



## Obamas and Bidens Volunteer on MLK Day

**Americans Nationwide Answer Call to Volunteer on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Before Historic Inauguration**

By KATE BARRETT Jan. 19, 2009—

On the eve of his inauguration, President-elect Barack Obama marked the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday by spotlighting King's dedication to community service. Obama, who has promised to make public service a theme of his presidency, made several stops throughout the day, beginning with a visit to wounded troops at Washington's Walter Reed Medical Center. Next he visited an emergency shelter for homeless D.C. teenagers, where he picked up a paint roller to help a few dozen teens who were renovating the boy's dorm. "We can't allow any idle hands. Everybody's got to be involved. Everybody's going to have to pitch in," said Obama at the Sasha Bruce House, accompanied by Martin Luther King III. "Dr. Martin Luther King's was a life lived in loving service to others," Obama said in a statement early Monday. "As we honor that legacy, it's not a day just to pause and reflect- it's a day to act."

The president-elect told volunteers at a luncheon at Calvin Coolidge High School this afternoon that he was "making a commitment to you as your next president that we are going to make government work." Still, on a holiday reserved to honor the strides of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Obama added, "Government can only do so much. And if we're just waiting around for somebody else to do it for us, if we're waiting around for somebody else to clean up the vacant lot or waiting for somebody else to get involved in tutoring a child, if we're waiting for somebody else to do something, it never gets done. We're going to have to take responsibility -- all of us."

As the former community organizer prepares to take the oath of office and asks people nationwide to commit to bettering their communities, public service professionals like Andy Nelson of Portland, Ore. suspect Obama's call to action may have given some people an extra push. "Typically after the holiday break, we see a real drought in January in terms of volunteer numbers," Nelson, executive director of Hands On Greater Portland, told ABCNews.com. "This year, the phones have continued to ring and we are seeing a real spike in volunteering." Indeed, the spirit of volunteerism may be contagious, according to Americans rolling up their sleeves and committing to service projects today on the day before Obama's inauguration.

In neighborhoods around the country, people were heading out to answer the call to serve. Close to the White House, fire and EMS stations served as hubs for a food drive, with canned food being donated to the Capitol Area Food Bank in Washington, D.C. In Portland, Hands On worked alongside nonprofit groups and schools on diverse projects that include painting a school, weatherizing homes and refurbishing donated bicycles for children. Nelson said the organizations were expecting more than 800 volunteers at 30 projects in the Portland metro area during the weekend and Monday. In central Ohio, Planned Parenthood volunteers collected women's essentials at a week-long drive organized to provide necessities to a Columbus shelter for women and families in need.

"We have great volunteers and lots of interest, but I do think it's important for the leader-elect of our country to continue to emphasize volunteerism -- I think it makes a difference," Lisa Perks, CEO of Planned Parenthood of Central Ohio, told ABCNews.com on Friday. "But I also think times are really tough and more people are interested in doing anything they can do."

### **Obama Wants You to Give Back**

The president-elect called on all Americans to volunteer in a public service announcement last week, giving added momentum to a national day of service made official by the House in 1994. To help people learn where and how they can do good, the Presidential Inaugural Committee set up a Web site, USAService.org, as a clearinghouse for volunteer opportunities. More than 11,400 service projects were listed in the database as of Saturday, with more than one million people expected to serve -- more than doubling last year's numbers. Stephen Goldsmith, volunteer board chairman for The Corporation for National and Community Service, the government agency that oversees AmeriCorps and other national volunteer programs, told ABCNews.com that the timing of the inauguration and Obama's commitment to service has "had a catalytic effect" on young people in particular who are eager to do good.

In addition to highlighting projects, USAService.org has featured guest bloggers sounding off on how and why they planned to contribute.

"We, as Americans, are defined by our sense of service, our willingness to put our country and our communities first," blogged D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty last Thursday. "It's what makes our nation great, and now more than ever, we must renew this tradition of service by making a lasting commitment to be caretakers of our communities." Fenty spent Monday putting together care packages for American troops at Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium. Obama has said his hope is that the push to do good lasts far beyond Monday.

"To honor the legacy of a man who lived his life as a servant to others, I will ask all Americans to make a renewed commitment to serving their communities and their country," Obama said in a YouTube address last week. "Dr. King once said, 'Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.' You don't have to wear a uniform. You don't have to be a community organizer. You don't even have to run for president. At a time when there is so much need, we are blessed with endless ways to contribute something to the life of this nation."

### **Honoring Service on Inauguration Eve**

As the Obamas gear up for the big day on Tuesday, their efforts to honor service continue into the evening.

On Monday night, Obama is slated to attend three bipartisan dinners, each honoring an accomplished public servant. Those being honored include Gen. Colin Powell, Vice President-elect Biden and Obama's former presidential rival, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz..

McCain will be honored at a dinner at the Hilton Washington, spearheaded by Massachusetts Democratic Gov. Deval Patrick and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C. Powell's dinner is scheduled for the National Building Museum, with the ceremony led by Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo. and former Sen. John Warner, R-Va. The vice president-elect will be the man of the hour at Union station, honored by Democratic Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine and Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb. On Monday night, Michelle Obama and Jill Biden, joined by Obama daughters, Sasha and Malia, will host a children's inaugural event called "We Are the Future" at the Verizon Center downtown.

*ABC News' David Kerley, Jake Tapper, Jennifer Duck and Sunlen Miller contributed to this report.*

Copyright © 2009 ABC News Internet Ventures