

STATEMENT OF PETER MAY, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, LANDS RESOURCES AND PLANNING, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 4195, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE PEACE CORPS COMMEMORATIVE FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH A COMMEMORATIVE WORK IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND ITS ENVIRONS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 24, 2010

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 4195, a bill to authorize the Peace Corps Commemorative Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and environs, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 4195 provided that it includes the amendments discussed in this testimony. This proposal does not seek any exceptions to the Commemorative Works Act (CWA) and provides that no federal funds be used for establishing the memorial.

It should be noted that this proposal to honor the ideals upon which the Peace Corps was founded does not fit the typical mold for commemoration. The concept of establishing a memorial to “ideals” is not explicitly described in the CWA. However, there is precedent for such commemoration: specifically, the National Peace Garden, which Congress authorized in 1987, and the Memorial to Japanese American Patriotism in World War II, which was authorized in 1992.

We wish to stress that our support for this proposal is based upon our understanding that this memorial will recognize the establishment of the Peace Corps and the significance of the ideals it exemplifies— not the organization’s members. The Commemorative Works Act precludes a memorial to members of the Peace Corps as the commemoration of groups may not be authorized until after the 25th anniversary of the death of the last surviving member of a group.

As written, we do have concerns that this bill could set an unwelcome precedent for any and all future concepts identified only as “ideals,” resulting in an untenable influx of memorial proposals. Therefore, we believe that additional language should be added to this proposal to more clearly describe and identify the ideals being commemorated and those exceptional aspects of American character that the Peace Corps has come to exemplify. Such additional language would reinforce both the intent of the bill and the Commemorative Works Act. It would also be an opportunity to use this proposal to set an appropriate and high threshold for future commemorations of “ideals”.

At its meeting on April 21, 2010, the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission expressed support for the concept of a memorial to the ideals of the Peace Corps and for the suggestion to strengthen the language in this proposal. We share the Commission's support for the idea of commemorating volunteerism and international cooperation as worthy ideals and practice of the Peace Corps. We feel this proposal has merit and have every confidence that language can be developed which fairly describes the Peace Corps ideals and sets this threshold at an appropriately high level.

Additionally, we suggest that the bill include provisions to direct that unspent funds raised for the construction of the memorial be provided to the National Park Foundation for deposit in an interest-bearing account as stated in 40 U.S.C. Section 8906(b)(3) for maintenance as allowed by the Commemorative Works Act Clarification and Revision Act of 2003. We would be happy to provide language for the Subcommittee's consideration.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions from you and members of the committee.