

AT ISSUE

A CONSERVATION CORPS FOR TODAY

Legislation to create a modern-day CCC—named ACC for American Conservation Corps—has been debated in Congressional halls since 1981. Will it make it through this year, the 55th anniversary of

its working model? The Democratic Senator from New York, who has worked on several of the ACC bills, holds out hope—and reservations—on success in the 100th Congress.

Senator Daniel P. Moynihan

How many of us have ever walked through a woods or a National Park and come across a trail or bridge or lodge, and discovered it was built by Franklin D. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps? During the CCC's nine-year lifetime, three million young men dedicated themselves to conservation work on the public lands. Their work, valued at more than \$1.5 billion, served the public good not only in terms of rehabilitated public facilities but also through its contribution to the lives of Corps members. Among these men, 100,000 entered the Corps as functional illiterates and left it able to read and write. Many of the CCC's projects still serve us today, and are eloquent testimony to the quantity and, more so, the quality of the Corps' work. Its legacy, in terms of infrastructure left behind and lives sustained and enriched through service, has been amply demonstrated.

The need for this type of program is no less today than it was on April 7, 1933, when Henry Rich became the CCC's first inductee. The twin problems the CCC was formed to address—unemployment of young people and deterioration of natural resources—are with us once again. Still, our parks and forests suffer from overuse, inadequate maintenance, and deteriorating infrastructure. And never before has our youth, as a group, been so impoverished. Teenage unemployment stands near 16 percent. Of the 6.6 million Americans presently unemployed, 38



percent are under the age of 25.

These problems are difficult ones, but nowhere near insoluble. A new conservation corps—the American Conservation Corps as we have chosen to call it—would be a significant step toward solving them. It is a step we must take.

And so I and others in Congress, most notably Congressman Morris Udall of Arizona, have sponsored legislation to establish the American Conservation Corps (ACC). As presently conceived, the ACC would employ up to 28,000 young people per year to perform much needed conservation and

rehabilitation work on federal, state, local, and American Indian lands. It would provide year-round and summer employment opportunities, principally for disadvantaged youths aged 16 to 25. It is precisely this group that must be given skills and habits that will allow them to successfully enter the work force.

I should emphasize that this is by no means a "leaf raking" bill, as similar proposals have been termed in the past. Far from it. The work that Corps members will be doing—indeed, work that over 50,000 young people are already doing in existing state and local service corps—is real work. Hard work. It is work to benefit all Americans who use public lands and public facilities, which is almost everyone at one time or another. And it is cost-effective work. Existing youth-corps programs have returned an average of \$1 to \$1.20 in appraised conservation work for every dollar expended.

The President's Commission on American Outdoors, formed in 1985 to make a comprehensive assessment of the state of the nation's outdoor resources, took a close look at what conservation-corps programs have done to rehabilitate our public lands. In its Report of January 1987, the Commission stated: "... the need is acute for the type of activities which outdoor Corps can offer. Recreation and conservation agencies at every level report staff shortages. ... Outdoor Corps can and do help meet the critical needs, usually

at great cost savings."

Some may recall that this is not the first time Congress has debated the idea of creating an ACC. The first ACC bill, the Public Lands Rehabilitation, Conservation and Improvement Act of 1981, was somewhat different from the more highly evolved version of the bill being considered today, although its intent was very much the same. In 1982, Senator Charles Matthias of Maryland and I introduced the first Senate bill, and hopes were high. But it was not to be, either in 1982 or in succeeding sessions of Congress. In 1984, we were able to put the bill through both Houses of Congress, only to have it vetoed by the President (although I might add that when Governor Ronald Reagan signed into law the legislation that would create the California Ecology Corps in 1971, he called it "the prototype for future national implementation").

In 1986, a bill substantially similar to the present one made it through both the House and Senate, but in slightly differing versions. Though differences between the two were not large, there was not sufficient time to resolve them, and we recessed for the year without a bill once again. The details of the ACC's long legislative history are perhaps not important in their particulars, but the story they tell is. And that is, the ACC is an idea that is here to stay. We have yet to enact a program at the federal level, but we have not given up. Even now progress is being made, and I believe we can pass a bill this year.

Our original proposal in 1982 called for funding the program at around \$100 million per year, with the federal government paying the large majority. This has since been scaled down dramatically, both because of very real budget constraints at the federal level and because of the unprecedented growth in the popularity of state and local service corps. It has been made clear that such programs are a high priority in many areas, and that states and localities are willing to take on a good fraction of their cost.

I would hope this increased emphasis on financial participation and planning at the state and local level could lead the present Administration to look more favorably on this bill than on the one vetoed in 1984. We have not had firm indications of such, but to the degree that our present approach is con-

sistent with the principle that the lesser involvement at the federal level, the better (a dogma adhered to by the Administration with some fervor, as some of us have learned all too well), we may have a chance.

And so where are we? When might all this actually happen? As of this writing, my bill has been placed on the calendar for action by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. A date has yet to be set for a vote by the Committee, but the bill should be ready for action by the full Senate sometime this summer. The Senate has passed ACC bills before, and I see no reason it would not do so again.

The situation in the House of Representatives is somewhat different. Efforts have been made to fold the ACC into a more broadly conceived program of a national youth-service corps. Similar to ACC, the program would be voluntary, but the range of allowable work would be much broader, and would emphasize projects in the area of hu-

man services—care for the elderly and infirm, and rebuilding of schools, playgrounds, and shelters for the homeless.

Worthy projects all, to be sure. But this increased breadth has caused difficulties. For one, as dictated by the occult science of House rules, it has caused the bill to fall into the jurisdiction of several Committees. This means delay. For another, this newer idea has not been the subject of years of debate and refinement as has ACC, and skepticism is more prevalent. And so as things stand, chances in the House are uncertain.

This notwithstanding, I think the chances for enactment of an ACC bill this year are good, and I have every hope that the President may yet see the light. Volunteer service can give our young people the chance to enter the educational system and the work force with new skills, renewed motivation, and the knowledge that hard work can get you somewhere. AF