larger, crippling polarization that we are seeing.

But the thing that we all are saying is, we've got a role to fix it, and there are reasons to be hopeful. There are reasons to believe that we can and actually be better. And the Serve America together Pact, this entire campaign for me is one of them, that this vision has brought me a sense of hope and a momentum that we have seen around this issue, the people that have just reached out in the past days when they knew that I was a co-chair on this, had shown me that this is real.

My fellow co-chairs in this entire campaign include some of the most incredible bipartisan leaders that this country has ever produced, real friends, dear friends, people like, General McChrystal, and Deval Patrick.

The campaign is, you know, backed by a number and a growing coalition, over two dozen military and civilian service organizations, leaders, organizations that are passionate about not just simply telling us what's wrong, but actually providing insight, and skill, and will to actually try to fix it; that Serve America Together conducted a poll in early January and found that nearly 7 in 10 Americans believe that one of the largest priorities for this current administration to be prioritizing programs or proposals that have the ability to heal the divides in this country; 63% believe this idea of service year programs like AmeriCorps are a good way of being able to start that process.

By expanding opportunities for all of our people to serve, we are opening the door for a new culture of service in our society and making it something that it does not have to be, an extracurricular, but it can be a pathway to redemption.

It can be employment mechanisms that we can have people that can do well and do good at the same time; that national service can give all of our young people a stake in this country and a share and to create a pathway to the opportunities and the vision and the insight that we all fundamentally deserve and needs to be more than just about how are we providing this opportunity to some.

This joy that I receive, that so many received, I want all of us to have that same pathway, all of us. You know, I run one of the nation's largest poverty fighting organizations.

We have seen the economic consequences of COVID-19 and how devastating they have been to so many of our communities, where a job that was already hard got harder almost overnight; where 11 years of job growth went away in 11 weeks. And we saw the impacts how, even though it was shared across the board, it was not shared equally. Because young people who were growing up under the cloud of poverty, oftentimes communities of color got hit disproportionately hard.

The unemployment rate is around 10% amongst 20 to 24-year-olds, 13% amongst 18 to 19-year-olds compared to 5.3% unemployment rate to those over 25. National service is not just a pathway for them, national service can be a pathway for all of us.

I saw it in the role at Robin Hood. I saw it when I started a small business in Baltimore called BridgeEdU that was focusing on making it easier for first generation and first-in-family students to make it not just to, but also through college by partnering with local universities and providing them with the proper supports to help to make that freshman year and that transition into higher education just a little bit easier with the wraparound services and the experiential co-curriculum that was necessary.

We saw how it worked in the military. And the one thing that I continue to see throughout all of these various experiences was that a belief in something bigger than yourself it mattered and that that urgency around it, it does matter; that we can build skills, and education, and employability helping to lead an effort to improve our neighborhoods; that national service and all of the various components of what national service is and can be actually has the power to create the pathways to create real economic opportunity for our young people that will not just shape their lives at that moment, but will shape their lives forever.

But if we want to see that vision through, we must recognize our collective responsibility

to ensure that youth of all backgrounds can serve; that there should not be a price of admission. There should not be an additional sacrifice that we're asking young people to make, particularly when we know that the return on investment is not just for them; that the return on investment it's going to be for all of us.

Beyond just being able to serve, we need to ensure that all of our young people are aware of the variety of opportunities that they can find these pathways to success and that once we open that door, we have to do our part to expand national service opportunities for all so that they can continue to see the compounding returns that this type of experience is going to give them.

We can create an opportunity for all to heal our country and provide increased pathways for success for students who need it most. But this opportunity must be illuminated that if young people from all backgrounds have any hope of finding it.

One of the really powerful things I have seen, if you look at the Service Year Alliance's white paper that was called, "Reimagining National Service," it lays out a very ambitious agenda for increasing equity and accessibility and national service.

This is a turning point for this country. We are breaking down barriers in all aspects of society and we are building a 21st century economy at the same time. That's part of the power of what we're talking about with national service.

Let's think beyond the traditional service sight. Think beyond the classroom and the national park. National Service Corps members should be part of fighting the climate crisis, expanding access to broadband. They should be on the frontlines of rebuilding a crumbling national infrastructure to help create a more resilient nation.

They should be serving our seniors and our young people, assisting and addressing mental health challenges that so many of our neighbors are facing. And this is why I am so excited about the event today.

Service Year Alliance is a detailed plan of making national service a part of growing up in America that is bolder and bigger than anything that we have seen before. Their roadmap to the service presidency is specific and ambitious.

It's inclusive and it's centered around all of our current priorities and it builds upon

bipartisan momentum that

We have seen in the last year from Senator Coons and Wicker's Corps Act to the release of the Inspire2Serve report from the National Commission on National and Military and Public Service.

This is a powerful idea and we have a real opportunity to invest in national service in a way that we have never done so before. And I'm not alone in thinking this because the reality is nobody understands us more than our president.

President Biden understands at his core what it means to serve this country; his family epitomizes that, his service, his children. President Biden, with your leadership, national service has a chance to transform this nation, transform our young people, transform our democracy. You have the chance to make national service the cornerstone of your legacy and become the service President.

And so, I hope and I pray that with your leadership we can bring this coalition, this army, this committed group of people who know that part of our salvation, the path to our salvation runs through our ability to see every one of us, runs through this chance that we all have to be part of a larger solution, and making sure that national service is not just a part of growing up in America but that national service become part of what it means to repeatedly work towards, refine, and define what it means to be American in the first place.

I thank you all for all of your leadership and all you continue to do for our society. We're going to get this done and it's going to be beautiful day when we do. Thank you.

MR. COLVIN: Wes, we are so grateful to have you as our newest co-chair of our Serve America Together campaign. If you measure inspiring by the number of emails and texts that my phone just received, I just had to turn it off. That was amazing. And on behalf of the coalition that is behind the Serve America Together campaign, I just wanted to say thank you for your leadership. We'll honored to be in this with you.

My name is Jesse Colvin. I lead Service Year Alliance. We are indeed working to make national service a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. I served as an Army ranger in Afghanistan so it is an honor to share this virtual stage with my fellow military veterans, Wes, Senator Jack Reed, Josh Fryday and General Allen who happened to command NATO and American

forces in Afghanistan during several of my deployments there.

We are deeply grateful to Brookings and Bel Sawhill for your leadership on national service and for co-hosting this event with us. We are so excited to share a new white paper with you all today. As Wes mentioned, it is "Reimagining National Service: A roadmap to a Service Presidency."

Reimagining national service, reimagining what it means to serve our country can be and should be a legacy for President Biden and this administration. Much of the work, as Wes mentioned, on our way to making national service part of growing up in our country has already begun. Wes mentioned several of these. We've seen thoughtful recommendations from the Commission on Military National Public Service and it's inspired a Serve Act. Senator Reed's action for National Service Act and the bipartisan Coons, Wicker CORPS Act.

As mentioned earlier in the first panel, there's a lot of excitement around a new civilian climate corps and as also previously mentioned, we just saw the biggest federal investment in national service in decades with a \$1 billion in the American Rescue Plan Act.

And finally this past Sunday, the New York Times editorial board endorsed national service and cited our Serve America Together campaign. We were thrilled to see the New York Times double down on our call to President Biden to make universal national service a reality.

So President Biden (inaudible) to build on this momentum and become the service president by making a bold investment in national service that breaks down barriers, makes national service more equitable and inclusive and utilizes national service as a human capital solution to today's converging crises.

So we stand in a unique moment. President Biden could issue a (inaudible) call to service that meets the demands of our next generation and a vast number young Americans would answer the call. Our poll as Wes mentioned, conducted in January, found that 44% of young people and 60% of young people of color are interested in doing national service. 44% equates to approximately 1.7 million Americans. 1.7 million young people would serve if given the opportunity but there are only 75,000 opportunities available today.

Further, young people indicated that a call to service from President Biden would be

more persuasive than hearing it from virtually any other messenger including their own faith leader, their own mayor. Additionally, more than three-quarters of Americans, including 93% of Democrats and 59% of Republicans support legislation to expand national service.

With the right investments and support from the current administration and Congress, national service is uniquely well-positioned to help accomplish President Biden's top priorities including COVID response and recovery, work force development, climate change and infrastructure, racial justice and healing a divided nation. All while providing Americans the opportunity to invest in themselves and their communities.

The President can and should call this generation of young people into service. He can give them a chance to serve at a living wage and find their passion while putting them on the path to good paying jobs. He can make sure this opportunity reaches into every community in America and he can bring community voices into plans to rebuild our infrastructure and our economy.

In our new report, we outline six concrete steps that the administration could take to make national service and expectation an opportunity for all young people in America. We hope this can serve as a comprehensive guide, a road map, for the administration as it looks to build upon its initial investment and national service.

So without further ado, here is Service Year Alliances roadmap to a service presidency. Okay first things first. Growth. It's time to massively grow national service. We need to grow positions to make national service an opportunity that's available to all young Americans. AmeriCorps needs to grow from its current size of around 75,000 annual positions to 250,000 positions in the short term and to more than 1 million positions in the long term.

This includes increasing the number of youth built positions. The size of the Peace Corps also needs to double over the next decade to 15,000 volunteers. Young people are making a tremendous impact now increasing the number of opportunities to serve within communities with committed Corps members who can tackle their most pressing needs. They also need to make it easier for existing programs to continue to operate and to help new programs grow by creating more flexibility for AmeriCorps grants.

Lastly, they need to invest in an empowered board of directors. Something the Biden administration has already made great strides on with its nominations last month of Cynthia Hogan, Catherine McLaughlin and Shirley Sagawa. We are particularly thrilled to have Shirley, the founding CEO of Service Year Alliance, nominated to the board. Shirley has been an architect and a visionary for national service her entire career. She will bring in expertise and a pioneering spirit to the agency at a pivotal moment.

Second. Let's not be afraid to innovate here. We need to open the door for new models and new programs. As we expand and grow national service, we should look to create new, complimentary program models like a service year fellowship. This will give young people more choice in where they serve and allow state service commissions more flexibility to better meet state and local needs.

With this model, more communities, especially underserved communities, could get access to national service to meet their unmet needs. We should also invest in new program development and new grantee on ramps to ensure underserved communities have access to national service.

The third step on our road map is to bring to bear the weight of the entire government behind this effort. The administration should establish a national service advisor at the cabinet level so that all streams of service, military, national and public, could be coordinated and work together to greater affect. That national service advisor should head an interagency taskforce that oversees the establishment of interagency service corps. National service could expand the capacity and impact of these agencies and expose young people to a variety of opportunities in careers in federal service.

As mentioned throughout the programming today, there are a lot of opportunities here. They include the civilian climate corps and public health job corps that the administration is already working on as well as other corps focused on education, a military family service corps, a digital service corps or a military veteran's transition corps, among others.

This taskforce should look at best practices for building an ecosystem of investment in national service at the local level. Service Year Alliance has been working on developing this ecosystem through our Service Year impact communities. A network that exemplifies local collaboration in pursuit of

universal national service. We would love to see this idea picked up by the administration.

Step four is awareness. One of the biggest barriers to people serving right now is a lack of awareness that national service is even an option. Everyone knows about the Marine Corps. Army Ranger, I'll speak for my fellow Army veteran Wes and I. That hurts a little bit. Everybody knows about the Marine Corps but how many Americans know about AmeriCorps. We have to change that. We have to change that so every young person knows about the different opportunities to serve.

We recommend that the Biden administration establish a national awareness campaign to amplify the call to service and invest in a centralized online platform to make it easy to find opportunities. Leveraging the technology and learnings from serviceyear.org would greatly expand knowledge of and access to different types of service for a generation that is geared toward online information.

Next. If we were going to make all young people aware of national service, we need to ensure national service is accessible to all young people of all backgrounds. Raising the living stipend, doubling the education award to twice the amount of the Pell Grant and expanding wrap around services would open the door to national service to those who might otherwise not be able to choose the option to serve.

The administration should also explore best practices for incorporating justice involved youth in national service. And ensure that the hundreds of thousands of patriotic young people who are refugees, asylees and TPS, TED, DACA recipients all of whom would love an opportunity to serve their adopted country, are eligible to participate in national service and earn the education award.

Last but not least we need to set young people who serve up for success. National service ought to be a stepping stone to education or employment. Some of the strongest national service programs add to their Service Year experience by providing the training and skills that put young people on the path to success.

The administration should invest in making those linkages whether they are to higher education, the non-profit sector, the federal government or high demand sectors of the economy. There is a reason that so many of us who have served in our nation's military are calling for large investments in

civilian national service. We understand the value of service because we lived it.

As Wes said, not everyone wants to serve in the military, not everyone can serve in the military. We want to make sure every American has the same opportunity to serve that we did whether it's in the military, in the Peace Corps or in domestic national service like AmeriCorps. And who should understand that better than President Biden whose life has been defined by service.

He can spearhead this bold transformation of national service and break down barriers to make the opportunity to serve more equitable and inclusive. President Biden can reimagine what it means to serve our country and make national service the cornerstone legacy of his administration. My three year old and your kids and your grandkids futures depend on it.

So as the administration sets its sites on the American Jobs Plan and the American Family's Plan and looks to rebuild our economy along the lines of the new deal and the great society, now is the time for transformational investment and national service. We believe President Biden is a lifelong public servant and champion for service in all of its forms is the leader to make this a reality. So thank you very much to everyone here and with that, I will turn it over to E.J. Dionne for our next panel.

MR. DIONNE: I am so excited to be here. Thank you, Jesse, thank you, Wes. I want to thank also Senator Reed. I grew up on the Rhode Island border in Massachusetts so I've always thought of him as my Senator so I'm looking forward to him. And what an extraordinary panel and I want to thank John Allen.

Brookings has been engaged in service for a long time. My dear colleagues Kayla Drogosz and Bob Litan and I did a book 18 years ago called; "United We Serve: Making a Case for National Service." This report is fantastic and I just want to make one point before I introduce this really all-star panel.

It's that service is not just a nice thing, it's not a gimmick, it's not a toy, it's not some policy thing off to the side it's about solving problems. It's about tearing down barriers. It's about bringing us together and it's about our obligations to our democracy.

I know that we are going to be running short of time at the end so I just want to say, thank people out there for sending in some extraordinary questions. I'm just going to list a few that we've gotten

and some of you may answer them as we go. People ask, among many other things, is there funding for this initiative for underserved groups. I know we're going to talk about that.

What is the evidence that service programs reduce partisan and political polarization. I know we are going to get that. What's the roll of faith based institutions in service? These are just a few of the really great questions we've gotten.

And so, I want to thank my colleagues here today. Isabel Sawhill is a civic force of nature in our country. And whenever Bel is involved in something, you don't even have to look at it, you know this is almost certainly a very good thing. And so, it's a real honor to be your colleague. Bel is going to open the conversation today. She is a senior fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution.

Fiona Hill is an extraordinary figure in our public life and a lot of us are grateful to her and we're lucky to have her as a colleague. She is a senior fellow at Brookings. Pete Wehner is an old friend. Someone I've worked with for a long time. Agreed with, argued with and we've had fun at both ends of that. He is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. And Martha Ross is a senior fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Program here at Brookings.

So I'm going to begin by just asking each of your panelists, we have some unfortunately, you only have I guess about three minutes under our calendar to say everything you want to say. But if any group can cram an awful lot of moral instruction and policy wisdom in three minutes, it's this group. And so, I'm going to start with you, Bel, and thank you for organizing this.

MS. SAWHILL: E.J., thank you so much for your leadership. I was so glad to see you cited in the editorial from the New York Times this weekend. Because you have, as you said, been a leader in this effort intellectually for a long time.

MR. DIONNE: By the way, I wasn't looking for that but bless you for saying it.

MS. SAWHILL: But I was so inspired by the earlier speakers and the earlier panel. I almost had tears in my eyes listening to them because I really think this is a game changer or can be a game changer for our country. This is the moment to do this and if we don't do it, we will have lost an enormous opportunity to deal with a lot of our problems. Both our practical problems at the community level, our problems in providing more opportunities for young people and our opportunity to heal some of

our divisions.

So, you know, I got interested in this set of issues when I was writing a book about the so-called left behind or forgotten Americans and trying to figure out why Trump was elected in 2016 and why he remains so popular. And I just was blown away by the earlier panel, by Wes Moore's comments about how much difference this can make and why it's so needed.

And then I'm very proud that we've been able to partner with Service Year Alliance because they have figured out how to do this. You know, I'm a superficial player in this particular space. And I learned from them and early on when I wrote my last book and went over to see them and told them how enthusiastic I was about this. They have educated me and now they've put forward a plan that can move our country forward. I'm so glad we have a Senator here who's been working on the legislative side of this.

Now in my remaining one minute or whatever it is at this point, I just want to reiterate why I think so many of us are excited about this. First of all, because we do have so many pressing needs in this country whether it's climate change, whether it's COVID, whether it's education, whether it's poverty.

And we can't solve all those problems with government alone, we need partnerships. We need public-private partnerships. We need federal, state, local partnerships. We need philanthropic and non-profit community to be involved and we're very good at that in America. We're not so good at government these days or at least we could be better.

And so, I think getting the civic sector involved in all of this by local communities is really critical. Let them identify the needs. Let them find new leaders who are young and can help with these pressing needs.

Secondly, I think this can provide a pathway to careers for young people, including careers in public service. And we can bring in the underserved communities in the process and I'm so glad that Service Year Alliance is giving so much attention to the need to increase stipends and do other things to make it possible for the less advantaged to serve. As Wes Moore said, I think this is not just a gap year opportunity for the well-educated, it's an opportunity for all of us to get involved.

And finally, I think really most importantly, this is an opportunity to heal our divisions. And

I have been so, I mean as Wes Moore said, we all know about these divisions but they are really, really deep. You know, when you have something like one out of every three Americans believing that the last election was not fairly won. When you have so many Americans not even wanting their adult children to marry someone from the opposite party, when you have even masking to protect from COVID becoming politicized issue, we know we have a problem.

What I want to point out or emphasize about that is I've actually dived into the serious psychological research on this. And it's more extensive than you might think. In other words, I used to think this was kind of a wooly headed idea, a kind of an idealistic idea. That if we just got people together in national service doing practical things for their communities that suddenly these problems of stereotyping other people or demonizing them would go away.

Well it turns out that there's very deep, very serious research that shows this can really, really work. There have been experiments in other countries as well as here that shows that when you get people together in a purposeful activity that engages them on the ground with each other over an extended period of time. This tendency to stereotype, to demonize, to be divided really goes away.

And the military is the very best current example we have of that and I won't take the time to give you all the fancy research on this. But I just want to say that I've been very impressed with it. This is just not a wooly headed idea, this could work. But thank you, I'm proud to have played a little role in this and look forward to hearing my colleagues. And Pete Wehner who has been so great writing about this in the *New York Times* as well.

MR. DIONNE: By the way, Bel just told the first lie I've ever heard her tell in her life. She said she's a superficial player on this. If you will forgive a sports metaphor yeah and Steph Curry and Jason Tatum are superficial basketball players. Anyway, thank you very much for that, Bel.

By the way, Bel's book on the middle class is something everybody should read. It's a short, brilliant book that has a lot of ideas in it. And Fiona Hill has a new book coming out whose title, first of all, is fantastic and covers a lot of things and is really quite relevant to our conversation today. There is nothing for you here opportunity in an age of decline and I think some of your thoughts on service relate very much to the themes of the book that we are all eager to read. Fiona, thanks so much for joining us

today.

MS. SAWHILL: I just want to say one last word before Fiona because Richard Reeves will kill me if I don't. We have a proposal that we call Scholarships for Service in our book, "The New Contract with the Middle Class." So thank you for mentioning that, E.J.

MR. DIONNE: Excellent. And that answers one of the questions, by the way, that was asked by one of the viewers today so thank you. Fiona.

MS. HILL: Thank you so much, E.J. and just a great honor to be everyone here. I know we don't have a lot of time but, you know, the book that you just mentioned which I'm actually trying to finish up at the moment, you know, was very much inspired by my own service in the government. And as somebody who came to the United States as an immigrant and, you know, thought that the country had given me a great deal of opportunity.

You know, I became more disturbed over the time that I've been here. You know, I arrived in the United States in 1989, about how a lot of that opportunity that I had coming, you know, kind of so many years ago, has slipped away from many Americans.

And this is why Service Year is so important. Because, you know, our democracy has been challenged over the last several years. As all the speakers in the previous panel talked about, we've, you know, hit a lot of bumps in our system in the road because of the great recession more than 10 years ago now and the impact that that had on communities.

We've had a long process of deindustrialization, economic change that's been going on for the past 40 years or so. And really it became evident that the system is running out of steam. And as all of us know here, democracy is a work in progress, it doesn't fix itself. And it's not a question of who is in the White House, it's a question of how all of us pull together and this is what Service Year is about.

When President Biden has said America is back, it really needs to be Americans are back and I think that this is what the message is here that we all have urgency and that we can all do something at different levels. And when I was in the government, both times that I served just like Wes Moore and Jesse Colvin talked about, I served with a lot of people from all kinds of diverse backgrounds.

I was extraordinary struck by the high number of military veterans still in federal

government service. The people who have retired and still want to serve and, you know, how much that sense of wanting to serve is ingrained. And I also would say there's an awful lot of people like myself, immigrants, first generation Americans. And I think both Jesse and Wes talked about this, people who are refugees.

When I was at the National Security Council even under Trump there were so many people behind the scenes who came from somewhere else and had that shared sense of mission or goal to do something for their adoptive country or do something for their country overall.

So what we have to inculcate and I think is what everyone is talking about here is the sense of team America. And Martha and Bel and Peter and you, E.J. and everyone else here has been writing about the different pathways that people can get to that point of giving something back but giving something to themselves. Because democracy really depends on not just deriving benefits in this system but filling your part of it. We keep using this word of stake and stakeholders, sense of belonging to something that's bigger than yourself, a larger community, we've all been talking about this one way or another.

And I think, you know, Jesse's point that 1.7 million young people want to serve. Even if we can't get sufficient funding, we have to find ways in which we can support that. And, you know, one of the things that I've been exploring in the book and, you know, eventually when it comes out in the fall is how individuals can do something. You know, individuals have the ability to give something back and give somebody an opportunity. You can look around you in your own community and the product, for example, of public service back in the U.K.

I came from a very poor community but we had girl scouts and, you know, guys troops in the local churches. We had youth groups and poor kids in the community were actually also encouraged to give something back. If it's volunteering at, you know, a retirement home or at a food bank or a local community center, you know, there's so many ways that people can find to service in their immediate vicinity.

And I would just encourage all of us to sort of think about okay, if we can't get something paid for everyone, how can we still make it possible for people going into their schools and into

universities and colleges and community colleges to be able to get engaged in something where they feel part of this larger team, the idea of a team America. And that's something that we've been missing.

And I do believe just like Bel has just from an anecdotal basis that it doesn't matter what your background, what your political perspective is, what your religious belief is, what your racial or ethnic identity is. If we've all got a sense of common purpose and we all feel we're in there together, there's an awful lot we can achieve.

So it's how do we pull everyone together? And I know that Peter and Martha have a lot to say on this as well. And, you know, I just thought I would stop there but I know we can do it. Just like that we heard from Wes Moore. And I also want to actually give a shout out for Wes's book, the other Wes Moore where he talks about the other person with his name. I've got other Fiona Hill's out there too, very different life paths.

What is it that makes a difference in somebody's life path? It's getting engaged in something, in having something bigger than yourself that helps push you in a certain direction mentoring and people all pulling together.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you so much. We can't have enough Fionna Hill's in my view.

MS. HILL: Well, I think all of us. We need all of more of us, right?

MR. DIONNE: We need all the Fionna Hill's. I just want to tell Pete and Martha if I could, through no fault of this panel, we're running a little bit over time and we've had such great speeches. And I'm told that Senator Reed has a tight window so I just say that as to preface your remarks, the questions I want to ask.

I mean, Pete, you have written about democracy, religion, culture, politics and national security. What impact, I'd love you talk in your remarks about the impact this could have on our culture, on our national culture and again. Addressing the question, what chance is there that this might pull us together, at least a bit, at a moment when we are so divided? And thanks for being with us today, Pete.

MR. WEHNER: Sure thanks, E.J. and to Service Year and Brookings and Bel for hosting this. It's a great question. I mean I think the short answer is I think there is a good chance, better than good chance that national service can help reweave the country. I don't think it's a magic wand, I don't

think anybody who has participated pretends it is.

But the forces of decomposition in America now are far stronger than the forces of composition. And they're stronger than at any time I would say in my lifetime. The country is flying apart, it's flying apart politically, it's flying apart culturally and socially and we've got to begin, I'd say two things. One is you have to begin to address those elements that have fractured the country and that are causing it to blow apart. And then you have to begin in a more positive way to identify areas it can begin to bring you together.

And I think national service really falls into the latter for the reasons that people have spoken eloquently here about. This is a hyper polarized time, a tribalistic time, people feel that they're under siege. And we know from empirical evidence which is something that conservatives at least once upon a time cared about. That national service actually helps people begin to share different perspectives and to see the world from a different point of view.

The divisions that we have as a nation are not as deep as we think they are when you go down to issues. But there is a kind of dehumanization that's happened. When you're working with people, just to echo what Bel and Fiona had said, with people in common purpose, it doesn't mean your political differences will disappear. It means that they'll be put in a perspective and in a context and the dehumanization begins to end.

And you begin to think we have differences but these are good people and these are honorable people often and it's okay to have those differences. So I think it's a really big deal. Last thing I'll just say on the conservative side, you know, the national motto, of course, is E pluribus unum out of many, one, we emphasize the pluribus a lot recently.

The unum we're not so good at and there is an idea, I think, from a national perspective and just speaking as a conservative of an idea of an American identity that is capacious. But sometimes it feels like I think we share a continent but not a country and we have to share a country again. And I think that national service has shown that it can do that and if we amp it up, I think it can be a real agent for healing in America.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you so much, Pete. It's a reminder that if you're working with

someone solving a problem, it's harder for you to hate each other. I mean human beings can manage that under all circumstances but I think it's at least a little bit harder. So bless you for that, Pete.

Martha, like Bel, you have offered proposals along these lines long before today in your new white paper. The new white paper aligns with your previous work at Brookings. Based on your research, what kind of impact do you see from these proposals? And just so our audience knows, I'm going to let Martha speak and then eventually at the end of that, I may just have to turn it back to Bel who will introduce Senator Reed. I could spend all afternoon with these folks but I think we have to move today on. So Martha, bless you for being again, a bad sports metaphor, the cleanup hitter of the day. Thank you.

MS. ROSS: Thank you. Yeah, I see national service as a vehicle for so much positive change. And if we do it right, it's going to be good for young people, for communities downstream for employers and society because we're going to help young people become more capable and more engaged with the world around them.

And I want to talk about a mixture of big picture things and some nuts and bolts things. The big picture thing is that right now for millions of young people, the pathway from high school to and through school into the labor market and a good job is more like an obstacle course than a clear road.

And COVID has made that exponentially worse. We need to radically improve our education, our employment, our training systems to support young people as they move into adulthood. And national service can be a really good vehicle for that. This is a historically awful labor market. Education has been incredibly disrupted over the past year in a way that is hardest on those with the least resources and we're going to see a lot of disconnection among young people.

So for national service to reach its potential, we have to reach young people that the formal system often is not very good at reaching. This can't only be for young people who are on track educationally from families with good professional networks and who have the savvy and the knowledge to apply to school and get through it. Those are easiest to reach and we do we need to reach them.

But we have to reach those in tougher circumstances whether or not they have high school degrees. Whether or not they have a solid plan for a next step after college. Those who have

been involved in the juvenile justice system or the child welfare system. Those with family members to support, those for whom the former work world is entirely foreign.

And otherwise we're going to leave them behind at the mercy of a higher ed system that is deeply stratified by race and class and we accept incredibly high attrition rates among low income students and people of color. And we have a labor market that is increasingly unfriendly to those without professional networks or college degrees and otherwise offers them low wage, dead end jobs. So national service is a way to build skills, to build experience, to build networks.

So on the nuts and bolts, I just want to say a few things about program design and infrastructure. Yes, it is beyond necessary to raise the living allowance beyond the poverty level as well as raising the sides of educational award the way Bel and Richard have proposed.

And echoing what some of the other I'd say we need to build up the model of helping organizations and places do their own planning so that they can generate home grown solutions with their own people. Which could be at a neighborhood level or at a city level which means that we have to rethink how we structure the program and that it's easy for smaller non-profits to apply and to host service members.

And then lastly, it should be a mandate that every young person forms at least one trusting and supportive relationship with a caring adult as part of this part of their experience. It is one of the single most important components of any program for youth and young adults. And in some cases, this is going to mean a heavier investment in social workers, in mentors, in counselors as the wrap around supports that we heard about earlier from the Service Year Alliance.

This has huge potential. I'll just end where I started that I'm very excited about this and that we have this policy window to accomplish so much.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you so much. And I am going to have to turn it to Bel. I just want to make two quick points in closing. Number one, my friend Phyllis Segal who with her husband the late Eli Segal, were real pioneers in the service movement going back two decades. Makes a very important point that when we talk about service, we are talking primarily about young people but we are also talking about senior citizens, about older Americans and that is very much part. They are very much part of this movement.

Secondly, I see Senator Reed on the screen. Give my love to my part of the world. We can do a lot more working together than we can hating each other. And service at least at a minimum means we commit ourselves to the common cause of saving our democracy and giving each other a hand. I salute everyone on this panel and I turn it over to Bel Sawhill to introduce our distinguished guest. And as a child of New England, it's always good hear somebody speak the English language with the proper accent. So thank you, Senator Reed.

MS. SAWHILL: E.J., thank you so much to you. And I'm going to make a very brief introduction here so that we have plenty of time for you, Senator, because we really want to hear from you. Senator Reed is the senior senator from the New England very important yet small state of Rhode Island. He is chair of the Armed Services Committee.

He has had a very distinguished career in the military and most importantly for today, he has been a proponent of national service and has sponsored or co-sponsored legislation that could move the needle forward in an important way. Senator, welcome and thank you so much for taking time to be with us today.

MR. REED: Well thank you, Isabel and thank you, E.J. and I will do my best to maintain the appropriate pronunciation of the English language throughout. But first, let me thank the Brookings Institution and the Service Year Alliance for organizing this discussion and laying out a vision that puts service at the center of building a stronger nation economically, socially and globally.

And we are at a crossroads. The pandemic has been a wakeup call. It has shown a bright light on inequality throughout society. It has laid bare the limits of our social safety net. And it is a reminder to us of our responsibilities of one to another. The murder of George Floyd has mobilized communities across the nation to demand action on police reform and racial justice.

The insurrection at the Capitol and the coordinated and ongoing disinformation campaign to undermine faith in our democracy and elections is proof that we cannot take our democratic institutions for granted. We have to decide who we want to be, how we want to live and what kind of future we are building for ourselves and our children and our grandchildren.

Reimagining service and the roadmap you have proposed are ideas whose time has

come. I believe that Americans are ready and willing to answer the call to serve. To come together and meet challenges. We just need to create the conditions to mobilize them.

When it comes to service, I often look to the example of the late Senator John McCain who lived a life of service and cared deeply about providing opportunities for Americans to be a part of a cause greater than themselves. On the Armed Services Committee, we were faced with a challenge. John was the chairman and I was the ranking member. And the challenge is, should we reform the draft to include women.

But we knew the question was bigger than that. We knew that service is not limited to military service. What does it mean for the nation when we no longer have the shared experience of service. When so many who want to serve aren't able to do so.

So we established the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service to look at the issue of service comprehensively. The National Commission produced its report and recommendations in March and they were comprehensive. They too called for a national mobilization of service of all kinds.

Even in the midst of political divisions, there is a growing consensus that the desire to serve is a source of strength for our nation and that we need to invest in it much more. The American rescue plan included \$1 billion to expand and strengthen national service programs like AmeriCorps. To win further funding and support, it will be critical that all stakeholders work to ensure that these resources are put to good use and to tell their stories of success and community.

There is bipartisan support for doing more. I joined my colleague, Senator Coons and my colleague Senator Wicker in introducing the bipartisan CORPS Act that would further boost resources of national service to critical community needs as we continue our recovery from the pandemic. But this should be part of a long run strategy. We need a sustained investment in national service to build a culture where service is an expectation and where everyone can afford to serve. That is why I worked with Representative John Lawson of Connecticut on the Action for National Service Act to set a target of 1 million service positions, establish a whole of government approach to expanding service and ensure that we invest in those who serve both during their service and afterwards.

We need a new social contract that says that if you commit to serve, we will commit to helping with the cost of college. We know this works for military recruitment and it's time we adopt it for civilian service. President Biden has called for transformation investment in jobs, infrastructure and American families. Expanding national service will help maximize those investments and reinforce our social fabric as we build for the future. Those of you here today are leading this change and I stand ready to do my part to boost community and military service at a time when our nation has so much to gain. I salute you, command you and work forward to working with you. Thank you.

MS. SAWHILL: Thank you very much, Senator and thank you to everyone who participated today. This event will be on the Brookings website in a day or two I believe. And I'm particularly glad Senator, that you brought out the fact that this has been a bipartisan effort. And we hope that we can achieve that goal of one million service members in the future. Thank you again to everyone.

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