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Martin Luther King Day of Service

SPECIAL TO THE NNPA

Patrick A. Corvington and Aaron S. Williams

Many may view the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. solely through the lens of civil rights. For the two of us, the centerpiece of his message is the power of service and volunteering to heal racial wounds and lead America into a new era of shared responsibility and equal opportunity. Much of Dr. King's service message can be summed up in one of his most famous sayings: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is what are you doing for others."

For a quarter of a century, the nation has set aside a day to honor one of the great heroes of American history. In recent years, the holiday has been designated as a Day of Service — "a day on, not a day off" — to honor Dr. King's fundamental commitment to engaging people of all races and walks of life in service to our nation and our world.

Nowhere is Dr. King's persistent and urgent question more fully pursued and realized than in the two agencies we lead; the Peace Corps and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Fifty years ago, Senator John F. Kennedy posed Dr. King's question to an audience of 5,000 students on the steps of the University of Michigan with a challenge that they serve people in need around the world.

The eager response of those willing students ignited one of the signature service movements of our times. Since 1961, more than 200,000 Americans have volunteered through the Peace Corps to fight poverty, disease, illiteracy,

communities across the country; feeding the hungry, helping struggling students in our schools, responding to natural disasters, and serving in many other ways.

Dr. King understood that working together in common purpose was essential to building what he called "the beloved community." The desire of Americans to bridge divisions in order to lend a helping hand has always been bigger than politics. In 2009, in a spirit of bipartisanship, rarely seen these days in Washington, it took

and a host of other challenges in 139 countries around the world. President Kennedy's vision of an army of domestic anti-poverty volunteers was realized in 1965 with the creation of VISTA.

In 1993, millions more Americans were given the chance to serve with the creation of

Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), working with leaders in the House, just weeks to introduce, debate, rally the votes, and pass

Life's most persistent and urgent question is what are you doing for others

AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). Each year, CNCS engages more than five million Americans in "getting

the Serve America Act — the most sweeping expansion of national service in a generation.

His life of service reminds us that the everyday acts of ordinary citizens make this country extraordinary

things done" through its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve programs. Our service members, who represent all races, ages and walks of life, stand shoulder to shoulder with

the Serve America Act — the most sweeping expansion of national service in a generation.

Like Dr. King, these visionary leaders understood that as a nation, we are strongest, we are

more united, and we are at our best when we do for others. Our own service work has taught us that doing for others is also a powerful way to do for yourself.

We both grew up at a time when leadership opportunities for African American men, both in and out of government, were just beginning to open up. Inspired by the sacrifices of Dr. King and others, we chose the path of public service. That path has taken us from volunteering in poor villages abroad and homeless shelters here at home to leading America's service agencies at a time of great need for grassroots hope among communities worldwide.

Today, we are pleased to announce that the Peace Corps and CNCS are partnering to bring the rewards of service to more people and communities — especially to those who may not have had that chance before. It is our privilege to be inspired by the Americans who make a commitment to service opportunities that have led them to a better life and opened new doors of opportunity.

On this 25th anniversary of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, with so many problems facing our nation, we say to all Americans — if you have not already made service a part of your daily lives, get started today. And don't just do it for one day. Make it a lifetime commitment. Dr. King changed the course of history armed only with the power of his ideals and grassroots citizen support. His life of service reminds us that the everyday acts of ordinary citizens make this country extraordinary.

The Diminished Power of the Black Caucus

SPEAK OUT

William Reed

As they assembled at the US Capitol for the 112th Congressional session a record number 44 African Americans were sworn in as Members of the House of Representatives.

The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) gained national recognition when its Members met with President Richard Nixon in March of 1971 and presented him a list of 60 recommendations for governmental action on domestic and foreign issues. Today, the CBC, whose membership is exclusive to Blacks, represents the political aspirations of 13 percent of the American population and comprises 9.6 percent of the Congress.

There are no Blacks in this Senate session. The CBC Chair is Emanuel Cleaver, a three-term Congressman from Kansas City. Cleaver, elected to Congress from Missouri's 5th District in 2004, is a United Methodist pastor who was Kansas City's Mayor for two-terms. Joining Cleaver will be four Members newly elected as CBC officers 2011 – 2013: Del. Donna M. Christensen (D- U.S. Virgin Islands) as First Vice-Chair; Representative G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) as Second Vice-Chair; Representative Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) as Secretary; and Representative Andre Carson (D-IN) as Whip. Like Cleaver's Congressional District, most CBC Members' districts are not majority-Black. Except for the District

of Columbia (DC), a mainland US Congressional District usually has about 700,000 residents.

The CBC is officially non-partisan, but in practice it has been closely identified with the Democratic Party, and tends to function as a lobbying group with-

they're race-hustling poverty pimps."

Because of their tilt toward the Democratic Party, CBC members were uniquely impacted when Republicans won control of the House of Representatives. In the 112th, CBC members lose three full committee chairmanships and over a dozen subcommittee chairmanships. As a result, the CBC and its members' clout and influence are greatly diminished and

his mother Corrine before him. All the new Democrat Members are former state or local elected officials. The two new Black Republican Members come from majority-White districts and are split in their allegiance to the CBC agenda. Rep. Allen West (R-FL) is a retired Army Colonel who will join the CBC, while Rep. Tim Scott, a former South Carolina state legislator and owner of an insurance business, will not.

Because of the November 2010 elections, Republicans gained the majority in the House and at their behest, the 112th Congress was opened by readings of the US Constitution. Each Member of Congress read an average of 17 words. Georgia Congressman John Lewis was given a standing ovation when he read the 13th Amendment, which bans "slavery [and] involuntary servitude." Before the readings, Illinois Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. pointed out that the original document counted "Blacks as three-fifths of a person." To illustrate the plight of the 14 million Americans that are either under or unemployed, Congressman Jackson has asked job-seekers to send their résumés to him at ResumesforAmerica@mail.house.gov. Or to: 2419 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20009.

Congressman Jackson has asked job-seekers to send their résumés to him

in that Party. Only four Black Republicans have been elected to Congress since the CBC was founded: Senator Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts, Representative Gary Franks of Connecticut, Delegate Melvin H. Evans of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Representative J. C. Watts of Oklahoma, who became the first Black member of Congress that did not join the CBC citing its close Democratic affiliation and goals. Watts said of his refusal to join the CBC, "...they said that I had sold out and was an 'Uncle Tom'... and I said well, they deserve to have that view. But I have my thoughts...and I think

scrambling to identify ways to leverage their power.

New to Congress and the CBC are Hanson Clark who defeated Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick in their Detroit primary; Terri Sewell is the first Black female Congressperson from Alabama. She replaced Artur Davis who lost his bid for governor. Karen Bass, who was Speaker of the California Assembly, replaced retiring Congresswoman Diane Watson. Cedric Richmond now holds the New Orleans seat formally held by convicted felon William Jefferson. And Frederica Wilson took over the Florida seat that has been held by Kendrick Meek and