Cultivating Opportunity and Recovery from the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act

Senators Chris Coons, Roger Wicker, Jack Reed, Roy Blunt, Tammy Duckworth, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Cory Booker, Susan Collins, Amy Klobuchar, Marco Rubio, Tammy Baldwin, Lindsey Graham, Angus King, John Cornyn, Mark Kelly, Bill Cassidy, and Dick Durbin

Background: The United States has a strong history of citizen response to national calls to service in times of crisis. More than eighty years ago, our nation rose to the challenge of the Great Depression with the creation of citizen service programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. Millions of participants benefitted from paid employment and opportunities to develop skills while constructing national parks and public lands infrastructure and producing cultural works still enjoyed generations later. Through decades of bipartisan evolution, today's national service programs carry on that legacy.

National service programs, administered through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), provide services that are in critical need during our COVID-19 recovery. Those programs, including AmeriCorps, the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, and AmeriCorps Seniors, should be expanded to meet the needs of this moment. Those needs are as expansive as they are diverse: students requiring extra tutoring to recover from learning loss, food banks calling for more hands on deck to meet heightened demand, millions looking for new workforce opportunities, and others looking for a new pathway to afford higher education. National service supports flexible, locally driven responses to meet a wide range of community needs while providing an opportunity for participants to build their skills and earn student debt relief or tuition assistance.

Key features:
- Authorizes $8 billion to fund national service positions during a recovery period through fiscal year 2024 to grow programs to meet the scale of critical challenges. These resources could also enable more robust recruitment and awareness campaigns and enable an expansion of the Volunteer Generation Fund.
- Envisions corps members providing a broad range of social services to support our recovery efforts consistent with the programs' existing activities and expertise, such as:
    - Assisting educators in helping students overcome learning loss;
    - Expanding throughput at food banks and delivery services that combat nutrition insecurity;
    - Supporting outreach efforts to those experiencing homelessness; and
    - Promoting conservation, environmental resiliency, and natural resource preservation.
- Ensures that service provides meaningful opportunity during the recovery period by providing supplemental funding to raise the minimum AmeriCorps State & National living allowance to 175 percent of the federal poverty line and providing a total education award—used for to cover the cost of attendance or pay down student loans—twice the value of the maximum Pell grant.
- Provides flexibilities for programs to grow and respond quickly to dynamic local recovery needs, including:
    - Creating a pilot program that allows state service commissions to directly place members, especially in rural and high-poverty communities and with community-based organizations that have not previously hosted AmeriCorps participants;
    - Permitting short-term or seasonal terms of service throughout the year;
    - Waiving the match requirement for AmeriCorps State & National programs, and
    - Temporarily broadening eligibility criteria for some Senior Corps programs.
- Prioritizes funding for:
    - Entities serving communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and using culturally competent and multilingual strategies; and
    - Community-based organizations in rural or high-poverty areas or Tribal communities, especially where they propose to recruit participants to serve in their own communities.

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