

# Take a day on, not off, for King

Honor his legacy of service by taking the 'MLK 25 Challenge.'

By **John Lewis**  
and **Patrick A. Corvington**  
For the AJC

Ever since former Sen. Harris Wofford and I introduced legislation in the Congress that transformed the King Holiday into a National Day of Service, one question periodically arises: Do Americans view the King Holiday primarily as a day on or a day off? Are they commemorating the legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. with their extra time or simply getting extra sleep? Clearly, there are kids who will joyfully spend their day in front of their Xboxes, and shoppers who will rush to a department store sale on the holiday.

But as the life of Dr. King and the movement that he led demonstrate, ordinary people with extraordinary vision working in the corners of their communities can have an impact that re-

verberates throughout America. These tiny ripples of human compassion can build into waves that cleanse and heal the wounds of a nation.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is the federal agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service to solve community problems. In partnership with the King Center and community groups nationwide, the agency responds to a mandate provided in the legislation to organize the King holiday National Day of Service. Since the service day legislation was passed, we have seen interest grow from a handful of local events to well over 13,000 projects taking place this year in all 50 states.

Right here in Atlanta, we will be joining thousands of volunteers who will be packing food boxes for the hungry, rebuilding homes for the homeless, beautifying schools and serving in many other ways to commemorate the legacy of Dr. King. In doing so, people are following in King's footsteps, taking nonviolent action into their own hands to heal and mend the problems in our communities. That is what the National Day of Service is all about, engaging Americans in the joy of giving and inspiring them to see this holiday differently, not as a time to rest, but as an opportunity to share in the healing work of love.

Last year, in the midst of the Great Recession, 63.4 million Americans volunteered in some way in their communities. They

decided that they wanted to make service a meaningful part of their everyday lives. And their efforts are making a difference. They are expanding economic opportunity, helping to fix our education system, protecting our environment, responding to the needs of our veterans and assisting in the wake of natural disasters.

To mark the 25th anniversary of the King holiday, we are issuing the "MLK 25 Challenge." We are calling on all Americans to honor Dr. King by pledging to take at least 25 actions during 2011 to make a difference for others.

The recent violence in Tucson is a sobering reminder that we as a nation have not yet fulfilled King's dream for our society, the building of a "Beloved Community," defined as a society based on simple justice that values the worth and dignity of every human being.

As the victims, families and our nation struggle to recover from this tragedy, it is fitting that we look to the words of a nonviolent warrior who met aggression and hostility with the power of peace. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness," King once said, "only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Rep. John Lewis (D) represents the 5th Congressional District of Georgia and is a CNCS MLK Day Ambassador of Service. Patrick A. Corvington is CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

