



# Congress should invest in AmeriCorps' impact and promise

By David Price, Opinion Contributor – 12/07/23 2:30 PM ET

Thirty years ago, I was proud to vote with colleagues from both sides of the aisle to create the Corporation for National and Community Service — now known as AmeriCorps — and establish a lasting mechanism to mobilize Americans to engage in public and community service. With natural disasters like hurricanes and wildfires on the rise, students across the country falling behind, and increases in rates of addiction and poverty, funding AmeriCorps is even more urgent now than it was when we established the program.

AmeriCorps members tackle some of our toughest national challenges and are determined to make a difference. One reason this work has had such strong bipartisan support is because it is one of the best investments the federal government can make. AmeriCorps was founded as a public-private partnership, meaning federal grants require matching funds from philanthropic and local sources. This structure enables it to yield more than \$17 in community benefits for every \$1 invested by Congress. We must continue to invest in AmeriCorps if we want to build the kind of country we want America to be: A place where citizens give back, come together in times of challenge and get things done for their communities.

Throughout my tenure on the House Appropriations Committee, I worked hard alongside colleagues across the political spectrum to invest in AmeriCorps, to support the at times underappreciated achievements of AmeriCorps members across the nation. Now, however, my former colleagues in Congress are considering devastating cuts that would cut the AmeriCorps budget to the lowest levels in nearly three decades and eliminate over 61,000 service positions, despite the tremendous value and impact that AmeriCorps members have had in times of crisis and need.

The House Appropriations Committee that I was a part of for three decades is even contemplating zeroing out AmeriCorps Education Awards, which help those who have served afford higher education.

AmeriCorps delivers real, tangible outcomes for the American people every single day. When disasters strike, AmeriCorps programs are among the first to respond, sending teams to repair homes, assist survivors, and help restore communities when it matters most. While volunteers often quickly move on to other crises, AmeriCorps members remain to rebuild.

Over the years, AmeriCorps members have assisted over 20 million people in disaster areas, helping after forest fires in New Mexico and California; floods in Tennessee and Louisiana; tornados in Missouri, Kentucky, and Mississippi; the oil spill along the Gulf Coast; Hurricanes Katrina, Harvey, Irma, Maria, and Ian; and countless other tragedies.

Last year, AmeriCorps members worked to address hunger and food security for 2.2 million people across the country. AmeriCorps members mentor or tutor almost 100,000 children and are in nearly 10,000 schools. They help increase access to affordable housing through organizations like Habitat for Humanity and provide services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. AmeriCorps participants also aid hundreds of thousands of seniors and people with disabilities with independent living services.

AmeriCorps provides vital support to Americans who have served our country in the military, helping nearly 290,000 veterans and military families. And almost 15,000 veterans serve in AmeriCorps' national service programs each year, with a profound impact on other service members, as studies have shown that "vets helping vets" programs are especially effective.

AmeriCorps' Foster Grandparent Program, Senior Companion Program, and other initiatives utilize seniors' skills and experiences to help those in need in communities across America. AmeriCorps Seniors tutor and mentor more than 90,000 children each year. These programs benefit under-resourced and over-burdened Americans as well as the service members themselves — 84 percent of AmeriCorps Seniors members report stable or improving health after just one year of service.

I am proud to have helped create AmeriCorps and to have helped strengthen and grow AmeriCorps when I served in Congress. I will continue to support a robust federal investment in AmeriCorps so national service programs can keep at the important task of getting things done for America. This is a unifying cause that represents the heart of America, and it's a catalyst for what's already there: good, decent people from all walks of life, ready to do the hard work to help their communities.

I urge my former colleagues to stand up for AmeriCorps, reject short-sighted cuts, and invest in its impact and its promise.

*Former Rep. David Price (D-N.C.) helped to create AmeriCorps thirty years ago, and he has been a staunch supporter of AmeriCorps and its immense impact in countless communities ever since. Price was a co-founder of the bipartisan National Service Congressional Caucus in 2004. He now teaches at Duke University as professor of Public Policy Studies.*