

# Making a Difference

## Security and Opportunity Through American National Service

An Interview with Howard P. Milstein,  
Co-Chair, Howard & Abby Milstein Foundation

**EDITORS' NOTE** Howard P. Milstein is the third generation to lead the Milstein family business and philanthropic activities. An entrepreneurial builder of innovative, large-scale companies, Milstein's ability to marshal business, government, philanthropic, and family resources drives a breadth of initiatives across health, civic, educational, and security matters. Milstein is Chairman and CEO of New York Private Bank & Trust and its operating bank, Emigrant, and chairs and operates the Milstein family's real estate companies. In the philanthropic arena, Milstein is Chairman of the New York Blood Center, the American Skin Association, the Howard and Georgeanna Jones Foundation for Reproductive Medicine, and the Milstein Medical Asian American Partnership Foundation. He is a Trustee at Cornell University, an Overseer of Weill Cornell Medical College, and serves on the Dean's Advisory Board of Harvard Law School. He also serves on the boards of the National September 11th Memorial and the Nicklaus Children's Healthcare Foundation. Milstein was Chairman of the New York State Thruway Authority from 2011-2014, where he successfully led the design and procurement process for a new Tappan Zee Bridge, the largest infrastructure project in the nation.



Howard P. Milstein

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** The Howard and Abby Milstein Foundation ([howardandabbymilsteinfoundation.org](http://howardandabbymilsteinfoundation.org)) participates actively in the organizations it supports, with hands-on leadership and long term financial support. Eight core areas of focus have emerged from their vision: medical research and care, biotechnology and science, higher education and youth, history, religious and communal organizations, arts and culture, law enforcement and homeland security, and civic engagement. The foundation's involvement, leadership, and giving align with the essence of its homegrown "Venture Philanthropy," which brings the principles of venture capitalism to philanthropy, including finding and investing in leaders in the field, active engagement in each organization and its operations, and encouraging an entrepreneurial approach to innovation and change.

**You recently made a proposal in the pages of Time magazine that called for young Americans to complete a year of national service. Can you discuss your vision for the plan?**

For many years, I have believed that preparing the next generation of Americans to reach its fullest potential is of critical importance, and through a National Service Program, I believe we can bring young adults together with just such an opportunity, while also contributing to the prosperity of our country and making our nation safer.

The American ideal is a unifying force. For generations, it brought Americans together, side-by-side, in times of peace and times of war. In this fractious age, where challenges to

both our national security and national identity threaten to drive us apart, affirmative steps need to be taken to unify, rather than divide; to give back to our nation to which we owe so much.

**What would be the qualifications for participation, and where would service take place?**

Under the program, all young Americans healthy enough to participate, ages 18 to 22, would serve for at least a year in an undertaking of their choice. This might include military service, the Peace Corps, Teacher Corps or other initiatives involving health and wellness, infrastructure, or local and regional security. During service, participants would be paid and also have the opportunity to earn tuition credit for college.

**How do you feel American National Service will contribute to the prosperity of the country and make the nation safer, more secure, and ready to respond to threats?**

Training millions of young people in homeland security, emergency response, and related fields will help in the fight against terrorism, to the benefit of both national and economic security. American National Service will ensure that we do everything possible to prevent and cope with terror and to provide a level of confidence that is crucial to both psychological and economic resilience. It is important to remember that our nation is dependent on the strength of our economy. The terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 were after more than the 2,996 lives they took. They wanted to attack our values, our economy, and our spirit. Thus, ensuring proper preparedness can have enormous economic value.

**Would you highlight the value you see in having young Americans from different**

**backgrounds work together in common cause for the betterment of our society?**

Approximately three million young Americans would enter national service each year, so clearly, in addition to the ways our country will benefit, the program would bring our young people together. Serving side-by-side, young Americans from different backgrounds would work in common cause for the betterment of our society. They'd learn new skills, to be sure, but they'd also learn tolerance, compassion, and mutual understanding through their working relationships and friendships. I have no doubt that bringing together young people of different geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds can break down barriers in our society.

**You have said that reaching three million young minds can drive innovation, creativity, and invention. Would you elaborate on this point?**

The combined power of our nation's young minds would drive innovation, creativity, and invention across a range of disciplines. There is no substitute for experience, and as participants get on the job, they will devise solutions to problems, develop resilience and ingenuity, and strive to find better, more efficient ways to work. Consider it the ultimate crowdsourcing.

Moreover, a program of service exposing our young adults to a variety of real world experiences will inspire many to find purpose where they might not otherwise have thought to look. Participants will internalize American ideals, including community, diversity, and meritocracy. They would learn how to be effective and succeed in the real world and advance on the path toward the American Dream.

**How will participating in National Service help participants be effective and succeed in the real world and present a more accessible path to the American Dream?**

Our nation has always prospered when we have banded together for a common purpose. In generations past, American men and women came together to defeat enemies seeking to enslave the rest of the world. The terrorist enemy we face today is no less committed to our future destruction. American National Service provides the ideal opportunity – in times of war and during peacetime – to unite our younger generation to serve our nation and the common good. ●