

# Building the Beloved Community through inclusive volunteering

January 26, 2022

**[0:12] Jacqueline Innocent:** Welcome. I'm Jacqueline Innocent, and I have the privilege of serving as the senior vice president of integrated programs for Habitat for Humanity International. And thank you for joining us today as we discuss how to build more equitable communities through more inclusive volunteering and service.

In a few moments, Michael Smith, CEO of AmeriCorps — the federal agency for volunteering and national service — will join us, as well as Kirby Page, a longtime youth volunteer with Habitat for Humanity International.

But before, I wanted to just give you a little bit of context about this conversation. The notion of building an equitable community is part of the Habitat for Humanity International origin story. Our origins or our roots go back to a farm called Koinonia Farm, which was an interracial community farm outside of Americus, Georgia, founded in 1942. And throughout especially the years of 1956, 1957, 1958, et cetera, the members of the Koinonia Farm took a stand, and they were harassed, shot at and bombed for their stand against segregation and their commitment to being an interracial group and creating opportunity for all. And on this day, Jan. 26, 65 years ago, Clarence Jordan, cofounder of Koinonia, contacted Dr. Martin Luther King for advice. And a few days later Dr. King wrote back.

And if you'll indulge me, I'd like to read that back to you, an excerpt. "You and the Koinonia community have been in my prayers continually for the last several months. I hope the injustices and indignities that you are now confronting certainly leave you in trying moments. I hope, however, that you will gain consolation from the fact that in your struggle for freedom and a true Christian community, you have cosmic companionship. God grant that this tragic midnight of man's inhumanity to man will soon pass, and the bright daybreak of freedom and brotherhood will come into being."

Powerful words.

And the members of the Koinonia Farm continued. And born from that vision years later grew Habitat for Humanity International, which is now a global organization dedicated to making sure that we all have access to adequate and affordable homes, which we believe is part of what Dr. King envisioned when he referred to equitable communities, or as many refer to, the Beloved Community, as he sometimes said.

What is the Beloved Community? It's equitable. It's just. It fosters respect for individual differences. It's a neighbor helping their neighbor. And service has always been a part of the way we've done this work. Even when you look at some of the commitment cards that people who worked with Dr. King and his followers had to sign in some instances, service was specifically called out. Out of the 10 commitments in some of those commitment cards, you'd see things like "sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free," "observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy," "seek to perform regular service for others and for the world." And of course, a riff on the version we've all heard, "refrain from the violence of fist, tongue or heart."

Which brings us to AmeriCorps. If any of you have had an opportunity to meet an AmeriCorps member or see them in the community working, you'll really feel in your heart what I'm saying. The AmeriCorps members work in the spirit of the Beloved Community. They help knit communities together, they help repair our country, they help bring people together and address the challenges we all have as a country and help to make us all better all through service.

And Habitat has been a longtime partner with AmeriCorps because of our belief in what they're trying to do, from the very first AmeriCorps class, and we have seen firsthand the impact that those AmeriCorps members make all throughout the country and the many communities where we work.

So Michael, given that history and the power of the organization that you now lead, congratulations on your recent confirmation and welcome. Before we get started, I think it's important to say that we in the Habitat family are excited to work with you and your team and all the AmeriCorps members that you'll lead, to support you and do whatever we can to help make sure that we can all help to do our part to build the Beloved Community. Welcome, Michael.

**[5:28] Michael Smith:** Thank you so much, Jacqueline. It's wonderful to have an opportunity to be with you today.

**[5:32] Jacqueline Innocent:** Perfect. And since you've just taken on this role, I'd love to start with just a broad question for people to really get a sense of what are your hopes, dreams or goals for the AmeriCorps now that you've taken on this role? Can you give us a sense of what we might see in the future in terms of your focus?

**[5:54] Michael Smith:** Yeah, absolutely. So, you know, you actually gave a great pitch on AmeriCorps. I didn't need to say anything because you already did it. But for those of you who

don't know, AmeriCorps is the federal agency for volunteering and service. We are about getting things done for America. There are more than 250,000 AmeriCorps members, more than 1 million AmeriCorps alums.

Our AmeriCorps members are working in more than 40,000 locations in all 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Tribal Nations, U.S. territories. And chances are if there is a challenge in the community and you see people banding together to do something about it, AmeriCorps members are at the heart of it. And what I'm excited about is AmeriCorps members are also force multipliers. AmeriCorps members are members; they're not volunteers. So they are working in full- and part-time positions. They're able to tackle challenges, you know, waking up in the morning, thinking about it, and also figuring out how we can engage community members in addressing the challenges as well.

And during this ... these past two years, Jacqueline, have been so challenging for all of us all over the world. AmeriCorps members, and the volunteers that we work with, have stood up because they were in the communities. They were a part of the communities. So when we think about being in schools, keeping our kids in schools and on track, AmeriCorps members were there. When we think about the vaccination lines and making sure folks are getting tested, AmeriCorps members are there. When we think about food insecurity and housing and homelessness that has been exacerbated by this pandemic, that exposed all sorts of inequalities that exist in our country, AmeriCorps members were there.

So I want to make sure that we are doubling down on the work that's already happening so that AmeriCorps members are addressing the most urgent needs in our communities. And I think the work for us going forward in this next chapter of AmeriCorps is really threefold.

One, how do we make sure that national service is seen as being about impact? Not necessarily just the thousand flowers blooming or an altruistic thing that makes you feel good. But 20 years from now, when we look at how we did indeed build back better, when we look at how we changed the game for children and families in most need, we can say AmeriCorps played this specific role in making that happen.

Secondly, I think we need to make sure that national service reflects the diversity of our country and the communities that we serve, making sure that national service isn't this thing that happens to a community or it's a group of people coming into a community to do something and leave, but that we're actually creating robust pipelines. We're building up cadres of folks that are participating in national service from communities that are gaining skills, building skills, that then stay in that community to continue to bring healing and hope for a lifetime.

And then thirdly, I think national service has the opportunity to help reignite democracy and to disrupt the polarization that we are seeing all over this country. I have seen it. And anyone who has worked in volunteer projects, that has worked in national service community, has seen people coming together. When you roll up your sleeve, when you're responding to a disaster,

where we're from, how much money we make, the color of our skin — none of that matters when we're rolling up our sleeves, and it's neighbors helping neighbors.

**[9:21] Jacqueline Innocent:** Exactly. Thank you for that energizing look into how you'll be approaching this role and really inspiring those within the AmeriCorps program.

I want to look back for a second, and then we'll get back to that inspiring future you were describing. We opened talking about the Beloved Community, and so I would really love to hear from you. What are your thoughts? Why is it important for us still to refer to the Beloved Community? Why is it important for us even today to stay committed to that spirit of building the Beloved Community so many years later?

**[9:58] Michael Smith:** You know, it's really interesting. We just came off of the Martin Luther King Day of Service, and AmeriCorps is the federal agency that's responsible for leading that cause. So back in 1994, when Congress declared the MLK Day, the only federal holiday to be a day of service, AmeriCorps was put in charge in leading that. And all over the country we had hundreds of projects that were taking place. We had all sorts of people that were rolling up their sleeves and giving back to the community. And it was about honoring Dr. King's legacy. You know, this idea that if you believed in Dr. King's words, if you believed in Dr. King's action, then on MLK Day you probably wouldn't just sleep in, you probably wouldn't just watch a movie, you probably wouldn't just read a speech, but you would really take on what he preached, what he modeled, and give back to your community, get to action and get things done, not only on that day but thinking about how you'll give back all year long and how you will build a lifetime of service.

And so coming out of that day, I reflect a lot on lots of Dr. King's words, the idea that everybody can be great because everybody can serve, or "life's most persistent and urgent question is 'what are you doing to serve others?'" And so I think when we look at where we are today as a society, you know, I talked about the polarization, I talked about the inequities that we're experiencing, the idea that there are still far too many people in our communities where your zip code is a determining factor or a limiting factor in how far you can go. That's unacceptable.

Because Dr. King's words also taught us that we are inextricably linked in America's success. Our community's success or country's success is only ... it's inextricably bound to how the least amongst us is able to leave and achieve their dreams. And so if we want what is a full potential for our children, if we want what is full potential for our country, we have to make sure that we are reaching back, taking care of each other, building a Beloved Community, and really believing this idea that our neighbor's child is our child, and volunteering and service and community action is central to that.

**[12:08] Jacqueline Innocent:** Agreed. So well said. And in your remarks, you talked about the divide in our country, which we're all experiencing no matter what sides — and I hate using that word — you might happen to be on different debates. When you think about the divide in our country and you think about the systemic inequities that we need to deal with, can you talk a

little bit more about how AmeriCorps members and how service can be part of that solution to those challenges, the divide and the systemic inequities?

**[12:39] Michael Smith:** Sure. You know, this is an interesting conversation that I have with friends in the social justice space, which I'm just coming out of. And what really strikes me, what I have seen, what the data shows, is that serving and volunteering can help build that muscle that takes an individual from charity to justice.

So the idea that a young person is starting off working in a soup kitchen, learning about the challenges of hunger, learning about the challenges of houselessness, learning that there are people that are cold on the street, and develops compassion and passion about doing something about it. Wants to wake up early, wants to be with their parents, wants to be with their friends to give back to help their neighbors in need. The data actually shows us that it's those same children who will end up creating a lifetime that is about addressing some of those root cases that get to justice, about changing the system and not just meeting the needs that are urgent today.

And so volunteering in service is critical to addressing those barriers that exist because it creates the community that's going to solve those challenges not only for the near term but for the long term as well.

**[13:52] Jacqueline Innocent:** Perfect. And then you talk so much about the benefit of service and volunteering to communities. You also talked about or alluded to benefits to those who choose to serve. And so I was really interested in knowing what are your thoughts about the current and historical barriers that keep people from volunteering or serving or participating in national service through the AmeriCorps program? And what are some steps that we might all be able to take so that being an AmeriCorps member is an even more inclusive experience so that even more Americans are engaged in volunteering and it's truly a cross section of our entire country engaged?

**[14:37] Michael Smith:** That's a great question, Jacqueline. You know, the first thing I would say to that is I don't necessarily believe the numbers. The numbers show that it's about a third of Americans that are volunteering on a regular basis.

I know, growing up in the community that I grew up in — I grew up in a low-income black neighborhood — folks were doing everything they could for each other. People who didn't have a whole lot of money, didn't have a whole lot of time, they were taking care of their community in ways that still just inspires me and fires me up when I think about it. But, you know, they probably didn't think of themselves as volunteers. They probably would've never thought of themselves as someone who should apply for a national service program. The Sunday School teacher, the coach, the mom or the dad that got all the other kids who needed an extra hand over the weekend. And so, one, I think if we look at our communities, especially our communities in the greatest need, I think you will find people that believe in the Beloved Community, are actively building the community in ways that would inspire us tremendously.

But, you know, there are real barriers when we think about national service and the way that AmeriCorps leads it. So you can be a full-time AmeriCorps member. You can be a part-time AmeriCorps member. We have a stipend that you can get in order to do that. The stipend is still too low. You know, it's not enough for many people. We have an education award that you can get. It is helpful, but it hasn't grown in the way that it needs to grow. I remember hearing a young woman several years ago at I think it was a Points of Lights conference, a young black woman was asked by a moderator why do you think more of your friends don't join you in service? And she said, "You know, too many of my friends see this as a luxury that they can't afford." And so we have to change the conversation about this being a luxury that you can't afford. We have to change the policies so that we can make this something that is possible for anyone. And we also have to make sure that everybody can see themselves as a part of this family. So if you just have an hour to give on the weekend or you have 1,700 hours to give in a year, your service matters equally.

**[17:00] Jacqueline Innocent:** I love the way you started that answer. It would've been easy to fall ... I probably shouldn't have asked the question the way I did. It would've been so easy to fall into that trap of believing that we don't have a diverse cross section of people in America volunteering. The question is do we believe those numbers? Maybe those numbers really only ladder up to that very formal sense of volunteering rather than the more informal volunteering that so many community members do.

But I also appreciate you highlighting all the ways that we can also make volunteering more welcoming for more. We've been talking about systemic inequities. We've been talking about Beloved Community and the power of the AmeriCorps program to help close the divides in our country and address some of the challenges we're facing. But of course I'd be remiss if we didn't take a moment to talk about one of the biggest challenges that we're facing, and that's COVID. So I was hoping you could talk for a bit about the role that you see for AmeriCorps service and volunteering around addressing COVID and the recovery from it.

**[18:09] Michael Smith:** Sure. Thanks for that question. This is one of the areas where I have just been so proud of what AmeriCorps has done, what AmeriCorps members have done, what our partners have done. There are some new amazing things.

As part of the American Rescue Plan, we received a historic investment at AmeriCorps, and one of the things that is enabling is the launch of Public Health AmeriCorps, where we will now have thousands of new public health professionals that we are trying to build up from low-income communities, from underserved communities, so that they are working in the public health industry. And we hope that they will start as volunteers and start as AmeriCorps members, but we will create a pathway so that we are building the ranks of folks that are proximate that are working in public health. And so that's something we're going to see. That's a \$400 million commitment that I think could potentially not only help to transform communities, to hold up communities, but also change the game for the long term.

But also, all over the country, what we are seeing AmeriCorps members doing is a myriad different ways addressing the challenges that we're facing. I was talking recently with some AmeriCorps NCCC, our National Civilian Community Corps members, that were deployed at hospitals across the state of Kentucky. So when we were seeing the omicron surges, medical professionals needed help because there were things that they needed to kind of create time, and so we were able to send AmeriCorps team members working alongside these hospitals to do some of the jobs that freed up more time for the medical professionals. And I met at least a couple of those AmeriCorps members who actually want to go into medical careers, and so we're serving and learning at the same time.

We see ... I think we now have 65, 70,000 AmeriCorps members that are working with the public school system. And so when we look at learning loss, when we look at the inequities that existed before for our opportunity youth that were already at risk, of graduating or successfully entering into the workforce, we now see AmeriCorps members that are working, closely connected with our teachers and with our administrations to keep kids in school and on track. So there are lots of ways that AmeriCorps members are showing up to make sure that we're responding. And I mentioned earlier I also have been proud as we look at the food insecurity, to see how AmeriCorps members are helping in all sorts of ways to combat food insecurity all across the country.

So AmeriCorps members, what we are able to do as a federal agency, as our partners on the ground, we're kind of able to turn on a dime. And when the going gets tough in a community and the challenges change, AmeriCorps is able to change with that and make sure that we're responding to the most challenging moments that the communities are dealing with.

**[21:02] Jacqueline Innocent:** Thank you, Michael. That's a lot of powerful ways that you guys have pivoted to make sure that you're dealing with the challenges of the moment and really helping with what people need today.

Thank you. Because we really appreciated the flexibility and the support in pivoting our AmeriCorps members as well, right? Because in the moment of COVID, this concept of home — all of a sudden home was the place to shelter. Home was the place to actually wash hands. Home was the place to quarantine. And not everybody, even in this country, has an opportunity to do that or has sufficient space or the right facilities to be able to follow the guidance that the government gave us. And so despite the challenges, we needed to find ways for our AmeriCorps members to continue to serve and address adequate and affordable housing, and the agency really worked with us and provided great support in that. So thank you for that.

**[21:57] Michael Smith:** Thank you, Jacqueline. And what I think is powerful there, too, that I think is something that we've seen throughout American history, when your home is being challenged, when you are suffering, there is something that is transformative about stepping out to help others. Something that lifts you up. Something that gives you hope.

**[22:19] Jacqueline Innocent:** So true.

**[22:20] Michael Smith:** And I think we've been able to not only see the transformation that's happening with our community members, the houses that have come up, the systems that are being changed, but the transformation that is happening with AmeriCorps members, our AmeriCorps senior volunteers and all the volunteers that we work with that feel good being able to do something at this time of great challenge.

**[22:40] Jacqueline Innocent:** That's such a good point. I'm stepping out, remembering to look up and look out even when challenged. That's a really good point.

Michael, I think this would be a great time to invite Kirby Page to join us. I don't know if you've had a chance to meet her outside of preparing for this conversation, but Kirby Page has been a longtime volunteer, youth volunteer as we would call them. And when we talk about inclusivity, we can't forget including the next generation, not just in asking them to serve but in them helping to understand what we need to be working for, what we need to be working against, how we should be serving.

So with that, Kirby, welcome. Kirby's going to help field some questions from those of you who are watching, so feel free to start entering them.

But before we do that, Kirby, when you hear not just us here today, but in the news and all the dialogue, when you hear people talking about inclusivity, when you hear people talking about building the Beloved Community, when you hear people talk about systemic inequality and all those topics we sort of touched on today, what do you wish you were hearing more of? What does the next generation wish that the older generation would spend more time thinking about and working on?

**[24:02] Kirby Page:** Yes. Thank you, Jacqueline. And nice to meet you, Michael, and welcome you into the role and this space.

You know, I've been with Habitat, again for a long time, and I think from that it's steered me into different spaces where I'm now a diversity, equity and inclusion manager at a global health nonprofit that's also focused on social justice. And so bringing all those things together, I think about this a lot in the volunteer space across all of these different panels. And one of the biggest things that I think that youth volunteers spanning across a multitude of areas and spaces is that wellness has to be a huge consideration in our service and in all facets of our lives. So what are we doing to support both the physical and the mental health of volunteers and of people within our systems as they move forward and engage with our organizations and with service?

And I think that's really critical at this point in time, being within this pandemic, and also over the past few years as things continue to shift and change around the nation, and people really need those supports for any of the spaces that they're in, even going from the AmeriCorps spaces of being in the health care field and providing the support for frontline health care workers, but

being in the schools and the spaces where they're helping to provide these supports for others, what supports are being granted for volunteers or service members who are looking for this kind of space with wellness and health and mental health in general.

**[25:45] Jacqueline Innocent:** Thank you for that, Kirby. Is there anything else you wanted to share with us before you start taking some questions from the audience to see what they would like us to focus a little bit more on?

**[25:55] Kirby Page:** No. I think I'm happy to go into the Q&A, so thank you.

**[25:59] Jacqueline Innocent:** OK, let's do it.

**[26:00] Kirby Page:** Great. I can lead with our first question from the audience, which is what role can youth play to lead this conversation on the Beloved Community?

**[26:12] Jacqueline Innocent:** Michael, could you lead us in that answer?

**[26:14] Michael Smith:** Yeah, sure. I mean, look, we don't have to invite youth in to play a role because youth will show up. I've got Dr. King behind me, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela. And when you think about some of our civil rights leaders and how young they were when they were at the center of movements, when you think about the climate change movement and who's leading that movement, when you think about the conversations that we had after the horrific murder of George Floyd that is changing the way that America thinks about race and equity, it's young people that have kept the momentum.

And so I think, one, it is always young people that are at the leadership of movements and oftentimes more often than not they are driving society. And so I think we just have to make sure that we are listening, we have to make sure that we are providing on-ramps, we have to make sure that we're providing the support that they need, we have to make sure that we're not using them just as tokens, but they have the opportunity to lead and drive conversations.

I know we have at AmeriCorps a youth board member by statute that sits on our board. When I was leading My Brothers Keeper, we had youth board members. And so we have to make sure that we're listening, that we are connected and that we are making it possible. You know, this idea that you're going to be the leader of tomorrow — our young people are the leaders of today, and we have to make sure that we're constantly thinking about that pipeline and providing those opportunities so that we cultivate that talent so that the generation that's coming up behind us is even stronger than we are.

**[27:51] Kirby Page:** Thank you, Michael. I appreciate that answer. Our next question from the audience for you, Michael, is youth can provide an added energy, ideas and value to organizations through youth volunteering efforts, but there can be substantial barriers to the success of youth engagement. And so what advice do you have for organizations or young people themselves to address or remove barriers from meaningful engagement?

**[28:17] Michael Smith:** Yeah. You know, I'd have to think about what ... I wish we could engage in a conversation to hear more about the barriers that you're thinking about, but I think it's like with anything else. What is the goal-setting work that you're doing? What is the power-building work that you're doing?

So one of the things that we found when it comes to youth involvement is making sure you never just have one young person that's sitting on a board, but make sure that there's a committee or a couple people that are working together. Making sure that you're clear about the roles and the responsibilities, you're clear about the wins.

As Kirby mentioned, making sure that you're taking care of yourself first. We don't need martyrs in this field. We need people that are going to be ready to do this work for the long haul. So you've got put your mask on first, as the saying goes, and take care of yourself and know when to step out, know when to step in. And so I think it's more than anything else, it's about a realistic setting of expectations.

It's about power building, and it's about taking care of yourself so you can be in the fight.

**[29:25] Kirby Page:** Wonderful. And then an additional question for you, Michael, is what makes service and volunteering such a strong vehicle for uniting and improving communities, and why should we tackle tough community issues with volunteers?

**[29:40] Michael Smith:** Well, I mean, goodness. There are a few different reasons to think about that. One, government can't do it alone. The private sector can't do it alone. Schools can't do it alone. If we are going to reverse some of the challenges that we have been dealing with since the inception of this country, it's going to take all of us playing a role. Everyone's going to have to get involved, stand up, and step up in their communities. And I think anybody will tell you that, whether it's a military leader, a political leader or a business leader, it's taking all of us in this together and all of us bringing our unique strengths, our unique gifts, our unique talents to the table as well.

The other thing that I think is important to think about is service transforms. It transforms individuals by helping to build skills, by practicing new things, by creating even stronger pathways to education and career, and it also transforms relationships. We've seen the power of service to bring together people from all sorts of diverse, different backgrounds who may have never come together before, through the power of service. Neighbor helping neighbor, and I think it transforms the way that we operate as communities and hopefully as a country.

**[30:54] Kirby Page:** Thank you, Michael. An additional question from the chat we have here is, in your experience, how have you seen volunteering bring people together to build community and impact systemic and local and national issues?

**[31:08] Michael Smith:** Yeah, you know, I think I addressed that a little bit here, but I was on the board of Public Allies. When I was working at the Case Foundation, we brought City Year here to Washington, D.C., and I've seen this up close and personal. I've seen the person that might have been from a rural background that never met a Black or brown person in their life come together with the single mom from the inner city from a community of color who then become the best of friends. And the ripple effects that are not only helping to change the work that they're doing but even potentially changes how their family addresses all sorts of different issues. So we certainly see that on the personal level, but we see it on the level of actually tackling community challenges as well.

As I talked about earlier, this path from charity to justice where we see AmeriCorps members who might have started off as a City Year member or a Teach for America member who wanted to volunteer for a year of full-time service working in schools. And then just a couple years later they've decided to devote their life to education. We've seen AmeriCorps members that are working in public health who decide that they're going to continue that work in public health. So start from addressing these immediate needs and then become systems leaders. So I'm really excited to see that, and the data is showing that that transformation can indeed happen.

**[32:34] Kirby Page:** Thank you. I agree. I've also seen through peers of my own that interest and that growth from being in Teach for America or College Advising Corps to going through and being really indebted to the education system and growing in that space. So I appreciate that answer.

**[32:50] Michael Smith:** Right. Those kids might've just been hedge fund managers or something, and they got bitten by the bug. I know for me, when I was a kid, I wanted to be a journalist, and I thought I wanted to do, like, broadcast news. And I did early jobs and experiences working on the Hill and working with the National Crime Prevention Council, and it was those early experiences that made me realize, "Actually, I want to go a different direction."

And so service can be that opportunity that opens doors that our young people haven't even thought about. And not only our young people, but when I think about our AmeriCorps seniors, over 55 and over 60, sometimes doing career shifts and career changes and deciding to use the next third of their life in different ways because of that experience that they had.

**[33:38] Kirby Page:** Absolutely. I fundamentally know that my experience volunteering with Habitat starting from 2011 has led me to where I am today. I had the conversation with some peers just last night around "where do you see yourself if you couldn't work to make an impact?" And I think that that's very much a foundation that Habitat built within me, and there is nowhere I see myself where I'm not working to make an impact. And that's the long-lasting impact of that early-stage volunteering, so I agree.

**[34:16] Michael Smith:** Jacqueline, I think you're on mute if you said something.

**[34:19] Jacqueline Innocent:** I was asking Kirby if we have any more questions from the audience that we wanted to ask Michael before we transition to closing.

**[34:30] Kirby Page:** Yes. I believe we have one more, and that would be, you know, a lot of my friends are super passionate about current issues, from Black Lives Matter to climate change. How can you connect those issues to national service or housing?

Which I know you've touched on a little bit here, but if you wanted to elaborate a little bit more.

**[34:47] Michael Smith:** Sure. The biggest issues of the day are the issues that communities are tackling and grappling. And so I think if you care about climate, there are opportunities to work with organizations that are doing climate mitigation. If you care about social justice, there is an opportunity to work with organizations that are doing social justice. If you care about the state of health care in our country, there's an opportunity to volunteer with organizations that are doing that.

And so this provides this incredible on-ramp opportunity to not only talk about the issues but to be about the issues, to get your hands dirty, to do the work and to begin to be a part of bending that moral arc towards justice in our nation.

**[35:38] Kirby Page:** Well thank you, Michael. I appreciate all of your insight. And then I have a closing question just for you. What did you do on Martin Luther King Day this past Monday?

**[35:49] Michael Smith:** Well, Kirby, let me first say to you thank you for your service, thank you for who you are, thank you for not stopping with just one project but devoting your life to service and the way that you're giving back right now. I can't wait to see the more that you will do and how you will continue to lead this country. So I just want to say you are an inspiration and thank you for being who you are.

MLK Day of Service, I was everywhere, I feel like. You know, we had service projects all over the country. I had a chance to join President Biden and Dr. Biden in Philadelphia at Philabundance — it's a food services or nonprofit organization that provides healthy food to members of the community — and packing those boxes.

I had a chance to be with the Mission Continues, a veterans organization, working in a senior housing facility in the District of Columbia, where we were doing painting and rehabbing some rooms for the seniors, also another room where they do an indoor community garden. I had an opportunity ... and our secretary of the VA was there and our acting director of OMB was there

And then we were with the administrator of NASA building COVID kits with probably a couple hundred volunteers that came together to build COVID test kits in D.C. So I was so excited to have an opportunity to serve. And the President, the First Lady, the Vice President and the Second Gentleman, they were all out serving, members of the Cabinet, serving with thousands, if not millions, of Americans who were serving on King Day as well.

**[37:28] Jacqueline Innocent:** Wow, Michael. You did a lot in just one day, and of course that spirit continues on.

**[37:32] Michael Smith:** It was 2½ days. It was MLK Day weekend.

**[37:35] Jacqueline Innocent:** Fair enough. The whole three-day weekend. And hopefully, you know, we can all be inspired by what you achieved in just 2½ to 3 days and do just a bit of that each day in our own way.

I was going to close us out and come back to a theme, Michael, that you've touched on, how it's all connected, how interrelated we all are. Just in listening to your remarks between you and Kirby, there's a lot of overlap, right? And I really appreciate you joining us today and being willing to share from the heart and so honestly what you think, but especially what you think is possible when it comes to bringing Americans together and reducing the challenges that we're currently facing. And there's an MLK quote that covers one of the themes you touched on that I'd love to just read for us all as we close out.

"In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality."

And Michael and Kirby, all of your comments today really helped to remind us of that. And to those of you who joined us and took the time today to hear us out, please leverage what you learned here today to take one additional step or do one new thing that will contribute to this effort. Support AmeriCorps, support Habitat, take steps in your own organization, or make a change in your own personal life. Do something — anything — because we can't do it without you.

Thank you for joining, Kirby and Michael. Thank you so much for your time.