



August 20, 2008

McCain, Obama to Silence Critical Ads on Sept. 11

By Jim Kuhnhenn

WASHINGTON - Presidential contenders Barack Obama and John McCain plan to pull ads on Sept. 11 that criticize each other, a respite from the political fray to honor the anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attacks.

McCain spokesman Brian Rogers said McCain did not plan to advertise at all on the anniversary. "Nine-eleven is not a day for politics," Rogers said.

"We hope Sept. 11th is a day when Americans come together and reaffirm our resolve to address the common challenges we face together," Obama spokesman Hari Sevugan said.

MyGoodDeed.org is also among a number of organizations and families of Sept. 11 victims who plan to hold a ServiceNation Summit on Sept. 11-12 in New York. Sponsors invited Obama and McCain to attend a presidential candidates forum on Sept. 11.

In a letter to both candidates Tuesday, MyGoodDeed.org founders David Paine and Jay Winuk noted that the country seemed to forget partisan differences in the days after the attacks and were unified by a sense of compassion. The group planned to announce their appeal to the candidates on Wednesday. The campaigns revealed their intentions when contacted by The Associated Press.

Paine, the president of the group, runs a marketing firm in California. Winuk's brother, Glenn Winuk, was a lawyer and volunteer firefighter who died after rushing to the World Trade Center to assist victims.

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September 11, 2008

White House combatants observe Ground Zero truce

NEW YORK (AFP) — John McCain and Barack Obama were to observe a truce Thursday in their increasingly bitter White House contest with a joint appearance at Ground Zero on the seventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

Their visit to the site of the former World Trade Center in Manhattan promised a rare break from hostilities in the frenzied last two months of the presidential race.

"There will be no speeches," Democrat Obama's spokeswoman Linda Douglass said. "This is going to be a moment when politics are set aside."

Both Obama and his Republican rival McCain were to suspend campaign advertising for the day.

Heavy security was in place well ahead, with streets near Ground Zero closed and buses re-routed before ceremonies starting at 8:40 am (1240 GMT).

Two separate minutes of silence were to mark the moments when the two hijacked airliners struck on September 11, 2001, destroying each of the Twin Towers and killing some 3,000 people -- at 8:46 am and at 9:03 am.

Ceremonies included additional minutes of silence commemorating the collapse of each tower, as well as the traditional reading out of all victims' names.

McCain and Obama -- expected by staff to be arriving later in the day, after the official ceremonies -- have promised to bury the hatchet in honor of the anniversary.

Over the last week the White House contest has degenerated into name-calling, climaxing with the row over Obama's branding of the Republican campaign of McCain and running mate Sarah Palin as "lipstick on a pig."

But Obama set the tone for the Ground Zero event, saying Wednesday that 9/11 showed "that here in America, we all have a stake in each other; I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper; and we rise and fall as one nation."

Although they will want to avoid any semblance of politicking at Ground Zero itself, temperatures could rise later in the day when the two candidates participate in a televised forum at 8:00 pm (0000 GMT Friday).

The forum, organized by a coalition of civic groups named ServiceNation, is not a debate and the two rivals will appear separately, with Obama going second -- a line-up his aides said was decided by the flick of a coin.

Douglass said her boss might use the occasion to respond "to the Republicans' mocking of his own youthful commitment to community service."

However analysts think the antagonists will be on best behavior.

"The campaign's likely to get pretty nasty, but tomorrow they'll want to be above the battle," said John Mueller, a politics professor at Ohio State University. "Bashing the opponent is bad politics at that moment."

The 9/11 attacks remain a deeply emotional issue in the United States, even if polls show that pocketbook concerns, particularly the parlous state of the housing market, now top terrorism fears.

Because of continued delays in erecting the World Trade Center's replacement and a memorial, the memory of the attacks remain literally an open wound.

On the eve of the anniversary, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg lambasted bureaucratic hurdles for what he said was "frustratingly slow" progress in redeveloping the site.

Sally Regenhard, whose fireman son was killed seven years ago during the deadly rescue mission, hopes the candidates' presence will renew focus on what she says are the unlearned lessons of 9/11.

"I'd like to hear them say they're going to get more involved regarding... the need to protect our cities from all types of chemical and biological and radiological attacks," she told AFP.

"I want them to get involved with legislation to create a national standard for emergency response after attacks, hurricanes, whatever the emergency."

But don't expect the bipartisan approach in Manhattan to last long, warned New York University politics professor Steven Brams.

"They'll obviously want to unify the country, to commemorate this occasion. There'll be no harsh words exchanged if they meet face to face," Brams said. "But this is just an interlude."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

September 12, 2008

Meaning of Service Up for Debate

*Government's Role
Divides Candidates;
Bill Clinton on Trail*

BY AMY CHOZICK
AND ELIZABETH HOLMES

NEW YORK—Barack Obama and John McCain took their debate over the meaning of service to country into close quarters Thursday night, as the two appeared together at what was billed as a nonpartisan event timed to commemorate the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The presidential contenders took questions separately at the Service Nation Summit, a gathering of nonprofit and civic organizations. The format was similar to an event last month hosted by evangelical leader the Rev. Rick Warren. The candidates were on stage together for only a few moments. Sen. McCain clapped as his opponent shook hands with co-hosts Richard Stengel, managing editor of *Time* magazine and PBS's Judy Woodruff.

Sen. McCain, who took questions first based on a coin toss, insisted throughout his appearance that government wasn't the answer to service. "Government can't do it all, the essence of volunteerism starts at the grass-roots level," he said. "Let's not in any way stifle what's already going on, it's very, very successful in America," he said.

In contrast, Sen. Obama said government and the president should play a role in helping people toward community service, both in military and non-military roles. The Illinois senator pushed his proposals for a \$3.5 billion National Service Plan to sponsor volunteerism, a \$4,000 tuition credit to college students who agree to do community service after graduation, and a Clean Energy Corps.

"We need an all-hands-on-deck approach," he said. "I believe firmly that government should expand avenues of opportunity."

Separately, Sen. Obama met Thursday with former President Bill Clinton, who agreed to



Barack Obama met with former President Bill Clinton Thursday in Manhattan, hours before the Democratic presidential candidate and Republican hopeful John McCain debated the question of service to country at a forum.

stump for the Democratic candidate in battleground states in an effort to counter a surge in popularity for the Republican ticket.

Mr. Clinton plans to hold regular campaign events in both rural and urban areas of swing states, beginning Sept. 29 with a Florida tour, and he will host fund-raisers on Sen. Obama's behalf. "You can expect to see him on the campaign trail raising money and just generally doing what the Obama campaign asks of him," said Clinton spokesman Matt McKenna.

"We're putting him to work," Sen. Obama told reporters as the two men posed for pictures before the private lunch of take-out sandwiches and flatbread pizza at Mr. Clinton's Harlem office.

The Service Nation summit at Columbia University in New York gave Sens. McCain and Obama the opportunity to address a seemingly innocuous topic that has created rifts between the two candidates lately. While Sen. McCain typically equates the military with service, Sen. Obama speaks often about his years as a commu-

nity organizer. Republicans, including Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin, mocked community organizers at their recent convention.

"A small-town mayor is kind of like a community organizer only you have actual responsibilities," Gov. Palin said.

Sen. Obama Thursday called his job as a community organizer "the best education I ever had." Community organizing, he said, "taught me that ordinary people can do extraordinary things and that's something I want to encourage for every young person."

He acknowledged that being a mayor of a small town is hard work. "We yack in the Senate; they actually have to fill potholes, trim trees and make sure garbage is taken away."

Sen. McCain defended his running mate Thursday night. "Gov. Palin was responding to criticism of her experience as a mayor of a small town," he said. "Of course I respect community organizers."

Questioned about the tone of the campaign, Sen. McCain insisted he was running an issues-based campaign and put the

blame on his opponent for refusing to join him in town-hall meetings.

"First of all this is a rough business," the Arizona senator said. "Second of all, I think the tone of this whole campaign would've been very different if Sen. Obama had accepted my request for us to appear at town-hall meetings all over America." Sen. Obama has refused Sen. McCain's proposal, citing the opportunities voters will have at the three presidential debates to see the pair together.

Both candidates used the forum to reinforce their message of change and called for ending partisan bickering in Washington. "If they see us working together, the way we did for a period of time after 9/11, people will be drawn to politics," Sen. McCain said.

Sen. Obama said Sept. 11 "is a reminder not only of the terrible potential for evil in the world but it's also a reminder of what America does at the toughest times, which is to come together.... The question is how do we recreate that spirit not just during times of tragedy."

The New York Times

September 11, 2008

At Columbia, Students Mix Studies With Volunteer Work, for Credits

By MARC SANTORA

When Columbia University engineering students were asked to design a better walker for residents of Harlem's largest nursing home, they were not just helping elderly folks with hip problems have a better life through design — they were working for grades.

In an unusually aggressive push of the popular "service learning" concept, 500 engineering students will earn academic credit this year participating in projects around Harlem: designing swings for people in wheelchairs, building an environmentally sustainable greenhouse at a local high school and creating a trash can that can be used by the severely disabled, and others.

For the past six years, such service learning has been a graduation requirement for all of Columbia's engineering majors, in what experts say is one of just a handful of programs nationwide

to make mandatory what used to be known as volunteerism.

"We obviously want to create engineers and applied scientists who are technically adept, but also effective in this global society," said Jack McGourty, the associate dean of Columbia's Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. "We want to create students who are socially aware."

At Columbia, other academic departments are now considering integrating service into the curriculum, and community projects have become a key part of the university's sales pitch to prospective students.

The engineering department's efforts and broader service programs will be on display on Thursday as Columbia plays host to a service-themed forum with the major-party presidential candidates, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama, to mark the seventh anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

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At Columbia University, Students Mix Studies With Volunteer Work, for Credits

From Page B1

diversary of 9/11.

Gov. David A. Paterson, who is introducing the candidates for the evening forum at Lerner Hall, plans to use the occasion to announce the creation of a cabinet-level position focused on community service.

Columbia students plan to have recruiting booths on campus for a myriad of service organizations throughout the day.

"It will be an effort to say to the country that we need to make a quantum leap in calling upon our citizens to participate in national and community service throughout their lives to address some of our most pressing social problems," said Alan Khazel, founder of BeTheChange, a nonprofit group promoting service and part of the umbrella organization Service Nation, which helped organize the forum. "It is unique in my lifetime to have two candidates who have made the notion of service and civic engagement central parts of their candidacy."

Mr. Khazel said Mr. McCain, Republican of Arizona, and Mr. Obama, Democrat of Illinois, were driven by their own experiences, as well as the swelling interest in service among high school and college students. In a survey of 260,000 college freshmen in 2008, two out of three people said that it was important to work to help people in difficult circumstances — the highest rate in 26 years, said David Eisner, the head of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency tasked with promoting service.

He cited the 2001 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina, searing events that occurred during these students' formative years, as important factors. "We are at historical highs in terms of volunteering across the country,"

he said, noting that in the year after Katrina, 219,000 college students spent 2.2 million hours volunteering in New Orleans.

Mr. Khazel agreed, saying: "The millennial generation is the greatest serving generation since the greatest generation."

Some see a difference in motivation between this generation and its predecessors.

Mr. Eisner said that when he was appointed to his current position, he thought the best pitch to get students involved would be to tell them how it would help them get jobs or improve their skills.

"That was actually a turn-off," he said. "The two most compelling sales pitches were, you can change this world and you can have an adventure."

Just as critical was the type of service that was available. "They want to feel and see that they are making a change in other people's lives," Mr. Eisner said.

It is that desire that the engineering department is trying to tap into — while also opening students' eyes to the ways that engineering plays a critical role in daily life.

"It was one of the main reasons I came into the program," said Jonathan Bell, a 20-year-old junior majoring in engineering.

During his sophomore year, Mr. Bell belonged to a team that worked on making Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem more accessible for the disabled.

A swing they developed to be used by people in wheelchairs was so successful that the school is looking into getting it patented and manufactured.

"At the end of the day, I can look back and say, this is something I did, something real," Mr. Bell said.

Columbia is focusing most of its attention on Harlem, which is just north of its main campus in Morningside Heights.

This week, on a rainy Tuesday morning, half a dozen Columbia students made the short journey from Columbia to the Frederick Douglass Academy at 145th Street and Seventh Avenue to work with high school students on developing a self-sustaining



From left, Markova McPherson, Andrew O'Grady and Diddarh Subramony at Frederick Douglass Academy.

greenhouse.

Amashka Costello, a 16-year-old junior, was assembling a wind turbine that is to be placed on the roof to provide power.

"I had a slim idea of what a wind turbine did," she said. "But the challenge was not so much the construction. It was understanding how it would power

things in the greenhouse."

Amashka, who said she wanted to be an epidemiologist, said it was good to have the Columbia students on hand, not just to help with the project, but to talk to about getting into college.

Gregory Hodge, who has been the principal at Frederick Douglass for 13 years, said the pro-

gram exposed his students to influences they might otherwise never come across.

"In many inner-city schools, the kids never get to study engineering because the schools don't offer it," he said, adding that engineering gave students a chance to see problem-solving first hand. "Everywhere you look you see engineering."

One of the best ways to draw students in, he said, is robotics.

Although it does not count toward the mandatory engineering service requirement, hundreds of Columbia students have helped schools in Harlem develop teams to compete in robotic competitions over the past five years.

When Frederick Douglass beat Bronx High School of Science three years ago, Mr. Hodge said, it was "empowering."

Since the school partnered with Columbia, he said, there have been tangible results: average SAT scores have risen roughly 200 points — taking the new scoring methods into account — since Columbia students began a tutoring program called "Let's Get Ready" five years ago.

And now Frederick Douglass

students are coaching elementary students in their neighborhood in their own robotics league.

Maureen Curly, the president of Campus Compact, which was founded 22 years ago to encourage service on college campuses, said that students who were helped by others were also more likely to volunteer themselves.

"They come into college with an expectation of being involved in service learning," she said, noting a large growth in such programs, with Tulane University in New Orleans becoming the first to require service work for all students starting with this year's freshmen.

For Morris Michael, 18, a sophomore in Columbia's engineering department, the effort is perhaps even more personal than usual. He was one of the so-called Lost Boys of Sudan, displaced in a civil war there.

"I have spent my life running around," he said. "And I have lived like a refugee wherever I am. It was community service — someone reaching out to me — that allowed me to be here today. So community service defines me. I am community service."

ONLINE: PROMOTING SERVICE

Links to information about service learning programs and videos showing projects at Columbia University:

nytimes.com/syrragion

The New York Times

September 12, 2008

Candidates Take Break, of Sorts, to Mark 7th Anniversary of the 9/11 Attacks

By PATRICK HEALY

After days of sharp attacks against each other, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama suspended all political combat on Thursday, including television commercials, and instead made joint visits to ground zero and a forum on public service in New York to mark the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

At one point, Mr. McCain, who spoke first at the nighttime forum at Columbia University, defended his running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska, for recently making fun of Mr. Obama's work years ago as a community organizer. He said that Ms. Palin made her comment in reaction to Democratic attacks on her relative inexperience as a first-term governor and a former mayor of a small Alaskan town, Wasilla.

"Of course I respect community organizers, of course I respect people who serve their community, and Senator Obama's record there is outstanding," said Mr. McCain, the Republican presidential nominee, before adding, "I think a small-town mayor has very great responsibilities."

Mr. Obama, the Democratic presidential nominee, said in his appearance that while he deeply respected mayors, "I was surprised by several remarks around community organizing, and belittling it."

"It taught me," he said, "that ordinary people can do extraordinary things, when they're given a chance and brought together. I want every young person to recognize that they will not fulfill their potential until they hitch their wagon to something bigger."

Both candidates did agree on a politically divisive issue: They urged universities like Columbia to reverse Vietnam-era bans on Reserved Officers Training Corps activities. Some schools continue the bans in reaction to the military's policy on gays and lesbians — a policy that Mr. Obama has pledged to lift and that Mr. McCain has said he would continue.

"Shouldn't the students here be exposed to the attractiveness

Larry Rohter contributed reporting.



Senators John McCain and Barack Obama with Cindy McCain and Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York at the World Trade Center site on Thursday.

of serving in the military, particularly as officers?" said Mr. McCain, of Arizona, who attended the United States Naval Academy. "I would hope that these universities would re-examine that policy."

Asked if Columbia, his alma mater, should reinstate ROTC, Mr. Obama said: "I think we've made a mistake on that. I recognize that there are students here who have differences in terms of military policy, but the notion that young people here at Columbia aren't offered a choice or an option in participating in military service is a mistake."

Outside of the forum, on the steps of Low Memorial Library, students cheered loudly when Mr. McCain talked about Columbia's unwillingness to let ROTC

on campus and then booed when he mentioned the option of serving as a military officer. When Mr. Obama proposed allowing ROTC back on campus, meanwhile, the students remained largely silent.

While Mr. Obama made no campaign appearances on Thursday, he did not entirely halt campaign-related activities: He shared a 90-minute lunch in Harlem with former President Bill Clinton, intended, in part, to soothe any ill will left from the bitter Democratic primary campaign between Mr. Obama and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York.

Advisers to the two men said afterward that the meeting was cordial and that Mr. Clinton urged Mr. Obama, of Illinois, to

keep his political message focused on economic issues.

The meeting took place in Mr. Clinton's 14th-floor office on 125th Street, and they took a few questions from reporters. Mr. Clinton said he had agreed to do "a substantial number of things" on behalf of Mr. Obama this fall, and would hit the campaign trail as soon as his Global Initiative conference concluded on Sept. 26.

"We're putting him to work," Mr. Obama joked.

Asked for his opinion about the state of the presidential race, Mr. Clinton replied, "I predict that Senator Obama will win and win handily."

"There you go," Mr. Obama said. "You can take it from the president of the United States. He knows a little something about

politics."

Yet the main event of the day was a moment when no words were exchanged: It was the image, rather, of Mr. Obama and Mr. McCain walking shoulder-to-shoulder down a long ramp at ground zero.

The two appeared somber throughout their 15 minutes together, chatting briefly on a reflecting pool. They stood silent for a few moments, each clasping his own fingers.

At the end of their 15-minute public detente, Mr. McCain and Mr. Obama shook hands, and Mr. McCain could be heard saying,

"All right, sir, see you soon."

The idea for the rivals to appear together at ground zero originated last week during a telephone conversation between the men. When Mr. Obama called Mr. McCain to congratulate him on accepting the presidential nomination, aides to both men said, Mr. Obama proposed the idea and Mr. McCain accepted.

The breather from minute-by-minute politicking comes after several days of intensifying tension and attacks between the McCain and Obama camps, in large part over Ms. Palin's leadership style and record. She is under scrutiny for her inconsistent positions on Congressional earmarks and her motives in dismissing the Alaska public safety commissioner, among other things.

The New York Times

September 13, 2008

The Spirit of Public Service

At a forum at Columbia University marking the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, John McCain and Barack Obama took a break from their increasingly harsh presidential contest to speak with genuine passion about a worthy cause they both share: engaging more Americans in national service.

What was striking about their back-to-back interviews, conducted by Judy Woodruff of PBS's "NewsHour With Jim Lehrer" and Richard Stengel of Time magazine before 1,000 people in Columbia's Lerner Hall, was their respectful tone. At one point, Mr. McCain even expressed admiration for Mr. Obama's work done years ago as a community organizer, departing from disparaging remarks made by his running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska, at the Republican convention. Their overlapping views were no less remarkable.

Both candidates agreed that President Bush erred following 9/11 by asking Americans to go shopping rather than making a serious effort to channel the nation's

aroused sense of patriotism to sustained and productive volunteer activities. They pledged to make a new call to public service a hallmark of the next presidency.

Giving concrete expression to those pledges, the candidates are among the co-sponsors of a promising piece of legislation introduced on Friday in the Senate. Drafted by Senators Edward Kennedy, the Massachusetts Democrat, and Orrin Hatch, Republican of Utah, the bill would build on the success of AmeriCorps.

It would expand the number of full-time and half-time national service volunteers eligible for a modest educational voucher at the end of an intensive year of work by 175,000, bringing the total to 250,000. The new slots would be devoted to meeting public needs in areas such as strengthening schools, improving health care for low-income communities, cleaning up parks and aiding efforts to boost energy efficiency.

The bipartisan backing for this initiative strikes a hopeful chord.

The Washington Post

September 12, 2008

Candidates Promise National-Service Initiatives

By Michael D. Shear and Jonathan Weisman

NEW YORK, Sept. 11 -- Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain pledged to inspire a new commitment to public service Thursday, as they set aside the rancor of an intense presidential campaign during a two-hour forum on the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

"The best way to commemorate, and the best way to show our appreciation for and our love and sympathy for the families of those who have sacrificed, is to serve our country," McCain said.

The question, Obama said later, is how to recreate the spirit of service "not just during times of tragedy, not just during 9/11, but how do we honor those who died, those who sacrificed . . . how do we honor them every day?"

In back-to-back conversations largely devoid of partisan recrimination, McCain (R-Ariz.) and Obama (D-Ill.) each urged Americans to honor the victims of the country's worst terrorist attack by dedicating their time to service through teaching, the military, the Peace Corps and faith-based volunteering.

But the reality of Campaign 2008 -- a contest that has turned particularly ugly in recent days -- was never far from the surface as both men were challenged by the questioners to explain the often angry tone of their competition for the White House.

McCain acknowledged the "rough" nature of the campaign and praised Obama's service as a community organizer -- something his running mate, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, had mocked during her speech to the Republican national convention.

McCain defended Palin, saying she had been responding to a barrage of criticism of her own experience as a small-town mayor. But he appeared to chide his supporters who derided Obama's efforts as a young man.

"Of course I respect community organizers. Of course I respect people who serve their community," he said.

Obama did not disparage Palin's service as mayor of Wasilla, praising small-town mayors and noting the presence of many at the Democratic National Convention in Denver last month. "We yak in the Senate. They actually have to fill potholes, trim trees and make sure the garbage is collected," Obama said.

He expressed only "surprise" at Palin's decision to belittle his work as a community organizer, displaying no anger and keeping the sometimes subdued tone that some Democrats have argued he must shed if he is to rally Democrats and appeal to voters waiting for him to display his passion.

Obama called McCain's service in the military "legendary," adding that "one of the wonderful things about this campaign is his ability to share that story."

Some of the more lighthearted moments of the evening came when each man was asked if he would create a Cabinet-level position on public service -- and then appoint the other to it.

McCain chuckled and said yes before adding that he believes there are too many Cabinet secretaries already.

Obama laughed and said, "If this is the deal he wants to make right now, I'm committed to appointing him." Asked whether he would serve in McCain's Cabinet, Obama said, "We've got a little work to do before we get to that."

McCain also drew laughter when he was asked about encouraging older Americans to participate in public service. They are "living longer and they're more vigorous," he said. "I'm here to tell you that's a fact."

The 72-year-old candidate then cocked his head and pretended to fall asleep for a moment, letting out a "Zzz."

While the tone of the event was civil, McCain and Obama did outline differing roles for the federal government in fostering volunteerism.

McCain stressed that the government should not compel service, argued the private sector should take a larger role in disaster relief and said he hoped private companies would allow their employees to volunteer in the community. He declined to put a price tag on his service initiative.

"When you compel someone to do something, you basically are in contradiction to the basic principle of people wanting to serve," he said, adding later that he would sign a bipartisan Senate bill that would expand government support of service programs.

Obama, who has proposed a \$3.5 billion service program, emphasized his belief that government and the private sector could work together to augment each other's efforts.

The solution, he said, is to offer people more ways to volunteer, and he said the government needs to do more to encourage that. "The government is going to have a role," he said.

"My sense is the country yearns for that," Obama said. "It's hungry for it. What has been missing is a president in the White House that taps into that yearning in a serious way. . . . The choices we offer young people today are too constraining."

Each made a bit of news in the forums.

McCain pledged to sign a bipartisan bill on national service that is being introduced Friday, prompting applause from the audience in Columbia University's Boone Arledge Auditorium at Lerner Hall.

Obama said he thought it was wrong for Columbia -- his alma mater -- and other colleges to turn away the Reserve Officers' Training Corps because of differences some students have on military policy.

"I think we've made a mistake on that," he said. "We should have an honest debate while still having opportunities to serve."

Last month, Jay Winuk, a co-founder of MyGoodDeed.org and the brother of a Sept. 11 victim, wrote to both campaigns, asking them to set aside campaigning to participate in the event.

Winuk's younger brother Glenn was a partner at the law firm Holland and Knight and a volunteer firefighter in Jericho, Long Island, who died after rushing into the World Trade Center to provide assistance on 9/11.

Earlier in the day, the presidential rivals made a joint appearance at Ground Zero to honor the victims of the terrorist attacks. They chatted as they walked side by side down a long ramp to the site, where they talked with family members of 9/11 victims as well as first responders before laying roses in the reflecting pool commemorating the attacks.

Both men had promised to take a break from politics for a day, suspending all television commercials and other campaign activities. A day after a barrage of attack e-mails from both sides poured into reporters' inboxes, there were none from McCain, Obama or their respective political parties.

"Today, we honor the memory of the lives that were lost on September 11, 2001, and grieve with the families and friends who lost someone they loved in New York City, at the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. We will never forget those who died," a statement from Obama read.

In the morning, McCain paid a somber visit to the field where United Flight 93 crashed, marking the moment that passengers overwhelmed terrorists onboard the ill-fated airliner.

The evening forum, in which both men took questions for roughly an hour from Time magazine's managing editor, Richard Stengel, and PBS "NewsHour" senior correspondent and political editor Judy Woodruff, was organized by ServiceNation, a

group dedicated to increasing service by Americans, and hosted by Time and CNN. McCain went first, and Obama was allowed to listen, organizers said, because they would not be asked identical questions.

While Obama and McCain put aside their attacks, the Illinois Democrat continued his rapprochement with former president Bill Clinton with a long, private get-together in Harlem. Over sandwiches and pizza, the two chitchatted about Clinton's commute from suburban Chappaqua, the work of the former president's international charitable organization and the presidential campaign.

"I've agreed to do a substantial number of things" for Obama, Clinton told a small pool of reporters. "Whatever I'm asked to do."

"We're putting him to work," Obama chimed in.

Los Angeles Times

September 12, 2008

**John McCain, Barack Obama pause to praise one another at forum
At Columbia University, McCain praises his rival's work as a community organizer.
Obama returns the compliment.**

By Maeve Reston



NEW YORK -- On a day when the presidential candidates put aside politics to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Republican nominee John McCain distanced himself from comments made by his running mate, Sarah Palin, who derided Democratic rival Barack Obama's service as a community organizer.

The issue became a flash point during the Republican convention last week when Palin contrasted her background as a small-town mayor with Obama's post-college job helping public housing tenants and the unemployed on the South Side of Chicago.

John McCain A-Z Barack Obama A-Z She drew appreciative laughter when she said her work as mayor of Wasilla, Alaska, was "sort of like a community organizer, except that you actually have responsibilities."

McCain backed away from those comments Thursday at a forum on service at Columbia University, where he and Obama appeared for back-to-back interviews.

"I praise anyone who serves this nation in capacities that, frankly, we all know could have been far more financially rewarding to individuals than doing what they did," McCain said.

Pressed by moderator Judy Woodruff of PBS about whether he condoned Palin's tone, McCain insisted he respected the work of community organizers and went so far as to say he would consider asking Obama to oversee national service efforts in a McCain administration.

"Sen. Obama's record there is outstanding," McCain said of his rival's work as a community organizer.

Acknowledging that the tone of the presidential campaign had been "rough," he praised Obama for inspiring "millions of Americans who otherwise wouldn't be involved in the political process."

Obama returned the compliment in the next hour, lauding McCain's service as a Navy pilot. He said he had been surprised by the criticism of his work on the South Side of Chicago.

"I think about the choice I made as a 23-, 24-year-old to spend three years working with churches to help people help themselves," Obama said. "No insult to the president of this fine institution, but it's the best education I ever had."

The moderators asked Obama, in turn, if Democrats had belittled Palin's experience as a former small-town mayor. Palin is now the governor of Alaska.

After McCain picked Palin, Obama's spokesman, Bill Burton, said, "Today, John McCain put the former mayor of a town of 9,000 with zero foreign policy experience a heartbeat away from the presidency."

Obama spoke up for mayors everywhere, saying their job is among the toughest in the country.

"While we yak in the Senate, they actually have to fill potholes and trim trees and make sure the garbage is taken away," he said.

The congenial tone of the forum, at which the two candidates shook hands and hugged briefly on stage at the university's Lerner Hall, provided a fleeting pause in the rancorous debate on the campaign trail.

Both held to their pledge, which they made in a joint statement last week, to avoid politics and display unity in honor of the lives lost on Sept. 11, 2001. Before participating in the interviews, part of a weeklong "Service Nation Summit" on community and national service, McCain and Obama shared a moment of prayer and reflection during a visit to ground zero.

They were accompanied by McCain's wife, Cindy, and New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. They greeted one another with a handshake and barely spoke as they walked down the long ramp lined with flags from across the world to the reflecting pool at ground zero.

Neither candidate campaigned Thursday. Obama had lunch with former President Clinton at his office in Harlem. McCain attended a memorial in Shanksville, Pa., for those aboard United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed into a field after passengers are believed to have overpowered the hijackers.

For all the venom passing between the campaigns, each man seemed willing to name the other to a Cabinet post. Whether the loser would accept was not so clear.

Asked if, as president, he would put McCain in charge of a Cabinet position devoted to national service, Obama, enjoying the question, said, "If this is the deal he wants to make right now, I am committed to appointing him to my Cabinet."

Would he accept the same job under President McCain?

"We've got a little work to do before we get to that point," Obama said.

The Boston Globe

September 12, 2008



McCain, Obama Pause on Anniversary of 9/11

(Mark Wilson/Globe Staff)

Stilling the Rancor for a Day of Honor

By Susan Milligan and Bryan Bender

NEW YORK - John McCain and Barack Obama, rivals in an increasingly bitter presidential race, found common ground yesterday at ground zero, temporarily setting aside political differences to jointly honor the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks and make a unified call for national service.

In a somber event that belied the vitriol exchanged by the two campaigns in recent days, Obama and McCain walked side by side down a long path to a reflecting pool in the middle of an ominously empty space where the World Trade Center once stood. With Cindy McCain and Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York behind them, each placed a rose given them by a victim's family member - a pink bloom by Obama, a yellow one by McCain - into the pool, which began the day empty but was overflowing with flowers by the time they arrived.

With heads bowed, the two candidates honored the dead from the nation's worst terrorist attack and then together commiserated with first responders and victims' family members who attended the brief afternoon ceremony. There were no speeches, no charges and counter-charges, or scathing e-mails. In stead, there were only handshakes, hugs, and softly spoken "thank you's."

McCain and Obama chatted with each other as they walked, and appeared to share a laugh at one point. Before they parted, Obama briefly slung his arm around McCain, who returned the Illinois senator's half-embrace. At the conclusion of their 30-minute visit to the site, McCain and Obama wished each other luck.

The event was an unusual display of collegiality for candidates who have made bipartisanship a theme of their campaigns, but have also traded sharp accusations as the race had grown closer. The day was also in stark contrast to Sept. 11, 2004, during the only other presidential campaign since the attacks, when President Bush attended memorials in Washington, D.C., and Democratic nominee Senator John F. Kerry attended one in Boston.

"We will never forget those who died," Obama said in a statement released before the event. "On 9/11, Americans across our great country came together to stand with the families of the victims, to donate blood, to give to charity, and to say a prayer for our country. Let us renew that spirit of service and that sense of common purpose."

McCain, at a ceremony earlier in Shanksville, Pa., where United Flight 93 went down, read a brief statement honoring the heroism of the passengers who stopped the hijacked airliner from reaching its target, likely the US Capitol, where he works.

"I have witnessed great courage and sacrifice for America's sake, but none greater than the sacrifice of those good people who grasped the gravity of the moment, understood the threat, and decided to fight back at the cost of their lives," McCain said. "I am in awe of it as much as I am in debt of it. God bless their souls."

The two political opponents - who had agreed to suspend campaigning and TV advertising out of respect for the victims - also made separate appearances in the evening at Columbia University to attend a Servication forum promoting national service, a theme for both.

McCain underscored the value of national service, focusing heavily on military service. But he defended his running mate, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, for her comments dismissing Obama's work as a community organizer in his early 20s. Palin said in her vice presidential acceptance speech that "I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a community organizer except that you have actual responsibilities."

McCain said last night that Obama's community service work was "outstanding," but did not chastise Palin, saying she was "referring to the criticism of her job as mayor of a small town," and added that the tone of the campaign might have been more civil if Obama had accepted his demand to hold a series of joint town-hall meetings - an evening indication that the campaign would revert to its combative tone today.

Obama, asked about the same remark, said he was "surprised" to hear the "belittling" of community organizing, a job he said was "the best education I ever had." He did not mention Palin by name, and said his campaign was not denigrating small-town mayors by questioning Palin's experience to be vice president.

"Mayors have the toughest jobs," Obama said. "We yack in the Senate," while mayor have to "fill potholes" and make sure garbage is picked up, he said.

The two candidates were politely divided over how much the federal government should get involved in promoting - and paying for - national service.

Asked if he would sign, as president, the sweeping national service bill set to be introduced today by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, and Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, a Republican, McCain said yes; Obama, who is expected to sign on as a cosponsor of the Kennedy-Hatch bill, also praised the approach.

But McCain cautioned that he did not want government to be paying for work private organizations could do on their own. The Kennedy-Hatch bill would provide \$5 billion over five years in federal funding for such programs.

Obama said government was necessary to both inspire and help seed such programs. "Government's going to have a role," he said, such as providing college tuition help to young people who agree to do community service after they finish their educations.

Obama won just tepid applause when he said Columbia and other universities should not exclude ROTC for students who want to pursue military careers, saying "I think it is a mistake" to keep them off campus.

Both Obama and McCain largely avoided criticizing the other at the Servicemembers event, but there were signs of the tension between the two campaigns.

Asked if he would put Obama in his Cabinet, McCain said "yes," quickly - but chuckled as he said it. Obama, too, laughed at the question. "I think we have a lot of work to do" before such an offer would be made, he said.

The Boston Globe

September 12, 2008

National Service, Not Lip Service

GLOBE EDITORIAL

ONE THING Barack Obama and John McCain agree on is that each would make a new call for citizen service central to his presidency. Indeed, last night the two contenders were scheduled to appear (separately) at a televised forum to promote greater civic engagement as part of a Sept. 11 remembrance called the ServiceNation Summit. Done correctly, national service slices across partisan lines, appealing both to the self-reliant "thousand points of light" volunteerism favored by conservatives and the communitarian "it takes a village" ideals that animate liberals.

Today, Washington's favorite bipartisan couple, Ted Kennedy and Republican Orrin Hatch of Utah, will file legislation to dramatically increase opportunities for Americans to volunteer, making it as integral a part of citizenship as voting. Using the model of AmeriCorps, the bill establishes five new "corps" for volunteers, including areas such as international service, disaster relief, and a green energy corps, as well as the traditional focus on education and poverty.

The bill creates tax breaks for businesses that give workers paid time off for service, and sets up "encore fellowships" for baby boomers seeking alternative retirements. In all, the goal is to expand the number of Americans who do regular service work to 100 million from the current 61 million.

Kennedy is an ideal champion of this cause, since he wrote the first National Community Service Act in 1989, and since so many successful service models, from City Year to Citizen Schools, started in Boston. Alan Khazei, co-founder of City Year, who now runs the national group Be the Change, said volunteerism needs to be woven more intricately into the national fabric. "This is really going to bring it to scale," he said.

Vast majorities of Americans say they want to volunteer but don't know where to start. It is this social infrastructure that national legislation can fund and support - even though some may feel government involvement in volunteerism is a contradiction in terms. Someone needs to train and coordinate volunteers, and get them linked to projects that match their interests and skills. And the bill would provide grants to volunteer start-ups, encouraging the kind of social entrepreneurship that created City Year, and measuring their performance.

To get people to take the first step, ServiceNation is sponsoring a National Day of Action on Sept. 27, with over 2,300 service events scheduled across the country; 109 within 50 miles of Boston alone.

After Sept. 11, most Americans yearned to be tapped to do something larger for their country. It's not too late to start.

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

September 12, 2008

**McCain, Obama pledge to boost US volunteerism
Obama would expand federal service efforts; McCain would rely more on private sector.**

Alexandra Marks



GOP presidential candidate John McCain (left) greets his Democratic opponent, Barack Obama, at a forum on national service at Columbia University on Sept. 11. (Stephan Savoia/AP)

New York

Barack Obama wants to make government “cool again” to encourage young people to serve and leverage volunteerism in communities across the country. John McCain wants to “inspire” people to serve a cause “greater than their own self interest” and encourage businesses to support employees who do public service.

In a rare congenial evening during this increasingly acrimonious campaign, the two presidential candidates agreed that the American heritage of volunteerism and selfless service is part of what makes this country “exceptional.”

Both also pledged to make the encouragement of national service one of their top priorities if elected and to expand AmeriCorps, the federal government’s community-service program.

Each even went so far as to pledge to appoint the other to a “cabinet level” position to oversee national service, although Senator McCain then hedged about creating yet another cabinet level position.

This unusual show of unity came Thursday evening, the seventh anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks at a summit at Columbia University in New York. It was sponsored by ServiceNation, a coalition of groups dedicated to restoring what it calls the nation’s “great tradition of citizen service.” The movement was inspired by the families of the 9/11 victims. They are determined that the day be remembered not just for the loss of lives and tragedy when the Twin Towers came down, but also for the extraordinary outpouring of humanity that followed.

“Flash back to how you felt in the days and weeks after 9/11,” says Jay Winuk, who lost his brother Glenn and is now the vice president and cofounder of MyGoodDeed.org. “As a nation, we need to embrace that and put it to good and sustained use.”

And so to kick off a two-day summit dedicated to “an America that is ruggedly idealistic, compassionate, and above all committed to the idea of shared sacrifice” – in the words of the ServiceNation’s website – it brought together the two men who want to lead the country.

Each was eager to talk about his own life of service – in the military and in communities hard hit by job losses. And each praised the other’s history of service. McCain even called Senator Obama’s “record there outstanding,” despite repeated efforts by his campaign to disparage “community organizing.”

Then each laid out very different visions for how they’d change the country to encourage a renaissance of selflessness.

Obama pledged that “service” will be central to his administration. He’d encourage young people to take up careers in public service and the government (thus, making it “cool.”) He’d do it in part by passing a \$3.5 billion national-service program that would expand AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps as well as provide tax credits of up to \$4,000 year to help underwrite college educations in exchange for public service. He’d also significantly expand the all-volunteer army, beef up veterans’ educational and health benefits, and create a kind of civilian corps that could take over some of the Army’s current civic tasks in war-torn regions around the world.

In explaining his goal, Obama recalled the outpouring of “patriotism, emotion, volunteerism, and a desire for service” that occurred after 9/11.

“The question is: How do we recreate that spirit – not just during times of tragedy, not just during 9/11 – how do we honor those who died and those who sacrificed – the firefighters and police officers ... every day?” Obama told a crowd of about a thousand at a packed Columbia University auditorium. Outside, thousands of students watched on a huge screen. “The country yearns for that, the country is hungry for it, and what has been missing is a president and a White House that taps into that in a serious way.”

McCain, too, says “a call to serve” would be central in his administration. In the aftermath of 9/11, he says he would have tapped the outpouring of energy by creating a “concrete action plan,” such as urging people to join neighborhood watch groups. He’d also beef up the volunteer Army and encourage young people to serve. In a surprising criticism of Columbia University, he chastised it for not allowing ROTC on campus.

“The best way to commemorate and to show our appreciation – and love and sympathy for the families of those who’ve sacrificed – is to serve our country. That way we can assure their families it will never happen again,” he says. “It’s also probably the best way ... to keep their memory alive by protecting the lives of those fellow citizens who were unable to experience it first hand but are in danger.”

McCain would also expand the Corporation for National and Community Service, which administers AmeriCorps and the nation’s handful of other volunteer programs. He says he would “be glad to spend some money,” but he wasn’t specific and made it clear he’d rely primarily on private industry and volunteer organizations to bolster volunteerism.

The Washington Times

September 9, 2008

BRIDGELAND: Volunteer America A Renewed Call

John M. Bridgeland

OP-ED:

President Bush speaks to an audience inside the Old Executive Office Building as he introduced the new Director of the Peace Corps, Gaddi Vasquez, in Washington on Friday, February 15, 2002. (Gerald Herbert / The Washington Times)

Presidential elections make for good political theater, and a myth has been perpetuated that President Bush simply told the nation to go shopping after September 11. In the face of terrorist attacks, planes grounded for 23 days at Reagan Washington National Airport, markets closed for a full week and an uncertain economy, the president encouraged Americans to get our country moving again. But he also asked Americans to serve their country, again and again, and created innovative initiatives the next president should embrace.

The citizen reflex after September 11 was instantaneous. Firefighters wrote their Social Security numbers on their arms as they entered burning buildings to save lives. Americans from Seattle drove to New York to offer comfort and meals to strangers; and partisan bickering in Congress stopped.

Moments of national crisis require national leadership, and Mr. Bush seized it. Shortly after September 11, he addressed a joint session of Congress and held a Rose Garden ceremony to urge Americans to support relief efforts in New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia. He asked schoolchildren to raise and donate dollars to America's Fund for Afghan Children, a 21st century equivalent of FDR's March of Dimes. He also announced a partnership between schools in America and the Muslim world.

In the January 2002 State of the Union, the president said "we want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self" and said Americans "began to think less of the goods we can accumulate, and more about the good we can do." He asked every American to give two years of service over their lifetimes and created the USA Freedom Corps to provide more opportunities to serve their neighbors and nation. He devoted 28 presidential events to this cause over the next few years.

Americans responded. Volunteering climbed from 59.8 million Americans in the first year after September 11 to 65.4 million volunteers four years later, before leveling off at 61 million last year. Under Freedom Corps, the AmeriCorps national service program grew, after a rocky start and battle with Congress, from 50,000 to 75,000 members and leveraged another 1.7 million volunteers to build and repair homes, tutor and mentor children, and clean up rivers and parks. The Peace Corps grew to its highest levels in 37 years, opened or reopened programs in 13 countries, and deployed volunteers to work on HIV/AIDS in Africa and disaster response after the Tsunami.

Interest in Peace Corps outpaced slots so a new Volunteers for Prosperity was created, mobilizing 41,000 skilled professionals last year alone to work on urgent needs such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and clean water for the poor. A new Citizen Corps for homeland security recruited nearly 1 million volunteers for police and fire departments, community emergency response teams, and a Medical Reserve Corps. Businesses, faith-based institutions and schools ramped up volunteering to solve problems in local communities.

Remarkably, after the war became divisive, the call to service grew quiet even though such reminders to serve on the home front should be central in a time of war. But the initiative was in place and historians would compare President Bush's Freedom Corps to Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps. What will be its fate? Will the next president keep the Freedom Corps - both the White House national service council and office to coordinate service policy across government and give it top presidential priority? Will the next president do what Mr. Bush did - honor and cross party lines to support national service programs started by other presidents, create new programs to meet the needs of the times, and support traditional volunteering? Such leadership would require a bow to John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush, Franklin Roosevelt and George W. Bush. Will the next president press a reluctant Congress to authorize and fund these efforts? And will he repeat the call to service throughout his term?

Fortunately, the next president will have a running start. The ServiceNation Summit in New York City on Sept. 11 and 12 - featuring the presidential candidates, veteran legislators with lifetimes of service and iconic Americans with institutional power - will unveil a bold service agenda with the support of 110 organizations reaching 100 million Americans. Let's hope we can seize this moment, move beyond partisanship, and fulfill the promise of a culture whose roots of service run deep.

John M. Bridgeland is CEO of Civic Enterprises and a co-organizer of the ServiceNation Summit. He also is former director of USA Freedom Corps.



September 11, 2008

What We Can Do

By Richard Stengel, Managing Editor

America is the original DIY culture--Do It Yourself. From the first settlement at Jamestown through today, we have been doing things ourselves.

Last year I wrote a cover story called "The Case for National Service." Now that the argument has been made, this year we're asking, How do we help execute that vision? Well, by doing it yourself--except in this case, we have hundreds of partners.

We became a co-sponsor this year of a national-service summit whose mission is to make national service a reality for all Americans. We partnered with ServiceNation, a new coalition of 110 organizations dedicated to volunteer service, to convene a two-day gathering in New York City, on Sept. 11 and 12, that we're confident will have a lasting significance.

The thinking behind the event was simple: Let's bring together scores of thinkers and leaders in government, business and the nonprofit world to trade ideas for solving our greatest challenges through national service and civic engagement. Our partners have been formidable. The organizers include Alan Khazei of Be the Change, Michael Brown of City Year and John Bridgeland of Civic Enterprises. Joining me as co-chairs are Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York; Alma Powell, who runs America's Promise Alliance; Bill Novelli, CEO of AARP; Laysha Ward, president of Community Relations and the Target Foundation; and Caroline Kennedy, whose father framed the mission best: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

It was decided that Day One--on Sept. 11, the anniversary of one of the greatest challenges this country has faced--would be devoted to the ServiceNation Presidential Candidates Forum at Columbia University. In their first joint appearance since becoming the official nominees of their parties, John McCain and Barack Obama would separately and in turn discuss their vision for national service--and how they would try to inspire the country with that vision. It is a tribute to their commitment to this issue that they both agreed to participate in the event with only seven weeks to go before Election Day. In back-to-back interviews, they agreed to answer questions presented by me and PBS political editor Judy Woodruff--and by you, via questions submitted online in the days before the event.

This is our second annual national-service special issue. Put together by a team that includes Jeremy Caplan, Laura Fitzpatrick, D.W. Pine and Julie Rawe, it contains 21 ways Americans can volunteer--right now. Bridgeland and John DiIulio Jr. suggest rethinking the kind of service we associate with Christmas. Colin Powell and Arnold Schwarzenegger each explain the passion they have for creating structures that foster civic engagement. And Ted Kennedy and Orrin Hatch talk about their Senate bill aimed at promoting national service.

We call it "21 Ways to Serve America." This is about practice, not theory. As I said, America is a do-it-yourself culture. And at Time we believe that even fixing the world can be a DIY project.

Richard Stengel, MANAGING EDITOR

People

September 12, 2008

On 9/11, Usher, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Tobey Maguire Give Back

By Jessica Gold Haralson

Reporting by LIZ MCNEIL



Photo by: Gus Ruelas / AP; Evan Agostini / Getty

Celebrities and politicians put aside their differences Thursday for a good cause.

Although they're rival presidential candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama came together for the ServiceNation forum, a non-partisan event at Columbia University. ServiceNation encourages Americans to get involved in public service. Both candidates agreed to back away from political attacks, instead discussing volunteerism, military service, and teaching.

The stars came out in full force: Usher, Leonardo DiCaprio, Glenn Close and Tobey Maguire all showed for the nationally-televised summit.

At the opening of the program, Usher was announced as a new youth advocate for Service Nation. At least one of the candidates is a big Usher fan: McCain recently told PEOPLE that he met the singer on the set of Saturday Night Live and that he "got to like him a lot."

According to his rep, DiCaprio was impressed by the call to national service.

Maguire gave a speech about the importance of service. Appearing right after New York Governor David Paterson, Maguire said the tragedy of 9/11 inspired him to give back.

"While I may play a superhero on the big screen, we all know who our real American heroes are," said the Spider-Man star. Some people in the 1,000-member audience were related to 9/11 victims.

Jon Bon Jovi will give the keynote speech today for the two-day summit.

September 15, 2008

ServiceNation Brings Out McCain, Obama and New York Youth

Lynne Glasner

The newly branded S-Generation was officially launched at the ServiceNation summit, an event that included both presidential hopefuls John McCain and Barack Obama as well as a long list of luminaries from both the public and private sectors. The event was specifically constructed to be nonpartisan and great efforts were made to keep it that way. In spite of the ugly turns in the recent days of presidential campaigning, both men had agreed to keep their remarks focused on the theme of service and to refrain from either promoting their candidacy or criticizing one another at the Thursday evening kick-off planned for the seventh anniversary of the 911 attacks.

So what is ServiceNation and why was it that at least some of the students on the Columbia campus where the event was held had never heard of it and didn't know who was sponsoring the event?

ServiceNation is the Hunger Project with teeth and without the baggage of a guru for leadership. The Hunger Project was begun 30 years ago with a focus on the "me" generation, selling the concept of ending world hunger in 20 years. ServiceNation was drafted a few months ago with the concept of "we," uniting to solve the problems facing the country by promoting the notion of service. ServiceNation in itself is not a service group; it is a campaign that has brought together and enlisted a cross-section of politicians, CEOs, and VIPs in the world of nonprofits. The plan has far-reaching and idealistic goals: "to expand opportunities for Americans to serve our nation at every life-stage, making service a core value of American citizenship and a problem-solving force in American society."

ServiceNation is an attempt to tap into what it sees as people's yearning to be part of something "bigger," and at the same time use that energy as a resource to help solve the problems we face. So how is that different from Obama's message of change and his commitment to community service or McCain's old references to devotion to a "cause greater than" oneself? The two candidates squared off to answer questions that showed where they diverged.

There's no question that the country faces great challenges, some might say greater than any we've ever had before. And the divisiveness and bitterness felt across both sides of the aisle are hard to bridge. Can a stellar group of leaders change the tide of the troubled waters or are they, too, building a Bridge to Nowhere? Is the idea of service for all something whose time has come, even if it's not mandatory? Can we really create a 21st

century CCC in which volunteer groups rebuild not just the infrastructure of a given community, but the spirit of community which is currently separated by a color war worthy of adolescents in summer camp?

These are the challenges that ServiceNation is posed to address and their answer is a repeat of Obama's mantra: Yes we can. The organization wants to capture the hearts and minds of Americans in a can-do spirit that they think will be infectious. By enlisting broad, bipartisan support across all sectors of the spectrum, they anticipate wide support and funding.

While the lion's share of those who will be targeted to serve is the 18-26 year-old demographic -- the new S-Generation -- everyone will have a role and will be encouraged to participate. Over 100 service organizations have already signed on and the list is growing. AARP is a major sponsor and the buzz about the soon-to-retire baby boomers as another core demographic illustrates the scope of talent that will be available to further the cause.

The theme seemed to play well in Friday's summit audience that was filled with either politicians or people involved in business, nonprofits or philanthropic organizations. But how did it play on the Columbia campus, where the primary demographic lies?

The campus started to fill up around the quad three hours before anyone was scheduled to speak on Thursday evening. Students were already starting to spread out yoga mats to save spots for friends on the steps of Low Library, where a jumbo screen was set up outdoors to simulcast the evening event. The invited speakers and the candidates themselves, who were being interviewed by PBS host Judy Woodruff and Richard Stengel, managing editor of Time magazine, would be in another campus building under heavy security protection.

In anticipation of the crowd and in the spirit of the theme of the event, a couple of dozen service organizations set up tables on Campus Walk. In spite of the distractions, there was some interest in what the groups had to offer and students stopped to talk to the representatives and pick up the literature. One table, sponsored by the Political Union in collaboration with the College Republicans, was hawking voter registration. The Political Union is nonpartisan and the College Republicans club simply wanted to encourage students to vote and give them the needed information. If asked, they could also get information about McCain, but on a campus that is largely behind Obama, few expressed much interest. McCain literature was not in sight. The College Republicans' representative remained unfazed by the group's minority status. "It just keeps us on our toes," she explained.

The group expected to distribute voter registration forms to approximately 200 students as part of the get-out-the-vote effort, which according to Nick Shay, a volunteer for the Political Union, is about average for a day when there are events and large crowds. Shay thought that more Columbia students were registered to vote than the national average, but we still have "a campus full of potential voters who are currently unregistered," he

pointed out. Some students may want to vote absentee, depending on where they live, and "we just give them the information," he explained.

This was definitely a nonpartisan effort, in keeping with the theme of the summit. No mention was made of Barack the Vote, or the large voter drives in some areas sponsored by Democrats and other civic groups, or of what some consider Republican efforts to stymie those efforts by creating roadblocks with laws requiring state authorized photo ID; nor did anyone whisper rumors about scrubbing the voter lists or tampering with electronic voting. This was purely a way to help students make sure they are properly registered. Those who volunteer in this effort see themselves as part of the services that help promote democracy.

While the university encourages student service and many service groups operate on campus, service is not a mandatory part of the curriculum. A student from Austria explained that in his country, some kind of service is mandatory for all males over the age of 18 and he felt it was a very productive and positive way to contribute to one's country. In a truly voluntary system, there is low participation, so it doesn't work very well, he observed. Service in Austria is obligatory for nine months and the people get paid, though wages are low. "People tend to like it," he added.

Interestingly, on the Friday program, representatives of Duke, Penn, Tulane, and Bentley College (MA) each announced new initiatives in which their schools would be making service part of the curriculum. After Katrina, Tulane became the first major university to make public service a requirement and is now in a position to lead and expand their programs. Richard Broderhead, president of Duke, explained that students should know what it is to serve. "Service is an important part of who we are," he told an enthusiastic audience.

So is this what ServiceNation is advocating? Partly. Their mission is to set the tone and promote the concept, not to tell any organization what to do or how to do it. Perhaps it can be seen as an acknowledgment by the leaders of every major sector of society that our country is way off track and that unless we can get support from everyone to turn around the tanker, we may be heading for disaster. But is it feasible to expect all people to volunteer when so many students graduate from college with big loans to repay, when unemployment is at a 5-year high, when the bulk of the population, i.e., the middle class, is having a tough time deciding how to divvy up their limited resources between food, fuel, and health care?

The bipartisan legislation, the Kennedy-Hatch Serve America Act, announced Friday by Sen. Orrin Hatch, will presumably sort out some of these questions, at least as far as funding is concerned. It's a broad bill that re-funds organizations like Teach for America and the Peace Corps along with many others. Some of these groups do pay a stipend for service and encouraging their expansion seems like a positive step.

But the Columbia students were mostly oblivious to the political implications of this part of the event; many were unaware of the events that were to take place the next day. Their

excitement was about having the candidates on campus and their sense of privilege at being part of it.

Because some students were uninformed about the event's sponsor, they were therefore also off base when it came to what they expected the candidates to say. "Iraq? The economy?" a few guessed. Some expected a political debate or at least some statements about the usual political topics and were surprised to learn that was not to be the case. They were there to be part of the historical event; the topic was irrelevant for them.

James Gormley started gathering with some friends by late afternoon and was looking forward to hearing what the candidates had to say. A senior majoring in political science, he expected that the crowd would be stirred up by the speeches, although he was among those who didn't know who was sponsoring the event and hadn't heard of ServiceNation. However, he was against anything that would require him to serve because, he claimed, it was unlikely to "benefit the greater good."

Overall most students seemed to think the idea of service was something they would welcome and would support anything that encouraged it and would make it easier to volunteer. No one who was asked thought service should be mandatory (nor does ServiceNation advocate mandatory service). This was confirmed, loud and clear, by students' response to the question of ROTC on campus; they booed at the mention of it when McCain said that ROTC should be allowed to recruit on campus. Although Obama concurred, he did not get the same response. The campus is decidedly Obama country.

Not all service, of course, is military. There's lots of work that needs to be done to fix the neglect of the last decades, from infrastructure to energy independence to poverty and education. Whose at "fault" for this sorry state of the union is perhaps besides the point. At least that's the message of ServiceNation. They describe themselves as a grass-roots effort, working in a nonpartisan way from the ground-up to "help solve our most persistent social challenges and crises." So are they mining the success of Obama's operation and co-opting it for a broader and "nonpartisan" purpose?

No one is against service and no one who was questioned thought it was a bad idea. But that doesn't translate into droves of students running out to volunteer tomorrow either. "Service should be our number one priority," Peter Blotnick, a grad student in continuing education argued. Although he was not familiar with ServiceNation and did not think service should be mandatory, he did think students should feel obligated to do something to help out. And maybe after all is said and done, that is just what ServiceNation is getting at - an effort at ending the 'me' generation mentality of entitlement and substituting the 'we' generation of service to others. Does that make it an effort to foster patriotism? Or a way to allocate federal money to level the playing field? It's not clear that these issues and other questions have been addressed, no less answered.

Columbia is a campus of mostly engaged students, not a place where apathy runs rampant. "Columbia is a very political campus. There's a wide range of political positions

here, but for the most part students are, at the very least, interested," explained Zoe Shea, a first year law student who also did her undergraduate work at Columbia.

For some, this was one of the reasons they had chosen to come here; they wanted to immerse themselves in the hub of the activity that is quintessentially New York City. "We already have a very political scene on campus, and people who might not otherwise be that involved, get involved," said a junior whose roots are in New Jersey. She and her friends were all supporters of Obama and would be casting their votes accordingly. There was no question about voting - that was a given.

"I think Obama did a really excellent job of showing avenues that we can all contribute to service. As a daughter of a soldier I'm very impressed by his sponsorship of the GI Bill," answered Brittany Hegeland, a senior in the department of German literature and cultural history when asked about her impression of the evening. "He believes in what the GI Bill was initially founded to be. He talked about ways of giving back. He really has a good understanding of how the office should be used, and he did a good job of giving concrete examples of ways to make it work,"

Both candidates have given back to the country through service, each leading by example, although in very different contexts. Many students seemed to be in agreement with Obama on matters of policy and were open to the message of service. No one showed disrespect for the military but it was evident that the military was not the route most of these students were about to take. That did not, however, rule out other service. In fact, several expressed a desire to pursue some kind of service after graduation. Not everyone will travel that path, but if ServiceNation is a success, it will make service cool, enticing that many more young people and making good the promise of Generation-S.

For that to happen, it won't start until we have a new President. The subtext of ServiceNation speaks to the loss of respect and prestige that has taken place under the current Administration. Fully funding organizations like the Peace Corps will send out a new cadre of people to be ambassador-soldiers for peace on the ground. That too, is part of the new legislation, as well as funding for other similar efforts.

As freshman Kimberly Rubin explained, "It's a travesty that the one president that I've been most conscious for seems to be the most hated and disrespected. I want someone who Americans can be proud of whether he be Republican or Democrat, just someone who we can stand behind."

While the students yearn for a body politic to believe in, the VIP players in the summit convened at the Hilton on Friday were promoting broad goals for service organizations that would offer opportunities for people to get involved. Whether for a day of planting trees or a two-year stint teaching in a needy school here or in faraway undeveloped countries, the idea is to open up the avenues and make civic service a matter of pride.

Friday's panels, composed of politicians and CEOs, were greeted with great enthusiasm. While it was not an entrenched Washington audience, it was certainly preaching to the

choir; the audience was mostly made up of politicians, members of service organizations, honored guests, and the media. There is probably wide, bipartisan support for the new Kennedy-Hatch Serve America Act, at least in theory. The real test will be if the bill makes it to the President's desk before January 20; that would show a renewed strength and a true spirit of bipartisanship. Even if it does become law, however, the big question will still be how to translate the spirit of service and transform it into a culture that becomes part of campus life all over the country while also reaching those 18-26 year-olds who don't live on a campus where it is easy to volunteer and where they are just as likely to be eligible for services as they are to serve.

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A New Age for Individual Service

Tom Nelson and Usher Raymond IV

Almost 50 years ago, President John Kennedy challenged Americans to ask what they can do for their country. The Baby Boom and Silent Generations answered that call to service, volunteering to build better lives for others at home and overseas through programs like VISTA and the Peace Corps.

Today, our country is grappling with uncertainty about the economy, the environment and global security. For the first time in history, older Americans believe they will leave the world in worse shape than they found it.

Fortunately, there are signs of hope that we are entering a new age of volunteerism, once again focusing the talents and commitment of individual Americans to address major problems at home and overseas.

Members of the Baby Boom and Silent Generations are increasingly postponing retirement to start public service-oriented careers -- combining a desire to do good with a need to do well. Tens of millions of boomers currently volunteer through their churches or organizations like Meals on Wheels, and more than half of all boomers plan to increase their volunteering in the next five years.

Younger Americans in the Millennial Generation, many of whom went to schools that required service to graduate, are better prepared for civic engagement than any other generation in our history. Just this month, more than 6,000 young women and men are beginning the school year as new educators with Teach for America. Others will don their work boots and khakis for a ten month tour with City Year.

Meanwhile, the constant stream of technological innovation offers new tools, most notably online, that help people of all ages maximize their impact. With just a few clicks, people can find volunteering opportunities in their neighborhood or around the world. Fast-growing social networks have the potential to rapidly mobilize and organize thousands of people, whether to vote or to clean up after a disaster.

So how do we take advantage of this momentum? How can we inspire more to serve, and how can we best harness their time and talents? That's a job for all of us.

AARP was founded with a service mission, and we have been mobilizing, training and engaging volunteers for the last fifty years. AARP volunteers have helped their neighbors and communities in a variety of ways -- from helping the disadvantaged fill out their tax returns to rebuilding the Gulf Coast.

The New Look Foundation has been energizing and empowering our country's youth for almost a decade. Whether helping communities to rebuild after natural disasters or giving disadvantaged youth the opportunity to earn their way into New Look programs through volunteerism, the Foundation is building two of the most important assets in our nation's youth -- leadership, and the sense of empowerment that comes from knowing that their voices count.

But we have much more to do. Last week, both AARP and the New Look Foundation are joining the Carnegie Endowment, Target and TIME Magazine, as well as an impressive array of leaders from the public, private and non-profit sectors to launch a new national call to action in New York City.

ServiceNation is a first-of-its-kind campaign to restore the tradition of American service through a national grassroots movement. The historic ServiceNation Summit represents the first time that major leaders from the full spectrum of American society put aside our partisan, ideological, and even generational differences to develop new opportunities and resources for volunteers. We are united in our belief in -- and passionate commitment to -- national service.

Problems that impact everyone require solutions that involve everyone -- from younger Americans who are just starting to shape the world, to boomers and older Americans who need to know it's not too late. Together, we can and will make a difference.

September 11, 2008

Live-blogging the ServiceNation Summit

Kate Linthicum



Photo: AP Photo/Chris Carlson

7:15 p.m. Well, that was civil.

Obama and McCain said what we expected them to say ("community service is good") and the moderators were exceedingly deferential. Woodruff and Stengel avoided the direct, controversial questions that made the Saddleback Forum so interesting (there was no mention tonight of abortion, or gay marriage, or what, exactly, constitutes "rich").

Both candidates performed well and appeared to be more comfortable than they had been at Saddleback. Obama, who had been criticized for being too circuitous in his talk with Pastor Rick Warren, tonight seemed more direct.

But the most interesting aspect of the event was what was missing. Both candidates avoided talking about the mud-slinging in this campaign, which has been getting messier by the day. We heard no attacks on character tonight, no sly references to pigs wearing lipstick.

Instead, the candidates were complimentary and the mood was conciliatory. It felt, for a brief moment, like a break.

Savor it, folks. These things don't last long.

Thanks for reading, and have a lovely night.

6:44 p.m. It's over! Obama has risen and is waving goodbye. Those hoping for a reprisal of Obama and McCain's earlier awkward handshake are sorely disappointed. It doesn't look like McCain is coming back on stage.

6:38 p.m. Obama, when asked if there is anything that the government can do to encourage service, says that government needs to fix itself before it can inspire Americans.

"Part of my job as president of America is to make government cool again," he says, to a smattering of laughter.

6:32 p.m. Obama thinks mayors have it bad, too!

"Mayors have some of the toughest jobs in the country," he says. "While we're yakking away in the Senate, [mayors] have to fill potholes, trim trees and make sure the garbage is thrown away."

6:25 p.m. Richard Stengel brings up a subject that has caused a lot of contention on Columbia's campus -- the administration's decision to not allow ROTC on campus. McCain had said earlier that he thought the ROTC ban was a disgrace, and that every student should have a chance to learn about the possibilities of military service.

Stengel asks Obama, "Should Columbia, an elite University, bring back the ROTC?"

Obama's reply: "Yes."

6:21 p.m. Columbia security reports that there are about 5,000 people outside the auditorium watching the forum unfold on jumbo-trons.

6:19 p.m. Obama and McCain disagree (not surprisingly) over the role that government should play in encouraging Americans to engage in community service.

Obama just listed a slew of government service programs that he would like to see started and existing programs that he would like to see expanded. He has said in the past that community service should be compulsory for college students in the country.

McCain, when asked, said he didn't think government should force community service on citizens because Americans are naturally compelled to help each other.

They agree on point, though. Both think that faith-based groups should play a major role community service.

5:58 p.m. Yikes. This is awkward. McCain's time is up. Nobody knows when Obama is coming on stage. Woodruff's mic is on, and we hear her begin to panic about what comes next.

Suddely, Obama strides onstage. He and McCain shake hands and McCain walks quickly off. Because of Woodruff's hot mic, the audience hears every word of Woodruff's small talk with Obama.

Thank God for commercial breaks.

5:50 p.m. Woodruff asks McCain a pointed question, obviously referring to the McCain campaign's recent stepped-up attack ads: "Do you think it is naive of people to expect that politics could be a little less rough and tumble and even nasty?"

After a bit of hemming and hawing, McCain responds, "I think it's very important that we focus on issues."

This contradicts something that his campaign manager, Rick Davis, said last week. Davis told the editors of the Washington Post: "This election is not about the issues. This election is about a composite view of what people take away from these candidates."

5:40 p.m. McCain goes on the defensive when Woodruff asks him about something Sarah Palin said at the Republican National Convention (Palin disparaged Obama's work as a community organizer, saying, "I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a 'community organizer,' except that you have actual responsibilities.")

"First of all, this is a tough business," McCain tells Woodruff, before insisting that Palin was simply responding to those who have suggested that she doesn't have enough experience.

McCain then defends her qualification. "Mayors have the toughest job, I think, in America," he says. He may live to regret that one.

5:22 p.m. Woodruff points out that volunteering is often a luxury, and that many Americans who do service work are "people of means."

McCain disagrees. "In all due respect to rich people," he starts, before pausing and pointing at the laughing audience. He goes on to say that he thinks that average citizens are the most common volunteers.

5:15 p.m. McCain is on stage. He will be interviewed for one hour. The first several questions are about how the government can compel Americans to serve their nation. McCain takes this as an opportunity to talk about government reform, a theme he has stressed consistently in this campaign (and even more so now that Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin is on board).

4:59 p.m. The event has just begun. Richard Stengel and Judy Woodruff are on stage, giving details on each candidate's background in service.

There looks to be a packed house.

Tonight is a homecoming of sorts for Obama. He graduated from Columbia in 1983. But this is his first appearance on campus since he began his run for president.

McCain also has ties to Columbia. His daughter, Meghan, graduated from the school in 2007.

4:40 p.m. It wouldn't be New York if there weren't a few famous faces in the crowd. The Columbia Spectator reports that rocker Jon Bon Jovi is inside Boone Arledge auditorium, and reporters for Bwog.net, the school's blog, say they have spotted R&B singer Usher.

Other big names who have apparently reserved seats, according to the Spectator: Leonardo DiCaprio, Michael J. Fox, former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, Caroline Kennedy and U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer.

4:23 p.m. Hello, all.

This afternoon we will be live-blogging John McCain and Barack Obama's appearance at the ServiceNation Summit in New York City. It begins at 8 p.m. EST. We'll have a play-by-play of the candidates' conversations with moderators Richard Stengel (Time magazine editor) and Judy Woodruff (PBS "News Hour" anchor) as well as some analysis.

Like last month's Saddleback Church forum, tonight's event at Columbia University will not be a debate. Obama and McCain will give separate speeches about public service, but we're told they will appear onstage together. It will be the second time the candidates have appeared on the same stage since they won enough votes in the primaries to claim their parties' nominations.

A lot has changed since Saddleback. Vice presidential running mates have been revealed. The race has tightened. Things have gotten ugly. And while the nature of this evening's event (as well as today's date) means that things probably won't get too contentious, we can expect it to be tense.

"Service" has been an important theme in both campaigns. McCain often tries to portray himself as a dedicated public servant, pointing to his Naval career and long time in the Senate as proof that he has dedicated his life to giving back (don't forget, the theme of this year's Republican National Convention was "Service First"). Obama likes to talk to voters about his time as a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago, where he worked with working class families.

We'll probably hear both of these narratives repeated tonight. It will be interesting to see whether the candidates mention their running mates.

The forum begins in about 40 minutes. To watch live coverage alongside us, you can tune in to CNN, MSNBC, Fox News Channel and C-SPAN.