



TESTIMONY OF DUANE K. OKAMOTO

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2009
8:30 A.M.
ROOM 329

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 275
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 303
SUPPORTING THE PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Chairperson Mizuno and Members of the Committee:

My name is Duane Okamoto and I am the Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture. I am here this morning offering my personal testimony in strong support of House Resolution 275, House Concurrent Resolution 303, which supports the Peace Corps Expansion Act of 2009.

I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana, West Africa, and consider it one of the most meaningful and significant achievements in my life. My Peace Corps experience changed the way I look at the world and influenced the way I have led my life since my return. I am very proud of the role that the Peace Corps has had since its founding in bringing Americans and people of developing countries together to solve problems and learn from each other.

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.

~~Cynthia...~~

From: Julie Kirk [juliekkirk@gmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, March 22, 2009 8:39 PM
To: HUS testimony
Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Rep. John Mizuno,
Chair of Human Services Committee

Dear Rep. Mizuno,

I am writing to you from Honolulu to support the Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009 resolution. The Peace Corps has had a profound impact on my life and US community.

The Peace Corps is neglected and underfunded. 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,

Julie K. Kirk
2295 Round Top Dr
Honolulu, HI 96822
808-341-7241

**LATE
Testimony**

~~Cynthia Nyroce~~

From: John Southworth [south@hawaii.edu]
Sent: Sunday, March 22, 2009 9:46 PM
To: HUS testimony
Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

Rep. John Mizuno,
Chair of Human Services Committee

LATE
Testimony

Dear Rep. Mizuno,

I am writing to you from Honolulu to support the Peace Corps Expansion Act 2009 resolution. The Peace Corps has had a profound impact on my life and US community. I served in Malaysia.

The Peace Corps is deserving of greater support. In 2009, there will be fewer than 3,500 volunteers serving in 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,

John H. Soutworth
Peace Corps Malaysia (1963-64)
999 Wilder Ave, Apt 1305
Honolulu, HI 96822
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Email: johnsout@gmail.com

* John H. Southworth *
* Lab School Distance Learning - Enrichment Programming *
* Curriculum Research & Development Group *
* The Education Laboratory: *A Hawai'i New Century Public Charter School *
* (*Formerly known as the "University Laboratory School") *
* 1776 University Avenue, Honolulu, HI, 96822 *
* Phone: 808-956-6871 Fax: 808-956-4933 *

~~Cynthia Nyman~~

From: Jen Graf [jennifergraf@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2009 5:05 AM
To: HUS testimony
Subject: House and Senate Resolution called "SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009".

Dear Jon Mizuno:

I support the expansion of Peace Corps into other countries and increasing their numbers. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador from 1996-1998 and it was the best/ toughest thing I have ever done. It was of great value to me because it has made me the person who I am. I personally recieved so much from the experience as well trying to do my best to give back

~Jen Graf
3310 Wauke st.
Honolulu HI 96815

~jg

St. Theresa's Prayer:

May today there be peace within. May you trust that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith in yourself and others. May you use the gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content with yourself just the way you are. Let this knowledge settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.'

LATE
Testimony

brower2-Jenna

From: Ken Harding [krharding@mac.com]
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2009 8:59 AM
To: HUS testimony
Cc: Ken Harding; Gene Ward 17; Rep. John Mizuno; Rpcvhi@wildapricot.org
Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

LATE
Testimony

Dear Representative Mizuno

RE: HR 1066
TOPIC: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

As one of the first volunteers to be sent to Peru, in South America in 1962, I support this resolution. I'm pretty sure that whatever good I did in Peru has long been forgotten, but I'm absolutely certain that my experiences there, in Ica, Lima, Chimbote, and Piura some 45 to 47 years ago, will NEVER be forgotten by at least one person: me!

My two years in the Peace Corps was one of the most important seminal events of my life -- educationally, emotionally, philosophically and spiritually. Lessons learned as a Volunteer have shaped every major decision ever since: going to graduate school at Stanford; meeting and marrying my wife of 43 years; moving to Hawaii and settling on Kauai in 1967 without knowing a soul; the way Kitty and I have raised our four kids and educated them; my interest in entrepreneurship, business and economic development; what I do for a living now, with teaching and tutoring; and moving to Kalihi ten years ago so I could work on urban community development issues, just like I did in Peru in the Peace Corps, 47 years ago!

Please support this resolution. The Peace Corps is the best investment the United States of America could ever make in the educational growth and perspective of its young people. It works!
It's a win-win situation for everybody concerned. And it's incorruptible: no-one ever lined his pockets with a Peace Corps Volunteer!

Sincerely
KEN HARDING, Peru III
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer
1443 B Kamehameha IV Rd.
Honolulu HI 96819
808.225.4045
<krharding@mac.com>
23 MAR 09

brower2-Jenna

From: Richard Bowen [rbowen@hawaii.edu]
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2009 12:55 PM
To: HUS testimony
Subject: SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009

LATE
Testimony

Rep. John Mizuno, Chair of Human Services Committee

Re: House Resolution SUPPORT FOR PEACE CORPS EXPANSION ACT OF 2009.

As a former Peace Corps Volunteer (Western Samoa, 1974-76, I urge your support for this resolution that calls upon Congress to expand the Peace Corps program, as President Obama pledged during his campaign. Peace Corps offers an alternative approach to international relations whereby volunteers live in conditions similar to those of the people they serve. Volunteers are ambassadors of goodwill during their service period and later play an instrumental role in educating Americans to a broader understanding of the developing world.

Mahalo.

Dick Bowen

Dr. Richard L. Bowen
Department of NREM
University of Hawaii
1910 East-West Road
Honolulu, HI 96822
808-956-8419

From: Joseph Zuiker [zuikerlw@pixi.com]
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2009 10:44 AM
To: HUS testimony
Subject: I support Peace Corps Expansion Act and this is why? (Published Honolulu Star bulletin in February)

**LATE
Testimony**

Your Peace Corps Investment - the mini-miracle machine

Stop crying about your investments, mine aren't doing much better. But speaking of your investments this week is Peace Corps Week; the overseas volunteer program that you have supported with your hard earned tax dollars for over 48 years. Actually its one of your best investments because it is a mini miracle machine. And if you want proof let me offer a few real life experiences that span 40 years; experiences of hopes dreams frustrations, failures and surprising successes shared in common with returned Peace Corps volunteers throughout Hawaii and around the world.

When I joined the Peace Corps I was a skinny white kid from Chicago with a political science degree who had flunked college Spanish twice. I was given minimal language training, taught a few things about "third world" countries and then sent to the northwest corner of the Dominican Republic (a Spanish speaking country). My host village was a sleepy cross roads junction with a collection of very small shacks stretched along the roadside. I was assigned to help area residents (mostly subsistence farmers with little or no land of their own) organize community improvement projects. When I arrived to start my two year assignment there was a civil war in the Dominican Republic and a rumor in my assigned community that I was a spy; a rumor I was unable to refute since I was almost totally unable to converse in Spanish, the only language spoken in my village.

I rented an abandoned unfinished farmhouse along the roadside and happily shared it with a wide variety of insects and many rodents. Initially I shared one thing in common with my neighbors; our houses had no running water and no electricity. Our daily water needs came from a creek behind our houses. Our houses all had latrines.

Upon unpacking my suitcases to start my two year tour of duty I immediately got some form of dysentery and spent a good portion of four months sitting in or near my home made latrine awaiting my next stomach ache. I eventually got on my feet and began trying to figure out what a community organizer really does for a living. What I discovered makes me believe that your Peace Corps is a mini-miracle machine .

Mini-miracle number one: The Highway from Heaven

At one point during my assignment I was so frustrated with the slow pace of my work as a "community organizer" that I decided to take a day off and just go visit a co-worker many miles down the road. For almost a year before that day I had been visiting

farmers in a nearby village that was cut off from cross roads highways by about 3 miles of a very bad road that resembled a cow path. Yearly rains had beaten the road down to the point that even mules did not want to use it to bring out pregnant women when their labor pains began. The movement of farm crops and basic household supplies in and out of the village was equally difficult.

During my first few visits to that village I tried to speak in halting Spanish about the possibility of improving their village through community self-improvement projects. But initially I was mostly village entertainment since I spoke so little Spanish and looked so very different (the skinny white guy surrounded by very dark skinned farmers whose parents had once lived across the border in Haiti). But the little kids grew to like me and the elders grew to think kindly of me and together we actually began to dream of what their village might be like if it they had a real road, one that accepted bikes, mopeds and trucks and pregnant women without a fight.

For months and months our road improvement efforts consisted mostly of words, just words. Sure we did survey the cow path with two Peace Corps engineers who had little prior road improvement experience and they even produced a passable looking topographical map that showed a few culvert cuts that might battle monsoon rains while protecting our dream road if it was ever actually built. But the cow path remained unchanged and I began to be embarrassed to visit my village friends for fear that they would ask me why their road wasn't getting improved. And at night I would lie in bed with nagging fears that I was a big fraud who had come into a poor village and talked big but was nothing more than a false prophet beaten down by a cow path.

And that frustration explains why I tried to take off from work that one day but instead ran into a mini miracle. And that mini miracle forms the basis for my thoughts about the Peace Corps.

To me the Peace Corps is about breezing down the main road but then bringing your moped to a halt in utter disbelief as you see a full blown bulldozer sitting in an empty farm field a few hundred yards away from the entrance to your friends' cow path. And its about the utter shock when you listen to the driver tell you that his bulldozer will be sitting there doing absolutely nothing for at least a week until the government gets enough money to fill it up and move it down the road. And the Peace Corps is about immediately abandoning your plans for a pleasant day off and literally racing down that cow path and into the village to search of the road improvement committee chairman only to be told that he is higher up on the hillside planting in his garden. And its about grabbing his young son as a guide and climbing breathlessly up that steep hillside. It's about you arriving at his mountaintop garden with your lungs aching and using your broken Spanish to tell him that some god in heaven dropped a bulldozer into the village's lap if only this village leader will immediately drop his planting chores for the day and instead go down the mountainside with you to travel to the public work's office to plead for the use of the bulldozer.

And the Peace Corps is your hope that this kindly village elder has enough faith in you by this time to listen to your wild bantering and then enough confidence in you to actually

drop his tools and follow you on this shared wild goose chase. And it is a keystone cops race up the highway to the local public works office and then back down the highway to another district public works office and then further down the highway to the provincial public works office , each time pleading for an opportunity to use the bulldozer if only for a day. The Peace Corps is the joy you share with the village elder when you both realize that you actually got permission to use the bulldozer and then it is the realization that your troubles have only begun because you must now find a way to feed the bulldozer with fuel 50 gallons of fuel and the bulldozer driver with multiple chicken dinners for his efforts. For you see in the Dominican Republic bulldozers don't run without fuel and bulldozer operators don't work without chicken dinners (trust me).

And to me the Peace Corps is about ending up that night alone, exhausted and freezing in a dollar a night flop house without a decent blanket to keep you warm while waiting for your boss to return to his office from some all night party. And it's about actually begging him to stick his neck out while bending a few rules to give you enough money to buy fuel for one day so you can actually use your empty-tank bulldozer.

Then the Peace Corps is the about the fleeting happiness that fills your heart

when you finally get your boss's permission and the money and then it's about the craziness that confounds you while you try to determine if the right kind of fuel is actually available in the very rural service stations near the village and then your frantic attempts to find 50 gallon barrels to hold the fuel that you eventually located and finally your desperate search for a truck to transport the fuel to the sleeping bulldozer driver at the side of your cow path just before dawn.

And the Peace Corps is about the insane pleasure of standing next to your friends and seeing that big brute of a bulldozer get cranked up to begin battling that cow path and pointing a fresh roadway in the direction of the village.

And after that first day of beginning of a real road the Peace Corps is about the frenzy that starts up when the villagers learn that they can use the bulldozer a second day and the realization that your friends are looking to you to figure out where they can get the fuel to keep this bulldozer at war against their cow path. And the Peace Corps is about the exhaustion that creeps into the sweaty college kid as he gets on his moped to head into the cold nighttime air because the evening now requires a 40 kilometer return visit to the boss's office for more fast talking and second language begging to try and get another 50 gallons of fuel for the heavenly monster. And eventually the Peace Corps is the utter disbelief that you did the same thing for thirteen days and nights as that bulldozer driver leveled that entire cow path while eating almost every chicken in the village.

And after that bulldozer is long gone from the village, the Peace Corps is about many months of work with your friends in sweat and in pain while picking apart hillsides to cover your newborn road with paper thin layers of gravel and large doses of prayer for a moderate next rainy season. And finally the Peace Corps is about the large cement drain pipes that you and your friends embedded deep into the ground using only picks and

shovels while hoping that those two novice Peace Corps engineers got lucky with their culvert placement guesses..

And then the Peace Corps is about a 65 year old not quite so skinny white guy going back to that roadway some 40 years later like I did last year to meet with my remaining village brothers and sisters. And the Peace Corps is about the laughs and tears that we shared that day under the shade of a big tree in back of their very humble houses and it's about the obligatory freshly butchered chicken dinner that they insisted I eat as their friend and guest. And it is also about the joy of walking with them back to the spot where you dug those culvert trenches on those hot afternoons while painting the roadway with your sweat while proclaiming village progress through community action. And in the end the Peace Corps is the act of gazing down on that still existing roadway and seeing those darn cement culverts continuing to protect your friends' road. Now that is a miracle.

Mini-miracle number two: A School For Dreamers

The Peace Corps is about several one room leaky roof ed, broken cement floored, no benched and no book elementary schools rotting away along several miles of roadway. And the Peace Corps is about an American volunteer who truly believed that the world could become a better place if community residents would only work together despite the conflicting views of neighbors who shared a decades long history of failing every time they even tried to come together to make community improvements to those shacks which they embarrassingly referred to as schools.

And the Peace Corps is about that volunteer's loneliness while wandering up and down those hills inadequate ability to even explain why he was in their village. And slowly when one's Spanish improves, the Peace Corps is about hundreds of nights sitting in the dark of residents' unlit houses and spinning broken sentence dreams of a better future for their children and grandchildren if only these folks would come together to form a committee to try to improve their schools. It's about the headache building tension of trying to figure out new ways of combating your new friends age old views that they are not a worthy people, that they have never worked together and they will never be able to work together.

And the Peace Corps is about refusing to give up on your belief about progress and then going back to your friends' homes night after night for more in the dark verbal drawings for them of what a miracle a new school would be for your future generations in the community. And the Peace Corps is about your middle of the nightmares that you are a fake because your two year tour of duty is moving faster than is the residents' slow moving community improvement committee.

And the Peace Corps is about the committee actually beginning to take shape and their audacity in wanting to build a much larger community school than you would have thought possible or wise and the school plans finally being drawn up by those same recent graduate American green-behind-the-collar Peace Corps engineers. And the Peace Corps is about the community's gratitude when a prominent former resident donates land for the school and the small barefoot school kids beginning to collect rocks on the hillside for the

school's cement and rock foundation. And then its about those same small kids going down to the only local water source, a dirty river, and each day filling up 50 gallon tanks of water so cement could be made for their new school that day.

And the Peace Corps is about the true believer residents that begin to hatch from nowhere on their journey from skeptics to true community forces. And it's about the Peace Corps volunteer moving around the community to assist, support and occasionally vent his anger as the school construction project moves ever so slowly forward using barefoot kids , cement mixed with shovels, sweat, an occasional drink of rum for the workers and three dollar a night community bingo games run by a bone chilled elderly teacher standing at the local crossroads in rain and cold night air while trying to raise enough money to purchase a few more cement blocks for the walls of the rising new school.

And the Peace Corps is the miracle of that school actually being built and then expanded by a later Peace Corps volunteer. And then the Peace Corps is about the forty years that you lived your life with less than adequate contact with your friends in those foothill villages.

But most of all the Peace Corps is the miracle of returning to your friends after that forty year absence and being greeted with open arms and not a single cross word except "what took you so long to return". And the Peace Corps is about the principal of that well maintained school taking you by the hand from room to room to be introduced as the "Americano who taught us how to work together as a community and build this school". And the Peace Corps is about that miracle school that continues to give your friends' grandchildren a good start toward having a better life than you and your friends ever believed possible during those dreamy nights long ago. And the Peace Corps is about the mini miracle of the daughter of one of those dirt poor farmers now being a lawyer in Paris and another one of those water-can and rock-picking kids now being a veterinarian in charge of all animals that enter the Dominican Republic at the international airport.

Like I said the Peace Corps is a mini miracle machine to this day and one of your best investments.

Joseph F. Zuiker

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Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

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