

**Remarks of Mark Walter, Executive Director
New York State Commission on National and Community Service**

**SENIOR CITIZENS DAY 2009
EMPIRE STATE PLAZA (ALBANY, NY)**

Thank you Governor Paterson and Director Burgess for your continued leadership in the area of service and civic engagement. I also want to thank the NYSOFA staff for their efforts coordinating this amazing day!

And thanks to all of you for your service within your local communities and your attendance at this exciting event!

The State Office For the Aging has been a valuable partner in the State Service Commission's mission of engaging all New Yorkers of all walks of life in service.

In a study conducted in 2007, New York state ranked 49th in the nation in the amount of volunteer service activity its residents completed.

Under the leadership of Governor Paterson and FL Paige Paterson who serves as the Honorary Chair of the State Commission on National & Community Service – we are committed to changing that statistic.

But the Governor and Commission recognize that volunteering and service is more than just changing a statistic because service impacts the lives of real people and helps meet the needs of local communities every day across New York State.

Here in New York, nearly 3 million volunteers put in an annual average of more 366 million hours of service last year. This service equates to more than \$7 billion dollars in otherwise government or public-supported services to local communities.

Older adults are a tremendous source of social capital to address pressing community issues.

It is my belief that older adults represent the most value volunteer resource our state has. I believe this because you were raised in a time when service and random acts of kindness were common-place. You represent the moral fiber of our state and we need your involvement in your communities to impart that wisdom.

I believe there is tremendous opportunity for intergenerational learning to pass on your experience and knowledge to your children and grandchildren. I believe it so important that our next generation grow up valuing service as an opportunity – and that service becomes an intrinsic piece of who they are. You can help make this happen both by example through service to your community – but also by making an effort to reach out to youth and explain the importance of connecting with their community to help meet the basic needs of others.

As volunteers, your input to help make your communities more livable is essential. I encourage you to seek out opportunities where your voice can be heard about ways to enhance the infrastructure, housing, and unmet needs in your local communities.

The value you provide by volunteering not only helps those you service – but also helps you as an individual. There are tremendous health benefits to volunteering especially among older adults. Studies have shown that active volunteering lowers the likelihood for depression, increases life expectancy, and lowers the rate of heart disease. These all sound like great reasons to me to get involved – in addition to the critical resources you provide to others in your community.

Today, leaders from every sector of American life are joining together to celebrate a new era of service, responsibility and personal engagement to solve the nation's problems.

In mid-February, we witnessed the signing of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act.

Governor Paterson was at the forefront in leading the nation's governors in urging congress to support the act.

The Serve America Act focuses service on education, health, clean energy, veterans, economic opportunity and other national priorities.

The act will also mobilize hundreds of thousands of Americans to demonstrate the impact of service and the power within all of us to create large scale change.

The Serve America Act dramatically increases AmeriCorps positions from 75,000 positions annually to 250,000 in eight years.

The act authorizes volunteer generation fund to award grants to states and nonprofits to recruit, manage and support volunteers and strengthen the nation's volunteer infrastructure.

The Serve America Act also provides for Silver Scholarship for Americans age 55+ upon completing minimal volunteer service benchmarks. The scholarships can be transferred to children and grandchildren to support their education which is a wonderful piece to this legislation.

It is critical that here in New York that we not only encourage volunteerism, but we provide the necessary infrastructure to our non-profit organizations to manage volunteers.

Governor Paterson included funding in his budget to support the development of 10 regional volunteer centers across New York State to provide training and technical assistance to non-profit organizations. This training and network will help non profits ensure volunteers have a meaningful service experience and return on a regular basis.

I want to leave you with a few of president Obama's words at the signing of the Kennedy Serve America act:

“we need your service right now, at this moment in history. I'm not going to tell you what your role should be. That's for you to discover. But I'm asking you to stand up and play your part. I'm asking you to help change history's course, put your shoulder up against the wheel. And if you do, I promise you your life will be richer, our country will be stronger, and someday, years from now, you may remember it as the moment when your own story and the American story converged, when they came together, and we met the challenges of our new century.”

I look forward to us all doing our part to help meet the challenges of today and those we have yet to encounter.

Thank you.