



STATEMENT BY KEVIN F. F. QUIGLEY
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PEACE CORPS ASSOCIATION

SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps, and Narcotics Affairs
July 25, 2007

Chairman Dodd and Ranking Member Corker, my name is Kevin Quigley, President of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA). Like many other witnesses today, I am a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV). I served in Thailand for three years, 1976-79. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee to comment on your important and timely legislation, S.732, The Peace Corps Volunteer Empowerment Act.

While other witnesses have more direct experience in administering Peace Corps programs or more current experience as volunteers, I am here to discuss two inter-related provisions of great interest to the returned Peace Corps community. These are the authority to double Peace Corps by the time of the 50th Anniversary in 2011 and provide an additional \$10 million to be used through a competitive process to fund outstanding Third Goal Projects that effectively bring the world back home.

Given the considerable interest in your legislation, NPCA conducted an on-line survey. After a brief background about NPCA, in my testimony I'll report on this membership survey and then devote most of my limited time to discussing the central provisions regarding doubling Peace Corps and funding Third Goal activities. As you requested, I will also provide suggestions regarding how Peace Corps could be more effective in recruiting minorities and older Americans as volunteers.

NPCA

NPCA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1979 and is the only national organization for Peace Corps volunteers, staff, and others whose lives have been influenced by the Peace Corps experience. Our mission is to "help lead the Peace Corps community and others in fostering peace through service, education and advocacy."

We seek to connect, inform and engage the Peace Corps community. In this community, there are 130 affiliates, 90,000 supporters and more than 30,000 individuals who participate in our national and affiliates' activities. These individuals reside in all 50 states the District of Columbia, the territories, as well as living overseas. They continue to serve and make a difference in a variety of ways. NPCA has programs to promote service, enhance understanding of other cultures, and advocate around issues of importance to our community, such as this legislation.

Membership Survey

From March 15 - April 15 this year, NPCA conducted an on-line survey seeking reaction to the Peace Corps Volunteer Empowerment Act (S. 732). Our survey was divided into sections that roughly paralleled sections of the legislation, asking individuals to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with key proposals.

433 individuals took part in the survey, representing at least 41 states and the District of Columbia. Survey respondents provided more than 1,300 comments. They served (or currently serve) in at least 80 of the 139 total Peace Corps countries. For those who provided information, nearly half (44%) served in the Peace Corps during the current decade of the 2000's. Twenty percent served in the 1960's, 15% in the 1990's, 11% in the 1970's and 10% in the 1980's. Although this is by no means a rigorously scientific survey, we are confident that it is generally representative of the interested and engaged Peace Corps community.

Overall, the respondents were extremely supportive of the provisions in the legislation, although expressing some cautions. With the Chairman's permission, I would like to have a copy of the survey results submitted into the hearing record.

Broadly speaking, the cautions were that whatever Congress does should not impede the fundamental mission, independence and operations of Peace Corps, nor negatively affect the volunteer's role in the community.

Doubling Peace Corps

Section 401 of S.732 provides authority for a significantly expanded Peace Corps. As we heard earlier today, Peace Corps is at a near three-decade high of 7,700+ volunteers. However, this is just half of its size in 1968 when Peace Corps had 15,000 volunteers and trainees. At that time, our country was 50% percent smaller, with a population of 200 million as opposed to 300 million today. So, relatively speaking Peace Corps is ¼ of its size four decades ago.

This small size is not because Peace Corps has solved the problems it was created to address, nor is it ineffective, nor is there is insufficient demand from countries or potential volunteers. With more than 2 billion people in the world living on less than \$2 a day, poverty is every bit as endemic as it was when President John F. Kennedy created the Peace Corps in 1961, 46 years ago. The Office of Management and Budget gives Peace Corps agency its highest rating for effectiveness. There are more than 20 countries that have requested Peace Corps and more than three applicants for every Peace Corps volunteer position. As public attention to Peace Corps inevitably increases in the next years leading up to the 50th Anniversary in 2011, the demand from countries and from Americans to serve could expand dramatically.

From the vantage point of the U.S. standing in the world, as the Pew Global Attitude survey suggests, U.S. standing in the world has plummeted. As the Freedom from Terror survey also suggests, when there are direct people-to-people contacts there is a dramatic increase in how Americans and America is viewed. Furthermore, those perceptions appear to persist long after the initial engagement.

Given that Peace Corps is one of the most effective faces that we show to the world, expanding Peace Corps is extremely timely. This expansion can also help respond to a major U.S. national challenge, assist in addressing persistent global poverty, and is strongly supported by the Peace Corps community.

Third Goal Competitive Funding

As the Chairman and many others in this hearing room know well, since its inception Peace Corps has had three overriding goals. I paraphrase: 1) help others help themselves, 2) help them understand our country better, and 3) bring that experience back home.

For a variety of very good reasons, Peace Corps has invested the great preponderance of its resources in addressing goals numbers #1 and #2, primarily through recruiting, training, and placing volunteers overseas.

With generally constrained budgets, goal #3 – to bring the Peace Corps experience back home - has been consistently under-funded (based on the most recent analysis by Congressional Research Service, today's annual Peace Corps budget for 7.7k volunteers of slightly less than \$320 million is roughly equal to 30 hours of funding for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan).

Mr Chairman, your provision to authorize up to \$10 million for a competitive grants program for outstanding Third Goal projects organized by individuals and groups in the Peace Corps community is the first serious effort to address the perennial under-funding of this key Third Goal.

I am confident that your approach can generate significant leverage within the Peace Corps community and that any U.S. government resources would be matched by comparable in-kind and direct contributions from community members and organizations that are committed to meeting the Third Goal. This provision can build on the modest but effective programs already in place through Peace Corps and the network of more than 130 groups in the Peace Corps community that organize Third Goal activities in schools and communities across the country, especially around Peace Corps week—the first week of March.

Understandably, some critics of your provision will suggest that any funds for this activity will come at the expense of goals #1 and #2, seeing this as kind of “zero-sum” circumstance.

I see this very differently. Since we have chronically under-invested in the Third Goal, Americans know far too little about Peace Corps (in fact, many Americans are unaware that it still exists) and its highly efficient use of U.S. taxpayer resources. If our fellow citizens knew about Peace Corps, especially what results it achieves with modest resources, I think they would be clamoring for a significantly expanded Peace Corps.

So, dedicated funding for 3rd Goal Activity through a competitive process would provide resources ensuring that the Third Goal can be finally addressed and met.

Regarding administration of this Third Goal Grants Fund, I understand that while Peace Corps is generally supportive of this—especially if it involves additional funding—the agency may be reluctant to take on this responsibility since administering a grants program is not its core competence and may detract from Peace Corps's focus on recruiting, placing and supporting volunteers. If that is the case, there are other alternatives. Congress could provide this authority to either the Corporation for National Service or U.S. Agency for International Development, perhaps through the Volunteers in International Prosperity program. The former directly administers grant programs, the latter does so through a consortium of volunteer-placing organizations. Another alternative would be to have an independent organization, such as the National Peace Corps Association or another organization closely connected to the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer community, administer this role. There are some distinct advantages to either approach, which I would be glad to discuss further if the Committee is interested.

Regardless of where this Grants Fund is administered, I strongly believe that scaling up successful Third Goal Activities through these resources will help raise Peace Corps' profile, assist in recruiting highly motivated Americans, and generate needed public support for an expanded Peace Corps.

Recruiting Minorities/50+ Volunteers

The other witnesses have presented comments about what is being done and what steps we might take to improve recruiting minorities and older Americans as volunteers. Based on our survey and many conversations with members of the Peace Corps community, there are three steps to recommend. First, I think the critical step is to once again make service in Peace Corps a national priority and part of an overall strategy of restoring this country's role as a trusted international leader. Second and related to this, there should be an aggressive campaign to double Peace Corps. Third, with that kind of policy commitment in place, the recruitment process can be improved through greater transparency regarding the length of time and the required steps in the process, especially related to the medical clearance process. As your legislation provides, we also need to find ways to offset the high costs associated with the medical clearance process that are borne by applicants.

For example, one of my colleagues, Ravi Shah, submitted a statement to the Committee about his experiences as an applicant. Let me summarize briefly, after serving as an intern at NPCA, Ravi applied to Peace Corps last November. Ravi just completed the medical and security clearances and last week was invited to be a volunteer in Ukraine. He will leave on September 28th. Ravi's statement indicated that he had to pay \$439 in out-of-pocket expenses to complete the required tests. Of this amount, \$197 was reimbursed, less than half of the costs associated with his medical clearance. This is a significant barrier to service for many. We recommend that these medical clearance costs be provided by Peace Corps. Recognizing the potential expense and the need to avoid disincentives, perhaps the best way to do this is through a modest increase to the readjustment allowance to retroactively compensate volunteers for these costs after she or he has completed service.

Conclusion

Chairman Dodd and Ranking Member Corker, the Peace Corps community thanks you for addressing the issue of expanding Peace Corps and providing funding for Third Goal Activities—which have been long-held aspirations for our community. We are also grateful for the many other creative provisions you are proposing for empowering volunteers and lowering the barriers to service so that many more Americans can serve in a Peace Corps. With these changes, Peace Corps can have an even greater impact in addressing the problems of poverty and under development. As Chairman Dodd said in his statement introducing this legislation, this will make “make the Peace Corps even more relevant to the dynamic world of the 21st Century.” And for that reason, we strongly support it.

The National Peace Corps Association is committed to working with you and others to generate the resources required so that Peace Corps can be expanded in future years, providing many more Americans with the opportunity to serve their country through the Peace Corps and to bring that experience back to America in ways that help shape our place and improve our standing in the world.

Thank you.

NPCA
1900 L Street, NW, Suite 404, WDC, 20036
www.peacecorpsconnect.org