

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)

Assistant to the Democratic Leader

Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget

US House of Representatives – Washington, DC

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Spratt Asks President to Support AmeriCorps

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) sent the following letter to President Bush in support of the AmeriCorps program. An AP story that ran in The State on June 13 follows.

June 12, 2003

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to notify you of an urgent situation that has been brought to my attention. South Carolina has suffered an eighty-seven percent decrease in our AmeriCorps member allocation for the 2003-2004 school year. This adversely affects my Fifth District constituents and severely impacts education efforts statewide.

South Carolina currently has 10 AmeriCorps programs with 267 members. These members serve as tutors in math and language arts for thousands of students across the state. The proposed cuts of over \$1 million could result in the elimination of a number of these programs, and a decrease in AmeriCorps statewide membership to only 35 or 40. This could have devastating effects on our students, who depend on these AmeriCorps members for extra instruction. I was also informed that the Corporation for National and Community Service has eliminated funding for City Year Columbia, our state's oldest service corps, that currently serves an inner city school district with many needs.

The problem apparently stems from an internal accounting issue related to the AmeriCorps enrollment freeze in November. While I commend AmeriCorps for correcting its books, the resulting national cuts appear to go well beyond anything Congress ever intended.

There are currently 50,000 AmeriCorps volunteers, and I understand that you have called for this number to be increased to 75,000 in the coming years. However, to do this requires funding, and the proposed cuts to the program move us in the exact opposite direction. I hope that you recognize the damage that these cuts will have, and will do whatever you can to restore these much-needed funds for the AmeriCorps program.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your reply.

Respectfully,

John M. Spratt, Jr.
Member of Congress

S.C. could lose 200 Americorps volunteers

By JENNIFER HOLLAND
The Associated Press
6/13/03

Almost 200 community volunteers might have to end their work in South Carolina because a federal fund awarding educational grants is running dry.

The National Service Trust gives \$4,725 educational awards to volunteers who serve 1,700 hours through AmeriCorps. Launched in 1993, AmeriCorps has been described as a domestic Peace Corps.

The state's 231 Americorps volunteers mentor students, build houses, bring meals to the needy and clean the environment in 11 counties. This week, state officials learned only 36 Americorps positions would be funded next year.

The General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, reported that the Corporation for National and Community Service needs to overhaul its accounting procedures to match volunteer numbers with funds available.

That would require either getting more money from Congress or reducing the 50,000 volunteer slots by half.

AmeriCorps is asking the GAO and the Office of Management and Budget to reduce the amount of money required to be set aside for each volunteer.

Rock Hill risks losing a homework center staffed every night by volunteers who work with underprivileged students, said Brenda Ishmael, program director in York County.

Ishmael said she could lose half of her 45 volunteers, who mostly are Winthrop University students.

"The picture looks bleak," she said. "We're just kind of in limbo. We're trying to stay hopeful."