

# HCR 303

TESTIMONY OF DUANE K. OKAMOTO

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, INTERNATIONAL &  
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

MONDAY APRIL 27, 2009

2:30 P.M.

ROOM 225

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 303  
SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Chairperson English and Members of the Committee:

My name is Duane Okamoto and I am the Deputy Director of the Hawaii Department of Agriculture. I am testifying in a personal capacity in strong support of HCR 303, which calls for an expansion of the Peace Corps through the Peace Corps Expansion Act of 2009.

I am testifying largely because I just received an email from a doctor friend now in Malawi who is spending his vacation at the only teaching hospital in the country. He has gone to Malawi at his own expense on his own time to offer his services because of having been a Peace Corps volunteer almost 40 years ago. I thought the least I could do would be to spend a little bit of time writing in support of a program that almost 50 years since its inception continues to motivate people to volunteer.

I was a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Ghana, West Africa. I believe that the Peace Corps is one of the finest and most appreciated of federal government programs and has done much to alleviate poverty, disease, and ignorance around the world.

All you have to do to verify this statement is go to the East West Center or any gathering of foreign students on college campuses and inevitably you will find someone who is there because a PCV helped to build a road so a village could sell its goods and afford a school, or they will know a PCV who taught them English so they could take an exam that led to a scholarship, that brought them to the US, or they will know a PCV who got them excited about science, or dug a well and brought clean water to their village.

Peace Corps is not a one way street with only foreign countries benefiting. The Peace Corps has given close to 200,000 Americans insights into cultures and ways of doing things that have enriched our communities when the volunteers have come home. They offer a fact-based perspective that balances the frequently negative stereotypes that are often perpetuated in the media about people in the developing world.

Hawaii has had a long relationship with the Peace Corps, having served as a training site for volunteers going to tropical countries and sending over 1,200 of its residents throughout the world. This year, Hawaii led the nation in the rate of increase in

volunteers. This only seems fitting given the diversity of our population and the ease in which we enter into social and professional relationships with people of different races and cultures.

At a time when the world is in economic turmoil, the developing countries of the world are being especially impacted. It is in America's best interest to increase our assistance to the developing world and an expanded Peace Corps is one of the best means for America to demonstrate our commitment to living together in Peace.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please support the Peace Corps Expansion Act of 2009.

**From:** aurora0082@aol.com  
**Sent:** Friday, April 24, 2009 9:00 AM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

HCR 303

Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Senator English,  
Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Peace Corps is neglected and under funded. In 2009, we will send fewer than 3,500 volunteers to the Peace Corps - less than half the number in 1966. Over twenty nations without Peace Corps missions including Indonesia, Vietnam, and Sierra Leone have requested new programs, but due to insufficient funds, Peace Corps cannot respond. In 2008 alone, over 13,000 people applied to become volunteers, a 16% increase over 2007. The number of minority applicants and applicants over the age of 50 also rose by double digits in the last year. The desire for Americans to serve internationally is matched by a long list of countries that want volunteers. This is an appropriate time to grow and revitalize Peace Corps.

I hope you share my view that the Peace Corps is a vital component of our public diplomacy toolbox. Since 1961, nearly 200,000 Peace Corps volunteers have provided meaningful, small-scale development assistance, reversing stereotypes about Americans and returning stateside to enrich communities domestically with new language and other skills. Peace Corps continues to be one of America's finest expressions of friendship and solidarity across the globe.

The Obama-Biden Administration is working diligently to reinvigorate our foreign policy and burnish America's image. To do this, we must maximize every element of soft power. Investing in Peace Corps in would help to reestablish our credibility and moral standing abroad, while exposing people to the core American values of peace, progress, tolerance and prosperity. To meet the President's stated goal of 16,000 volunteers in the Peace Corps we must pass the Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009.

Sincerely,  
Rhianon Carrasco  
RPCV Fiji Islands 2006-2008

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[REDACTED]

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**From:** John Southworth [south@hawaii.edu]  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 23, 2009 10:37 PM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

HCR 303

To: Senator Kalani English, Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

From: John H. Southworth, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Malaysia 1963-64)

More detailed rationale has been presented. But my personal testimony argues in favor of the expansion of the Peace Corps at a critical time.

Our new US leaders have re-opened POLITICAL ties with many countries that have, in recent years, come to distrust our country. When the Peace Corps started under President Kennedy's term there was similar increased admiration for the USA.

After political leaders left it was the common citizen COMMUNITY and SOCIAL ACTION of Peace Corps Volunteers that helped build bridges between countries and peoples. Since 1961 nearly 200,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps. Early in its existence the Peace Corps became a model for other countries to organize volunteer efforts of their own citizens abroad.

I can easily say serving as a math and science teacher in Northern Malaya as a Peace Corps Volunteer gave me my perspective of appreciation for LEARNING from other cultures and SHARING our culture. I came to view our own culture from a different perspective that, at times, seems to counter the materialistic life styles of people who haven't experienced living and working overseas.

When I arrived in Hawaii in 1965 my first job was serving on the staff of the Peace Corps Training Centers in Hilo and Molokai. I was part of the original group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who started the Hawaii RPCV group that continues to this day and now joins me in urging passage of this legislation. To meet the President's stated goal of 16,000 volunteers in the Peace Corps we must pass the Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009. Please help that goal become a reality by passing this legislation.

**From:** randy sherman [randallzherman@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, April 24, 2009 3:09 AM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

HCR 303

Senator English,  
Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

Dear Kalani

I didn't know u were Chair for Peace Corps! And, probably u didnt know I was a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer! I served in Borneo in 1962-64. Peace Corps was the crowning experience of my life and lead to all that followed -- in fact my enthusiasm for Obama's presidency led me to volunteer to teach spoken English in China this summer! I can't express strongly enough how important I believe the ideals behind the Peace Corps are for the volunteer, the USA and the host nation. I sincerely hope we in Hawaii can do our part to promote the re-vitalization of this terrific program.

Thanks!

Randall Sherman  
Land Surveyor  
Valley Isle Surveyors

**From:** Gary Hoover [softprog@earthlink.net]  
**Sent:** Friday, April 24, 2009 7:25 AM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** Peace Coprs

HRC 303

Aloha Senator English,  
Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

Please support the peace corps bill.

I have just returned from a short term peace corps assignment in Zambia and know first hand how peace corps volunteers can change the view people have of Americans.

peace,

gary hoover  
[softprog@earthlink.net](mailto:softprog@earthlink.net)

**From:** hilo.rob [hilo.rob@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, April 24, 2009 7:42 AM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** Peace Corps Expansion Act

HCR 303

Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Senator English,  
Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

Dear Senator English,

As a returned Peace Corps volunteer, and as someone who understands the importance and benefits of Peace Corps service for the positive reputation of the United States and for increasing appreciation of other cultures by Americans, I would like to express my support for an expansion of the Peace Corps.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Hollingsworth

51 N Iwaiwa St

Hilo, Hawaii 96720

RPCV Samoa 1983-85



**From:** MoonYun Choi [moonyunchoi@yahoo.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, April 24, 2009 10:02 PM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** Support for Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009

Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Senator English,  
Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Peace Corps is neglected and under funded. In 2009, we will send fewer than 3,500 volunteers to the Peace Corps - less than half the number in 1966. Over twenty nations without Peace Corps missions including Indonesia , Vietnam , and Sierra Leone have requested new programs, but due to insufficient funds, Peace Corps cannot respond. In 2008 alone, over 13,000 people applied to become volunteers, a 16% increase over 2007. The number of minority applicants and applicants over the age of 50 also rose by double digits in the last year. The desire for Americans to serve internationally is matched by a long list of countries that want volunteers. This is an appropriate time to grow and revitalize Peace Corps.

I hope you share my view that the Peace Corps is a vital component of our public diplomacy toolbox. Since 1961, nearly 200,000 Peace Corps volunteers have provided meaningful, small-scale development assistance, reversing stereotypes about Americans and returning stateside to enrich communities domestically with new language and other skills. Peace Corps continues to be one of America 's finest expressions of friendship and solidarity across the globe.

The Obama-Biden Administration is working diligently to reinvigorate our foreign policy and burnish America 's image. To do this, we must maximize every element of soft power. Investing in Peace Corps in would help to reestablish our credibility and moral standing abroad, while exposing people to the core American values of peace, progress, tolerance and prosperity. To meet the President's stated goal of 16,000 volunteers in the Peace Corps we must pass the Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009.

Sincerely,  
Moon Yun Choi, Mali 1995-1998

**From:** Donald Romero [romerod001@hawaii.rr.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 26, 2009 6:45 AM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Senator English,  
Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Peace Corps is neglected and under funded. In 2009, we will send fewer than 3,500 volunteers to the Peace Corps - less than half the number in 1966. Over twenty nations without Peace Corps missions including Indonesia, Vietnam, and Sierra Leone have requested new programs, but due to insufficient funds, Peace Corps cannot respond. In 2008 alone, over 13,000 people applied to become volunteers, a 16% increase over 2007. The number of minority applicants and applicants over the age of 50 also rose by double digits in the last year. The desire for Americans to serve internationally is matched by a long list of countries that want volunteers. This is an appropriate time to grow and revitalize Peace Corps.

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Sincerely,

Don Romero

Philippines 21

**From:** Donald Romero [romerod001@hawaii.rr.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 26, 2009 6:33 AM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Senator English,  
Chair of Committee on Transportation, International and Intergovernmental Affairs

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Sincerely,  
Don Romero

Philippines 21

Kathleen Romero

Philippines 38

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**From:** Frank Lavoie [nb13lavoie@yahoo.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 26, 2009 9:00 PM  
**To:** TIATestimony  
**Subject:** HCR 303

Dear Committee members,

The Peace Corps is an excellent tool to both help foreign lands and also improve the understanding of America for those who volunteer.

Over twenty nations without Peace Corps missions including Indonesia , Vietnam , and Sierra Leone have requested new programs, but due to insufficient funds, Peace Corps cannot respond.

To meet the President's stated goal of 16,000 volunteers in the Peace Corps we must pass the Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009.

I served in Peace Corps in Armenia in 1996 through 1998.

Please support HCR 303.

Frank Lavoie