



Changing the face and practice of leadership in Albuquerque * Chicago * Cincinnati * Connecticut * Delaware * Estes Park * Los Angeles * Miami * Milwaukee * New York City * Phoenix * Pittsburgh * Raleigh-Durham * San Antonio * Silicon Valley

Response to Investors Business Daily Editorial

On September 4th, *Investors Business Daily* attacked Public Allies in order to smear the Obamas. They painted an inaccurate, distorted view of our work which been further distorted by many blogs. It is unfortunate that a nonpartisan nonprofit organization has been used by IBD to attack the Obamas. No one associated with Public Allies was interviewed by IBD, so it is important to set the record straight.

Public Allies mission is to advance new leadership to strengthen communities, nonprofits and civic participation. We achieve our mission in two ways. First, we have built a successful pipeline for young adults to begin nonprofit and public service careers. Second, we help individuals and organizations become more effective leaders.

Our AmeriCorps program recruits young adults, ages 18 to 30, places them in nonprofit apprenticeships where they serve their communities, and provides them with leadership training. It is important to note that our participants are forbidden during their service from participating in partisan activities, lobbying, voter registration, and protests, and they are fired if they participate in such activities.

Public Allies primarily serves low income urban communities, and prides ourselves on identifying and developing home-grown leaders. As a result, about two-thirds of Allies are people of color and about half are college graduates when they participate in the program. It should also be noted that military veterans have served in Public Allies and Ally graduates have served in the military.

Our placements have included well known organizations like The American Red Cross, The Boys & Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Habitat for Humanity as well as small faith-based and community-based organizations. Any 501c3 nonprofit may apply for an Ally so long as they have a project with a direct, measurable community benefit, and sign an agreement that defines prohibited activities. We select projects through a competitive matching process, and are proud of our independence in selecting groups that have included, for example, church-based social services, gay and lesbian services, voucher schools, and job placement services for ex-felons.

Public Allies trains Allies in leadership either weekly or bi-weekly. We believe that the next generation of leaders needs to be able to connect across cultures, facilitate collaborative work, recognize and mobilize all of a community's assets, be responsible for their development, and be accountable to those they work with and those they serve. These are our values and are similar to what is taught in the leadership curricula of many FORTUNE 500 companies. Our young people bring diverse viewpoints to our trainings, and we encourage them to voice their differences and work through them so that they can learn how to work toward common goals with people of diverse backgrounds, beliefs and experiences. We do not require or teach Allies to have political points of view.

One way we measure our program's success is by the number of our alumni who continue to serve their communities through their careers. We do not discourage alumni who wish to work in the private sector. Our emphasis and expertise, however, are preparing young people for careers in the nonprofit sector, and recent research has found that the sector will need 640,000 new leaders over the next decade. We also have tracked the civic engagement of our graduates because we encourage them to be active citizens regardless of their political views or career choices. In a past study, our members were twice as likely as 18-34 year olds generally to volunteer, mentor a young person, serve on a nonprofit board, attend a public meeting, and engage in protest activities. Public Allies does not sponsor, participate in, or promote these activities.

Public Allies is funded by AmeriCorps, and has more than tripled in size with support from the Bush Administration. We were recognized as a model for supporting faith-based and community organizations, a priority of the Administration, and received a contract from AmeriCorps under Bush to share our best practices with other AmeriCorps grantees, specifically how to better engage and strengthen communities through service (i.e., helping communities learn to fish rather than giving them fish). Public Allies does advocate for growth of AmeriCorps and supports the proposals of both Senator McCain and Senator

Obama to grow AmeriCorps from 75,000 to 250,000 members. Most of our money comes from the private sector and private philanthropy, and our board has always included people who identify themselves as Republicans and Democrats. We were recognized by *Fast Company Magazine* with a "Social Capitalist Award" for applying the best practices of business to social needs.

As a nonpartisan organization, we are saddened that *Investors Business Daily* distorted our record to attack Barack and Michelle Obama. Michelle was an excellent staff member of Public Allies. She helped create the program we run today, engaged local foundations and corporations to support our work, and built a board that included corporate and community leaders, Republicans and Democrats. We are grateful for her contribution, and we are grateful that many Republicans, including President Bush and Senator McCain, have supported national service programs like ours.

We hope that Investors Business Daily and others seeking to attack the Obamas will not distort our record for that purpose. We are not a partisan organization and do not engage in partisan activities whatsoever. We wish to use our resources to serve our communities, not respond to inaccurate, distorted, political attacks.

Public Allies' Letter to the Editor of Investors Business Daily

Dear Editor

It is unfortunate that Investors Business Daily used Public Allies, a non-partisan nonprofit organization, as a vehicle to smear the Obamas in the editorial, "Michelle's Boot Camps for Radicals" on September 4th.

I am a Republican and a former board member of Public Allies. Beyond the inaccuracies and distortions about Public Allies is a deeper concern - tarnishing the good work of a nonpartisan organization for a partisan purpose. I have served on more than a dozen nonprofit boards during my career and believe that service should not be the province of partisanship.

National service is one of the few issues on which Senators McCain and Obama agree. Both believe it should be greatly expanded and both will appear in a televised forum on the topic on September 11th. Public Allies, while supported by the Obamas, has also been supported by President Bush, whose administration has more than tripled their funding. In fact, President Bush honored me for my volunteerism with Public Allies in 2002.

Conservatives have supported Public Allies for three main reasons. First, they are result-focused and select the best service projects for their participants, including, for example, faith-based organizations, charter schools, and choice schools. Second, Public Allies employs the best practices of the private sector in its management, which led *Fast Company Magazine* to honor them with a "Social Capitalist Award." Third, they believe that communities should learn to help themselves, and AmeriCorps under Bush, contracted with them to help their other grantees better engage community members as volunteers and partners in their projects.

I am proud that the Obamas have highlighted Public Allies, and proud that Senator McCain is committed to national service. I hope that Investors Business Daily will learn more about the importance of community service and not politicize good works.

Linda Stephenson
Milwaukee, WI