

# Hill Briefing Forecasts Future Service Legislation

Older Americans can expect a boost from the next Congress in helping them find worthwhile volunteer and community service opportunities, according to experts speaking at the recent Capitol Hill briefing sponsored by GSA's Civic Engagement in an Older America Project. This event served as the capstone and closing session of the Society's recent 61st Annual Scientific Meeting.

On Tuesday, November 25, 2008, attendees made their way from the modern Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center to the historic Caucus Room in the Russell Senate Office Building — better known as the site of hearings on Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, and the sinking of the Titanic, and where both John and Robert Kennedy's presidential bids were announced.

Both candidates in the recent presidential election voiced support for an expanded federal commitment to volunteer service. Therefore civic engagement advocates have been preparing to work with congressional leaders to enact service legislation early in the 111th Congress. GSA held this Hill briefing as a prelude to the hearings that will follow next year.

The proceedings began with former Senator Harris Wofford (D-PA), who gave a historical perspective on the current service movement. He served under John F. Kennedy as the first director of the Peace Corps and later traveled the country with President-Elect Obama as a surrogate speaker during the campaign.

Briefing attendees were able to meet the congressional staff responsible for advancing the civic engagement and service legislation:

Emma Vadehra from the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), which drafted the Serve America Act; Alex Ceja of the House Committee on Education and Labor, sponsor of the Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act; Debra Whitman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, which has been a strong supporter of both civic engagement legislation and older worker bills; and Madeline Gitomer, a staffer for Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT), sponsor of the Encore Service Act, which includes the Silver Scholars Program.

Representing another facet of civic engagement and volunteer service were Tom Nelson, AARP's chief operating officer, and Stanley Litow, IBM's vice president for corporate citizenship and corporate affairs. They provided the perspective of the stakeholders who not only support expansion of service opportunities for older adults, but also have made service a part of their organizational culture.

Lastly, the audience received perspectives from several volunteers: Gloria J. Thomas, an Experience Corps volunteer; Jerry H. Gallun, a legacy leader with Habitat for Humanity; and Karen Harlow-Rosentraub, an associate professor at Case Western Reserve University. This panel described the importance of training and organizing volunteers for projects such as the Katrina Hurricane cleanup. Both Thomas and Gallun shared personal stories about the impact that their service has had on the children and families that have received their services, and how important this purposeful work has been in their lives.



▼ Stanley Litow (left) and Tom Nelson presented the role of volunteer service in their respective organizations.



◀ Harris Wofford (left) received a warm welcome from GSA's Greg O'Neill and Stacey Easterling of The Atlantic Philanthropies, the organization that provides funding for GSA's Civic Engagement in an Older America Project.

▲ GSA President Lisa Gwyther (standing at the podium) welcomed over 160 people to the briefing.

