

National Climate Service Corps and Careers Network Act

Purpose: This bill creates a National Climate Service Corps to supplement the existing Corps programs within the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), or Americorps, and establishes a Climate Careers Network to help connect Corps alumni and Americans to other job opportunities in the clean energy and clean environment economy.

This bill supports locally-driven responses to meet local employment, environmental, and climate mitigation and environmental resiliency needs.

Support: This bill has received endorsements from –

- America’s Service Commissions;
- Backcountry Hunters and Anglers – Nevada Chapter;
- The Corps Network;
- Conservation Lands Foundation;
- Friends of Nevada Wilderness;
- Great Basin Institute;
- Nevada Conservation League;
- Nevada Volunteers
- Nevada Wildlife Federation;
- Service Year Alliance

Highlights: This bill accomplishes the following –

1. Establishes a National Climate Service Corps;
2. Expands programmatic/placement eligibility of the anti-poverty Americorps VISTA program to include climate resiliency and mitigation;
3. Provides experienced alumni corpsmembers an easier pathway to gain employment in civil service;
4. Creates a Climate Careers Network for alumni corpsmembers and other Americans interested in life-long careers in green economy sectors.

What the Legislation Does

Building upon the Clean Energy Service Corps established in the Serve America Act (P.L. 111-13) and existing Corps programs, the National Climate Service Corps Act establishes the National Climate Service Corps, which will expand opportunities for Americans to serve in their communities; promote climate adaptation, mitigation, and resiliency; and prepare young adults for careers in the growing green jobs sector.

As communities throughout the nation strive to mitigate the impact of climate change, build their climate resilience, and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that young adults have the opportunity to give back to their communities in meaningful ways through promoting environmental sustainability and mitigating the threat of climate change.

The National Climate Service Corps will engage young adults (ages 17 to 25), veterans, and those from communities disproportionately impacted by climate change and provide them with hands-on skills through activities, such as,

- assessing community climate resilience;
- disaster emergency preparedness;
- promoting sustainable communities; and
- helping communities build back better after disasters occur.

Climate Careers Network

The bill would also task CNCS to work with the Departments of Energy, Education, Labor, the Interior, and Transportation, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency in establishing a Climate Careers Network to create a pathway to permanent jobs for National Climate Service Corps alumni.

As part of the Climate Careers Network, CNCS would create and maintain a publically available database with information related to opportunities for individuals interested in pursuing a career in the clean economy. The website would provide information regarding skills-training; mentorship or advising; apprenticeship readiness programs; and registered apprenticeship programs.

Through partnerships with labor unions, businesses, technical schools, nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education, community development organizations, and career and technical education providers, the Climate Careers Network would help connect National Climate Service Corps alumni and other Americans interested in working in the green economy with jobs and help build pathways to lifelong careers.

Section-by-Section

Section 1 – Short Title: the National Climate Service Corps and Careers Network Act

Section 2 – Purpose

- The purpose of this bill is to establish a National Climate Service Corps under the National and Community Service Act in order to:
 - Promote climate adaptation, mitigation, and resiliency;
 - Provide young adults with opportunities to give back to their communities through service;
 - Provide opportunities to disadvantaged youth to promote environmental sustainability within their communities; and
 - Provide a pathway to permanent employment within the green jobs sector.

Section 3 – National Climate Service Corps

- This bill amends the National and Community Service Act of 1990 to establish the National Climate Service Corps.

- Under the 1990 Act, the National Climate Service Corps will be placed alongside other National Service Corps models, as well as other funding and education award mechanisms (for example: the Education Corps, Veterans Corp, Healthy Future Corps, etc.).
- Funding recipients (states, tribes, public/private non-profit organizations, institutions of higher learning) shall carry out service projects that improves community adaptation, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery from natural disaster and other trends related to climate change. Project activities may include:
 - Assessing community resilience to climate change;
 - Emergency preparedness;
 - Promoting sustainable and resilient communities;
 - Supporting climate adaptation and mitigation of the negative effects of climate change.
- Funding recipients shall engage in projects for communities that are disproportionately impacted by climate change and severe weather events, including from communities of color, as well as low-income and tribal communities.
- Funding recipients shall strive to select corpsmembers under the age of 25 from disadvantaged or environmental justice backgrounds and veterans under 36.
- Similar to other National Service Corps models, the National Climate Service Corps shall also include programmatic indicators to track project progress, completion, and efficiency relevant to its clean environment and climate mitigation purpose.

Section 4 – Cooperation Among States for Emergency Response

- This section gives authority to participating states and entities engaging in National Climate Service Corps activities to enter into agreements with other participating states to provide mutual cooperation to respond and manage any emergency or disaster declared within an affected state.

Section 5 – Climate Resiliency Americorps VISTA

- This section amends the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 by expanding the list of eligible projects and programs available to Americorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) participants to include projects that increase resilience, adaptation, and mitigation to changes to the environment (including changes caused by natural disasters) impacting low-income communities.
 - The Americorps VISTA program was conceived by President John F. Kennedy to fight against poverty by placing program participants in an office setting to help local organizations expand their efficiency of service through capacity building activities such as fundraising, grant writing, research, and volunteer recruitment.
 - The scope of existing programmatic areas include health, education, homelessness, alcohol/substance abuse, financial literacy, before/after-school programs, veteran assistance.

- The amendment made by this section allows VISTA participants to engage in an additional form of necessary support and development for impoverished communities and residents.

Section 6 – Noncompetitive Hiring Authority

- This section states that a qualified corpsmember shall be eligible for appointment in the competitive service in the same manner as a Peace Corps volunteer.
 - Peace Corps volunteers are already provided “non-competitive eligibility” (NCE) status, per Executive Order 11103, made by President Kennedy in 1963.
 - For reference, the competitive service is a part of the federal civil service. Applicants for jobs in the competitive civil service must compete with other applicants in open competition under the merit system administered by the Office of Personnel Management.
 - NCE is a special hiring status that allows eligible returned Peace Corps Volunteers and Staff the opportunity to apply for and compete for positions in competitive service that are open to those who have served or worked for the Peace Corps. This NCE status makes it easier for federal agencies to hire returned Volunteers who meet the minimum qualifications of a given position.
- Providing qualified corpsmembers NCE status, similar to what is afforded Peace Corps members, will further help retain experienced and trained National Climate Service Corps members within the green economy sector upon completion of their service.

Section 7 – Climate Careers Network

- This section directs the CNCS (Americorps) to establish a “Climate Careers Network” to both address job placement challenges in the green economy, and to support individuals who have completed service in the National Climate Service Corps who want to continue to utilize the skills and expertise derived from their Corps experience into post-service employment in the green economy and clean energy/environment sectors.
- The Network shall be created in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Departments of Energy, Education, Labor, the Interior, and Transportation.
- The Network shall be comprised of:
 - A database that outlines relevant career opportunities; and
 - Partnerships with relevant entities for corpsmembers to engage in further training and job placement opportunities.
- This Network will help retain corpsmembers’ green energy and environment knowledge and expertise amassed from their service experience into to be utilized in life-long careers in similar fields of work.

Section 8 – Matching Funds Waiver

- This section would waive the matching requirements for non-profit organizations who run a National Climate Service Corps program and waive matching requirements if they work on federal public lands and waters projects through the Public Lands Corps authority of the Department of the Interior, U.S. Forest Service, or NOAA.
- Waiving the matching requirements would help to quickly scale up the new corps and enable participating organizations to run programs in rural or underserved areas where it is harder to meet the matching requirements for AmeriCorps and federal public lands projects.

Section 9 – Appropriations

- This section authorizes –
 - \$10 billion over five years (\$2 billion each year) to implement the National Climate Service Corps.
 - \$200 million over five years (\$50 million each year) to implement the Climate Careers Network.
- The authorization provided for the National Climate Service Corps is consistent with the distribution of funds as provided to other CNCS (AmeriCorps) programs, such as funding for programmatic areas, corpsmember stipends, and education awards.
- The authorization amount provided under this section is also consistent with the amount provided under President Biden’s American Jobs Plan to establish a Civilian Climate Corps (\$10 billion).