

**National Parks, Forests & Public Lands Subcommittee Hearing
“Future of the National Mall”**

June 1, 2012

Written Testimony of Representative Sam Farr (CA-17)
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Colombia, 1964-66

Thank you to Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of H.R. 854, the Peace Corps Commemorative legislation. I represent California’s 17th District and I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Medellin, Colombia. I introduced this bill with Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Members of Congress Representatives Thomas Petri (WI-6) who served in Somalia, Mike Honda (CA-15) who served in El Salvador, and John Garamendi (CA-10) who served in Ethiopia.

The Peace Corps Commemorative legislation is a cost-free, bipartisan bill that authorizes the non-profit Peace Corps Commemorative Foundation to establish a modest commemorative on Federal land in our nation’s capital to honor the formation of the Peace Corps and the ideals of world peace and friendship upon which it was founded. The founding of the Peace Corps was a seminal moment in American history that deserves recognition in our nation’s capital.

The historic L’Enfant and McMillan Plans for the nation’s capital provided a blueprint for the City of Washington to evolve as an enduring symbol of American identity. Peace Corps is the great American idea of the 20th century that truly reflects what it means to be an American – in service to our nation for the betterment of humankind. It is an important component of our national identity that reflects our highest value of peace. This ideal deserves to be honored here in the capital of the United States, and passage of H.R. 854 would make that possible.

Fifty-one years ago, President Kennedy ushered in a new era of American service when he signed the Executive Order establishing the Peace Corps: “Our Peace Corps is not designed as an instrument of diplomacy or propaganda or ideological conflict. It is designed to permit our people to exercise more fully their responsibilities in the great common cause of world development.” While the international community was fractured by Cold War tensions, the founding of the Peace Corps marked a moment in time that reflected the best of what America had to offer the world: service to others in the common cause of global peace, mutual understanding, grassroots development, and prosperity. With the creation of the Peace Corps, America showed the world that we are a partner for progress, a new kind of force in the world guided by peace and goodwill. Our country has never been the same and the world was changed – for the good – forever.

As historian Doris Kearns Goodwin noted, the founding of the Peace Corps “has produced an enduring legacy of service in the cause of peace, a timeless symbol of America’s most honorable ideals and aspirations.” Over the past 51 years, through war

and conflict, nearly a quarter million Americans from all 50 states have served in 139 developing countries, embodying the timeless American ideals of goodwill, friendship, prosperity, and progress. Today, the 9,095 Peace Corps Volunteers serving in 75 developing countries continue to live out these ideals and demonstrate the enduring significance of Peace Corps' founding. A modest commemorative on Federal land is an appropriate way to mark the moment that America formally established its commitment to service in the cause of peace.

Peace Corps was profoundly meaningful in my life as well. It gave me purpose; it focused my heart and mind on the problems associated with the culture of poverty, abroad and here at home. But it will not just be the 200,000 Returned Volunteers or the millions of family members and friends of Peace Corps Volunteers who will be able to reflect on this great American idea with this commemorative. Peace Corps Volunteers have partnered with tens of millions of individuals around the world, and this commemorative honors the moment in American history when those important partnerships and bonds of friendship first began.

As President Kennedy said in his last State of the Union address, "Nothing carries the spirit of American idealism and expresses our hopes better and more effectively to the far corners of the earth than the Peace Corps." It is now time that we have that idealism expressed in our nation's Capital as well.

This legislation has robust support both inside and outside of Congress. H.R. 854 has 156 bipartisan cosponsors; over a third of the House of Representatives wants to see this legislation enacted. But this legislation has also been favorably reviewed by the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission. In addition, on October 4, 2011, at this Subcommittee's hearing on H.R. 854, Stephen Whitesell, National Capital Region Regional Director for the National Park Service (NPS), stated in his testimony: "We [NPS] share the [National Capital Memorial Advisory] Commission's support for the idea of commemorating volunteerism and international cooperation as worthy ideals and practice of the Peace Corps."

In addition, S. 1421, similar bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators Portman and Mark Udall, passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee by voice vote on November 11, 2011. Clearly, there is robust bicameral, bipartisan support for passage of this legislation.

As you may know, this bill is a re-introduction of H.R. 4195, which passed out of the Natural Resources Committee by unanimous consent and passed the full House of Representatives by voice vote in the 111th Congress. The only modifications to this bill in the 112th Congress are the inclusion of a Findings Section and the addition of "ideals of world peace and friendship" to reflect the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission's suggestion that the legislation specify the ideals that the commemorative honor. At this Subcommittee's October 4th, 2011 hearing, NPS noted that the changes further strengthened the legislation. This bill is in compliance with the Commemorative

Works Act, and Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to Article I, Section 8, and Article IV, Section 3 of the United States Constitution.

Now is an opportune time to honor and recognize on the National Mall the enduring ideals of world peace and friendship embodied in the founding of Peace Corps. I respectfully request the Subcommittee's support of this legislation to honor America's enduring commitment to world peace and friendship.

Thank you.