



**INDEPENDENT SECTOR**  
A vital voice for us all

Memo to Members

## Perspectives

September 2008

### Now Is the Moment to Create a New Era of Service

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*Voluntary service is crucial to the ability of America's nonprofit community to improve lives. In this column, Alan Khazei, founder and CEO of Be the Change, Inc., a convener of the ServiceNation campaign, describes how and why this new organization is committed to strengthening the ideal of service. ([www.servicenation.org](http://www.servicenation.org))*

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For almost 30 years, the members of Independent Sector, from the AARP to the YWCA, have worked to promote volunteering and civic engagement in America. And now supporters of service have a unique moment in our history, an opportunity to try and establish these ideals as core ideals in our democracy. Consider: both presidential candidates believe deeply in service; post-9/11, Americans (particularly Millennials and retiring Boomers) increasingly want opportunities to serve their communities and country; and national service programs—from City Year to Teach For America to Youthbuild to many, many others—are testing and proving strategies of impact that can be scaled. With your help and continued leadership we can and must seize this moment.

The idea that the creativity and energy of citizens are the keys to solving problems is an idea whose time has come. To champion this idea, a dynamic new coalition called ServiceNation—organized by my new organization, Be the Change, Inc., along with City Year, Civic Enterprises, and the Points of Light Institute—has come together to launch a national campaign to increase voluntary service opportunities, use proven service strategies to solve problems, and promote service as a central pillar of civic engagement. This nonpartisan coalition—which represents more than 110 organizations that collectively reach more than 100 million Americans—is a testament to the power of these ideas. It includes organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, which has been committed to service for almost 150 years, and newer organizations such as Do Something, which are leveraging the power of young volunteers to accomplish amazing things. ServiceNation is honored and

excited that Independent Sector is a lead member of our coalition and serves on our Steering Committee. Its research documenting Americans' enthusiasm for bettering their communities has strengthened the case for bringing service to scale, and its important work highlighting the value of such activities in economic terms makes it clear that this is an investment well worth making.

To fully leverage the return on investment national service and volunteerism can deliver, ServiceNation has produced a comprehensive policy proposal that includes the creation of targeted service corps to address national challenges like the high school dropout crisis, and to expand our capacity to respond quickly to assist and rebuild communities hit by natural disasters. Currently, 61 million Americans volunteer time each year in schools, community-based organizations and faith-based institutions. Our vision is that by 2020, 100 million Americans will volunteer their time, skills, and creativity each year, and that up to a million Americans annually will choose to dedicate a year of their lives to national service.

Senators Kennedy and Hatch are already working together on new legislation that we hope will set America on the path toward this vision. But we won't be able to get there without expanding existing public-private partnerships, and building new ones to unite our communities in service. And we'll need to call on leaders from all sectors of our society to promote the potential and impact of service, and engage their

*Continued on page 2*

networks to help build a national movement that will inspire our leaders and communities to act.

To jumpstart this movement, the ServiceNation campaign will launch with a bipartisan ServiceNation Summit on September 11-12 in New York City. Both Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama will attend the Summit's first major event: a presidential forum on service and civic engagement in the post-9/11 world. At the Summit, 600 leaders from a range of sectors will discuss new ideas and proposals for service and promote a Declaration of Service that all Americans will be able to sign. Two weeks later, on Sept. 27, ServiceNation is organizing a national Day Of Action to celebrate the impact and potential of service. Already, more than 1,000 events, across all 50 states, have been created. Anyone can get involved, simply by going to [events.servicenation.org](http://events.servicenation.org).

Independent Sector and all of its member organizations can play a critical role in ensuring that this ServiceNation campaign will succeed. You can help make service the key to uniting our country around building a better future by educating your colleagues about ServiceNation and the legislative work of Senators Kennedy and Hatch. You can also support ServiceNation through your print, media, and online networks, and by helping us build a national movement by promoting ServiceNation and the opportunities for all Americans to get involved, on your websites. Independent Sector members can inspire Americans to create Day of Action events, and help us get a million Americans to sign the Declaration of Service by Inauguration Day next January. Your work has laid the ground for this campaign. And now it is time to take national service and volunteerism to an entirely new level in our national life. We hope you will actively join us in this effort. Your leadership can make all of the difference.