WASHINGTON, D.C. - Unless the White House takes quick action, the AmeriCorps national service program stands to have its funding cut dramatically this year. Rather than increase the number of volunteers to 75,000 as the president called for in his 2004 budget proposal, the program would be forced to cut back to a volunteer force of only 28,000 in 2003.

In a letter sent to the president this week, Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 31), who was a member of the House Education and Labor Committee in 1993 when AmeriCorps was founded, and 109 of his colleagues, requested AmeriCorps funding in the amount of $200 million to be included in the next supplemental appropriations request expected later this year. This amount would be enough to sustain the successful program at the 2002 level of 67,000 volunteers.

"AmeriCorps continues to be a terrific program with a proven track record of meeting the high priority needs of our communities, and the nation," Rep. Becerra said. "The socio-economic advances made because of the hard work of thousands of volunteers, not to mention the example they set as Americans willing to serve their country, convince me that this government should do everything it can to expand this program, rather than scale it back."

The recent funding cuts stem from accounting errors made by the executives of the Corporation for National Service and Community Service. Because of these mismanagement problems, AmeriCorps will still suffer nearly a 60 percent funding cut nationwide and a 65 percent cut in the number of volunteers in Rep. Becerra's home state of California.

"Not withstanding the errors committed by the AmeriCorps executives, the volunteers shouldn't be made to suffer," Rep. Becerra said. "The AmeriCorps program cost this government $240 million in 2002. Does it make sense to be passing tax cuts to the tune of $400 billion while at the same time discussing ways to trim a successful program that costs three-fifth's of one percent of the tax cut we passed this past May? Absolutely not."