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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, Members of the Committee: Thank you for convening this hearing today to discuss the resources that are vital for protecting America's security, safeguarding our core values of democracy and human rights, and continuing America's leadership across the world. As America and the world face unprecedented obstacles and instability, but also opportunities, your work has never been more important.

Today I want to speak to you about the urgent need for an expanded Peace Corps.

Some 7,200 Peace Corps Volunteers currently serve in 63 countries, training communities in critical areas of need, including food security, combating HIV/AIDS, and facilitating girls and women's empowerment through education and economic independence. Through partnerships with PEPFAR, Feed the Future and the President's Malaria Initiative, Volunteers provide crucial assistance to efforts to fight against HIV/AIDS, promote sustainable methods for food security, and eliminate malaria.

The Peace Corps is also recognized for its indispensable role in national security. As 121 retired three and four-star generals recently wrote to Congressional leadership, "Peace Corps and other development agencies are critical to preventing conflict and reducing the need to put our men and women in uniform in harm's way."

The Peace Corps' cost-efficient, effective model is reflected in its bipartisan, bicameral support in Congress. The 2016 Republican Party Platform recognized Volunteers for their success to win host country's hearts and minds, saying, "Peace Corps volunteers...teach and build in villages that know firsthand our country's idealism," while the 2016 Democratic Party Platform recognizes "the power of national service to solve problems and break down barriers by bringing people of all backgrounds together in common purpose."

Yet despite the Peace Corps' success, overwhelming support from our military leaders, and strong and consistent support from Congress, the agency remains as underutilized as it is effective. Nearly 24,000 Americans applied to the agency in FY16, but funding only allowed for 3,800 Volunteer openings. As retired General Stanley McChrystal has said, "This gap represents democratic energy wasted and a generation of patriotism needlessly squandered."

Perhaps of even greater significance, host countries annually request 5,000 Volunteers *in addition* to what funding can allow. Why would we as a country—*why would we as a government*—deny our allies and partners person-to-person partnerships?

What we pay for the Peace Corps—what our former colleague Sam Farr referred to as “the best bang for the taxpayer’s buck”—is put into even greater perspective when you consider that the return investment for the agency is unmatched.

Fluent in languages, culturally agile and equipped with an innovative, collaborative and creative work ethic, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers provide a steady pipeline for America’s overseas diplomatic, development and business operations. Kathleen Stephens was a Volunteer in South Korea before serving as U.S. ambassador there. Acting CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation Jonathan Nash served in Honduras. And Netflix Founder and CEO Reed Hastings was a Volunteer in Swaziland. Failing to invest in the Peace Corps will set us up for poor performance at all levels of global engagement.

Volunteers serve with pride, patriotism and distinction, and our service only makes us strive harder to perfect our nation. I know this transformation firsthand. The spirit of service instilled in me during my time as a Peace Corps Volunteer informs my service to my constituents and the country in the U.S. House of Representatives, as it did for my colleague, Congressman John Garamendi, and many former Members of Congress, including Chris Dodd, Sam Farr, Mike Honda, Tom Petri, Chris Shays, Jim Walsh, and many others.

I’ve also witnessed this transformation firsthand in the life of a fellow Volunteer. During my service in the Dominican Republic I served alongside Edward Crawford from Shreveport, Louisiana. Edward’s service led him not to the US Congress, but to another higher calling with as a U.S. Navy Officer who was deployed to Afghanistan to support the work of SEAL Teams 2 and 4 and earned the Bronze Star for his service. Edward continues to serve as a Navy reservist and attributes much of his grit, passion, leadership success and desire to serve to his valuable experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

When we send a Peace Corps Volunteer out into the world we are sending American out into the world. *Volunteers are our grassroots diplomats.* They go where no aid worker or Marine can. They do what no foreign service officer or Army Ranger can do. Volunteers speak the local language, celebrate the national holidays, worship at the same mosque and church, dance at the same weddings and cry at the same funerals, fish in the same streams and harvest the same rice paddies. When there is a mud roof that needs to be fixed, a Volunteer chips in. When there are cattle that need to be herded, a Volunteer helps. A Volunteer will wrap a newborn baby, wash an elderly neighbor, and tend to a sick child. And they do this 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Our Peace Corps Volunteers are often the only American or Westerner a village

or town knows or has ever known. They give a reality to who we are as a people beyond the movies and YouTube. They are a testament to our better angels.

But America increasingly turns down the opportunity to leverage this singular resource.

The number of currently-serving Peace Corps Volunteers has steadily declined for years. After a peak of 15,000 Volunteers in 1967, the agency has not reached 10,000 Volunteers since 1969. This is not because the agency or its model doesn't work. It works perhaps better than any other.

The shortfall in volunteers is because funding allows for the agency to offer just one-in-six applicants an opening.. Every year we turn away the opportunity for a young American to give a group of girls the gift of reading. Every year we turn away the opportunity for a retired American to build a maternity ward. Every year we turn away the opportunity for a small, remote village in Ukraine the opportunity to meet a black American. Or we turn away the opportunity for a group of university students in China the opportunity to know a Muslim American. Or we turn away village leaders in Mozambique the opportunity to know a first-generation American.

Every year we turn away an Ed Crawford. Every year we turn away a Sam Farr. Every year we turn away a Reed Hastings. Every year we turn away a Kathleen Stephens. Every year we turn away more and more Americans from serving America and the world through the Peace Corps. I ask of you—I ask of us—to give more Americans the opportunity to serve their country and the world.

Thank you.