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November 23, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

As you evaluate legislative ideas to promote job creation, I ask that you consider the far-reaching impact of direct public service employment, particularly for jobs in historic preservation of local and regional civic landmarks and the arts. We have much to be proud of in our efforts to boost the economy, but more must be done to directly target unemployment.

As the New York Times recently noted, “a broad range of economists” say that strong federal intervention through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and other Democratic initiatives “is helping an economy in free fall a year ago to grow again and shed fewer jobs than it otherwise would. Mr. Obama’s promise to ‘save or create’ about 3.5 million jobs by the end of 2010 is roughly on track.” While the Recovery Act is stimulating the economy as intended, we are facing a far steeper jobs deficit than was initially projected—a loss of nearly 7 million jobs. In my district, the city of Lawrence, Mass. has struggled with double digit unemployment for the last year and a half. Nearly one out of every five workers there is currently unemployed. In neighboring Lowell, Mass., unemployment is at 13%. I know you share my sense of urgency that something must be done now.

I am a strong supporter of the private sector and applaud the many dedicated employers in my district and across the country who create good jobs and serve their communities. I have always said that strong public-private partnerships are critical to any long-term economic revival. However, we have reached a crisis moment where the fastest, most cost-effective way to create jobs in the short-term is a direct hires program modeled after the work programs so successfully utilized by President Roosevelt during the Great Depression.

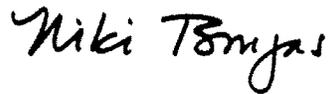
Even the conservative pages of the Wall Street Journal opinion section have argued that, done well, this could be the best option available to federal policymakers. Public service jobs need not compete with private sector jobs but could take on desperately-needed projects focused on public improvements and the arts in our communities. For instance, just as New Deal programs wisely promoted the arts, public service jobs today could focus on revitalizing and restoring publicly

owned buildings such as historically significant libraries, municipal buildings, city halls, auditoriums and theaters. Instead of allowing our civic treasures to further decline during this downturn, we can capitalize on this moment to create jobs, give our citizens an opportunity to contribute to their communities, and save our civic, cultural and architectural heritage.

As President Roosevelt himself noted, the preservation of our culture influences all aspects of life: "The Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration is a practical relief project which also emphasizes the best tradition of the democratic spirit. The WPA artist, in rendering his own impression of things, speaks also for the spirit of his fellow countrymen everywhere." As you know, the work done by the WPA had an effect far beyond the jobs created; their beautification and preservation efforts touched nearly every community in America for years afterward. This is the moment in which we could do the same for future generations of Americans while helping our citizens weather this economic storm now.

You face many tough choices as you weigh job creation strategies. Given the urgency of the crisis and the opportunity to make a lasting impact on our communities, I urge you to consider the benefits of direct employment through a program such as this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Niki Tsongas". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress