

## CONGRESSMAN JOHN GARAMENDI (D-CA)

HFAC Member Day

March 26, 2021

### Peace Corps Reauthorization

**CJG:** Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the full Committee today. I am here to speak on my “Peace Corps Reauthorization Act” (H.R. 1456) and respectfully request that you schedule my bipartisan bill for a hearing and markup.

In addition, I request that you include my H.R. 1456 in any upcoming hearing with the Director of the Peace Corps. I would personally like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for cosponsoring this bipartisan reauthorization bill again this Congress. The bill is endorsed by the National Peace Corps Association and the National Whistleblower Center.

Like successive generations of young Americans, my wife Patti and I answered President John F. Kennedy’s call and served in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia from 1966-1968. Since the establishment of the Peace Corps in 1961, more than 240,000 American volunteers have served in 142 countries around the world. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were nearly 8,000 Peace Corps volunteers serving in 61 countries. Today, Peace Corps volunteers stand ready to return to their crucial work once conditions are safe to do so.

However, Congress last reauthorized the Peace Corps in 1999 (Public Law 106-30), which expired at the end of fiscal year 2003. Now more than ever, Congress must support the Peace Corps’ mission and realize President Kennedy’s vision of generations of young Americans, ready to serve their nation and make the world a better place.

Our “Peace Corps Reauthorization Act of 2021” would do just that by providing additional federal resources to better support current, returning, and former Peace Corps volunteers by:

- Authorizing \$600 million in annual funding by fiscal year 2025 for the Peace Corps to support the goal of deploying 10,000 volunteers worldwide. Congress has provided flat funding at \$410 million in recent years.

- Expediting re-enrollment of volunteers whose service ended involuntarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic and allows volunteers to resume in-country service, once safe and prudent to do so.
- Directing the Peace Corps to provide benefits to volunteers whose service ended involuntarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Guaranteeing 3 months of health insurance coverage for returned volunteers paid by the Peace Corps, with the option to renew for additional 3 months at individual expense. Currently, the Peace Corps only offers automatic enrollment for 2 months of paid health insurance coverage, with the option to renew for another month at individual expense.
- Extending whistleblower and anti-retaliatory protections that currently apply to Peace Corps contractors to Peace Corps volunteers, including protections against reprisals by any Peace Corps employee, volunteer supervisor, or outside contractor.
- Extending Peace Corps volunteers' 12-month hiring preference for most federal job openings during any federal hiring freeze, government shutdown, public health emergency (such as COVID-19 pandemic), or while a volunteer receives federal worker's compensation benefits for any injury during their Peace Corps service.
- Directing the Peace Corps and U.S. State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security to update plans and protocols for Peace Corps volunteer security support and protection in foreign countries.
- Increasing the federal workers' compensation rate for all Peace Corps volunteers injured or disabled during their service from a GS-7 to a GS-11 level, the same rate provided for Peace Corps volunteers with dependent children under current law.

As co-chair of the Congressional Peace Corps Caucus, I am proud to continue working in support of the Peace Corps' mission, its volunteers, and the indelible impact their service has on the lives of so many. I hope to work with you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, and other Members of the Committee to advance the "Peace Corps Reauthorization Act" this Congress.

So, Mr. Chairman, will you please commit to working with us and holding a hearing?

Thank you again for allowing me to share my priorities with the full Committee today.