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SUMMIT ON
VOLUNTEERISM
A Response to
Economic Crisis

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Thank you. Thank you all for being here today, and a special thanks again to the Knights of Columbus and also to Fairfield University for putting this forum together. Obviously, this event is very critical to what's happening in our state and our nation today.

A little bit of background for you: The New York State Commission on National Community Service was established in 1993 to administer grants under the Federal National and Community Service Trust Act. The Commission is a governor-appointed statewide committee that works to develop civic responsibility by creating high quality opportunities for New York citizens to get engaged and to give back to their communities.

Governor Paterson is focusing on addressing the dropout crisis and strengthening our schools, improving energy efficiency, safeguarding the environment, improving healthcare, and expanding economic opportunities in low income communities. And last but not least, we can utilize volunteers preparing for and responding to disasters that impact local communities and across New York State.

Governor Paterson recently named Susan Stern as Chair of the New York State Commission on National and Community Service and at the same point in time elevated her to a cabinet level position in his administration. This makes New York State only the second state, in addition to California, that has a cabinet level position focusing on service and civic engagement. I think that's certainly very important for all of you to know, that you have a representative and you have a voice at the table that's focusing on the needs of not for profit organizations and how we can work with individuals across New York State.

The Commission has a new initiative that was launched in September of 2008: New Yorkers Volunteer. And it's designed to promote and support engaging volunteers in neighborhoods, schools, and communities across the state. The New Yorkers Volunteer website, www.NewYorkersvolunteer.org, was created last fall and it links New Yorkers with volunteer opportunities. Organizations can register their needs and then volunteers can visit the site and search out by their zip code and specific area of interest volunteer opportunities that are currently available.

Right now, this is what we consider the most comprehensive database of volunteer opportunities in the state as it aggregates from 16 different aggregating sites within New York State. And what we're trying to do is serve as sort of a clearing house for volunteer opportunities. So the New Yorkers Volunteer site is where I would encourage you all to visit and post your volunteer opportunities with your organization.

We're also hoping to expand the scope of this website understanding that it's one tool to increase volunteerism. But there's been much conversation around pro bono services and how to maximize the skills of skilled volunteers. So we're looking to actually expand our volunteer website where corporations can actually post services that they have to the website and pro bono services and then



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volunteer organizations on the inverse can then search out those pro bono opportunities. That's a new platform that we're working on now and hope to launch in the spring.

In his budget this year, Governor Paterson further supported his endorsement of volunteerism and service by including funding of \$500,000 to be granted to volunteer centers in the state to provide training and technical assistance to volunteer coordinators who work in various community organizations. I think that it extremely important that we focus on building that infrastructure of not-for-profit organizations. Usually the first individuals that are let go from organizations during down economic times are volunteer coordinators and there's so much energy and support that's generated by volunteers that it's almost an inverse relationship. We need to make sure that organizations understand that and that volunteer coordinators are kept on board for as long as possible.

Another initiative of our office working in support of the State Commission on National Community Service is the establishment of state agency liaisons within every one of New York State's offices. The idea is that we can communicate to all New York State employees, a resource in excess of 200,000 individuals to get out into their communities and volunteer.

Another primary role of the Commission is administering the AmeriCorps programs. In 2008 and 2009, the State Commission received more than \$15 million in federal funding from the Federal Corporation for National and Community Service in Washington, D.C., to fund national service programs that engage individuals, particularly youth, in direct service activities. We also network with the other streams of national service, Senior Corps and Learn & Serve America.

Currently, there are 46 AmeriCorps programs in New York State that leverage more than \$15 million in federal funding. This places more than 2,300 AmeriCorps members in service in local communities with not-for-profit organizations. The focus of their service is in the areas of education, the environment, poverty issues, public safety, and disaster.

This is an interesting time and it's an exciting time around service. President Obama has called Americans to renew their commitment to service to help address the critical problems facing our nation. This week, the president asked Congress to pass the Serve America Act which was introduced by Senators Kennedy and Hatch that would reauthorize legislation and specifically create a new corps expanding on AmeriCorps and increase the number of national service members from 75,000 currently serving across the nation to 250,000. Funding has been increased also in the president's budget to support service initiatives by more than \$28 million.

In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, or stimulus dollars that was passed by Congress and signed by the president on February 17th, provides for up to \$89 million for AmeriCorps programs across the nation and that's a piece of \$200 million allocated to all national service programs nationwide. So obviously there is a tremendous amount of federal support and state support around national and community service.



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Just to close, a couple of quick stats that I want to share with you: In 2008, 2.9 million New Yorkers volunteered and they volunteered 366 million hours and that translates again, using that Points of Light figure of how much volunteerism is valued by hour, to \$7.1 billion in local services to New York State communities. So obviously that translates very effectively into the need for increased volunteerism.

Oddly enough, a study that was conducted in 2007 by the Corporation for National and Community Service at the federal level, ranked New York 49th in the nation in the level of volunteer activity. I wanted to throw in a caveat that the study was conducted through the census so I don't know how many in the room completely fill out the census and get to maybe that last question or towards the end on volunteerism. But I think that we're going to challenge those numbers in the years to come and we're excited about that.

Just to close, action steps moving forward: We're looking to develop a state-wide infrastructure. There needs to be more support and resources for not-for-profit organizations so that they have the critical training needed to help recruit, train, retain, and most importantly recognize volunteers. We need to establish ten regional volunteer centers using the governor's funding to help provide this infrastructure. We need to match corporate skill-based volunteers with those specific needs in the not-for-profit sector. We need to leverage federal funding that's obviously exploding as far as the amount of money that's being passed down to support volunteerism and service and we need to maximize that here in New York. We need to create real change. We need to quantify the data and the outputs but at the same point in time we need to make cultural and social changes so that volunteerism and service becomes an intrinsic value among all of us and our children.

Thank you very much for your time.