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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Senator Alan Cranston (D., Calif.), chairman of the Child and Human Development Subcommittee, announced today he will begin hearings March 13 on a proposed feasibility study for a large-scale, permanent program for young people to volunteer for a year or more of non-military national service after they finish school.

The 18-24 month study would be conducted by a special Presidential Commission created under a bill introduced today by Cranston and five other Senators including Paul E. Tsongas (D., Mass.), a former Peace Corps volunteer, its principal sponsor.

Cranston said his subcommittee will "solicit a wide diversity of views from all concerned in a full and fair exploration of this entire issue".

"We need to reinstill in our people the virtues of volunteerism as a form of patriotism and to rekindle the spirit of working for the betterment of our society," Cranston said.

"It is time for America to challenge its people, especially its young people, to service; to draw out the best that is in them and to ask them to do their best for their country. I believe they are waiting to be asked."

Cranston, an early advocate of the all-volunteer army, said a voluntary program of civilian national service could help military recruitment and deflect demands for return of the draft.

"There are those who feel that the all-volunteer force is not working," Cranston said. "There are those, Secretary of the Army Clifford Alexander among them, who believe it is working."

"If the creation of a voluntary national service can--by raising the status and social desirability of volunteerism--assist in meeting military needs, it could help insure the success of the all-volunteer force and put an end to the rising demand for reinstatement of the draft. A great purpose would thus be served."

Cranston said the Presidential Commission probably will also study a mandatory national service program but he said he believes that "only a voluntary program would be acceptable to Congress and the American people".

Mandatory service, Cranston said, "would spark resentment and divisiveness rather than stimulate a spirit of service to the nation".

Stressing the importance of volunteerism rather than compulsion in a free society, Cranston said Americans constitute "a natural reservoir of energy and compassion--of people-to-people assistance--which is not being fully utilized".

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Though the commission will study how elderly retired and others could also serve, it is expected that major emphasis will be placed on national service between the ages of 18-24, Cranston said.

"We are not tapping the full potential of the ability and desire of young Americans to be of service to their country. Too many young people are brought up to be oriented more toward consumption and self-satisfaction rather than toward public service and helping others. Understandably, many of them take a dim view of their role in society. Young people need--they want and are entitled to--a greater sense of purpose and productivity in their lives.

"America needs the enterprise, the creativity, the imagination and the drive of its young people. Americans are a caring, compassionate people. We have demonstrated that time after time in our history. A national service program could provide both the stimulus and the opportunity for us to demonstrate it once again, and to create anew that sense of unity and common purpose which we seem to lack except in times of national crisis."

Cranston said national service could help young people "make the critical transition from school to the mainstream of adult life".

"National service could serve as a bridge between youth and adulthood, from dependence to self-reliance. It could be a kind of internship or apprenticeship for a life of productive and meaningful work.

"Though a year or two of participation in a national service program would not in itself solve the problems of youth--especially the problems of unemployed youth in our inner cities--it would provide a far better beginning to adult life than millions of young people now face. It could provide an avenue out of the despair and hopelessness that have driven so many young Americans to drug addiction, alcoholism, crime and a life of welfarism."

Cranston said national service should consist "not of make-work but of significant contributions to some of our pressing economic and social needs".

"Volunteerism gives us a way to meet those needs without resorting to costly, bureaucratically administered government programs," he said.

Among the services that could be performed, Cranston said, are care of the infirm and aged, special tutoring for low-achieving students, day-care for pre-school children, after-school care for "latch-key" children, work in hospitals, community health centers, institutions for the retarded and the mentally ill, prisons and juvenile detention centers, and "helping renovate and reconstruct our rundown neighborhoods, preserving our natural resources and fighting pollution".