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The Next Step in Changing the World

On behalf of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) board of directors and membership, we are writing to express our wholehearted support for the "Peace Corps Volunteers Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2026". A one-page paper summarizing the importance of this medal, and a draft bill are enclosed for your consideration.

A Congressional Gold Medal to honor United States Peace Corps Volunteers collectively, represents a significant milestone in recognizing over six decades of selfless service, and commitments to global peace and friendship that have been achieved through Peace Corps service. Coincidentally, awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to Peace Corps Volunteers in 2026 will occur during the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. There is no better time to celebrate the contributions of hundreds of thousands of these dedicated Americans.

Since its founding in 1961, the Peace Corps has embodied the spirit of American compassion and cross-cultural understanding. More than 240,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers across more than 140 countries, immersing themselves in diverse communities, working to empower individuals, and contributing to sustainable development. From promoting health and education – especially crucial roles in pandemic response and health improvement – to advancing economic growth and environmental benefits, Peace Corps Volunteers have consistently put service above self, fostering goodwill and cooperation worldwide.

The Congressional Gold Medal is a fitting tribute to Volunteers' invaluable contributions, recognizing the ingenuity, dedication, and sacrifices of those who answered the call to serve our nation and foreign communities. This medal will honor the achievements of past and present Volunteers and reaffirm the Peace Corps' ongoing mission to build a more interconnected, peaceful, and prosperous world. Without question, the results of Peace Corps Volunteers' projects in their host nations and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers' contributions back home have made the United States stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

We are proposing the Congressional Gold Medal for United States Peace Corps Volunteers because it will be an enduring testament to the bonds of friendship and understanding that these Volunteers have forged with people and communities across the globe. It will also inspire future generations of Americans to continue the Peace Corps' legacy of service. Thank you for considering this important honor for Volunteers who have represented the best of America abroad. We stand ready to assist in any way necessary to support the passage of this Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dan Baker".

Dan Baker, President and CEO
National Peace Corps Association

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Lee Evans".

John Lee Evans, Board Chair
National Peace Corps Association

Enclosures (2)



Why Honor the Peace Corps with a Congressional Gold Medal?

This is the Moment

As 2026 will mark the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission notes this moment will provide “an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation’s past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond”. 2026 will also mark the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Peace Corps, a renowned program that is highly admired here at home and in the more than 140 nations where volunteers served.

A Nationwide Honor

A Peace Corps Congressional Gold Medal will honor individuals living in every state and every single congressional district.

A Nonpartisan Honor

Throughout its history, the Peace Corps has been celebrated and supported by lawmakers across the political spectrum. A Congressional Gold Medal will serve as a time-honored testament to the nonpartisan nature of this iconic program.

A Prestigious Honor Roll

Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings. The late Michael McCaskey, former Chairman of the Chicago Bears. Astronauts Mae Jamison and Joseph Acaba. The late Lillian Carter. Numerous former members of Congress, governors, and state legislators, both Democrats and Republicans. These are just some of the more than 250,000 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and former staff who served our country with distinction.

Service Beyond Self

Using extremely conservative estimates, Peace Corps Volunteers have provided more than \$8.5 billion in value to our nation’s foreign policy. And, as they return home, these individuals join the network of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who contribute millions of hours of continued service each year to communities in every corner of our country.

No Time to Wait

The Gold Medal is Congress’s highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions by individuals, institutions, and groups. Of the nearly quarter-million Peace Corps Volunteers who served, those who did so in the early 1960’s are now in their late 80’s or 90’s. Sadly, with each passing week, dozens of these early volunteers are dying.

This Draft Bill is Proposed for Consideration by the 119th Congress^[1]

An Act

To award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively to United States Peace Corps Volunteers, in recognition of their outstanding accomplishments, continuous dedication to world peace and friendship, and their honorable service to our nation for 65 years.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Peace Corps Volunteers Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2026.”

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

1. In 2026, our nation celebrates the 65th anniversary of the establishment of the United States Peace Corps (in this section also referred to as “Agency”), one of the world’s most beneficial and celebrated international assistance programs.
2. Nearly 250,000 United States Peace Corps Volunteers (in this section referred to as “Volunteers”) have served our nation with distinction. Volunteers have been integral in promoting world peace and friendship in more than 140 countries around the globe. Their expertise in a wide variety of sectors, including agriculture, community economic development, education, environment, health, and youth in development, has contributed significantly to the needs of foreign countries on many levels.
3. Those Volunteers who are eligible for the Congressional Gold Medal served between August 28, 1961, when the first Volunteers departed from the United States for Ghana,^[2] and December 31, 2026.
4. President John Kennedy expressed his call to service for Americans during his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, when he said, *And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.*^[3]
5. On March 1, 1961, President Kennedy signed Executive Order 10924 establishing the Peace Corps.^[4] At a State Department press conference after signing the Executive Order, President Kennedy said, *We will send those abroad who are committed to the concept which motivates the Peace Corps. It will not be easy. None of the men and women will be paid a salary. They will live at the same level as the citizens of the country which they are sent to, doing the same work, eating the same food, speaking the same language. We are going to put particular emphasis on those men and women who have skills in teaching, agriculture, and in*

health. I am hopeful it will be a source of satisfaction to Americans and a contribution to world peace.^[5]

6. When President Kennedy signed the Peace Corps Act (Public Law 87-293) on September 22, 1961,^[6] providing the legislative foundation for the new Agency, the White House released a statement saying, *With the enactment of this legislation, an avenue is provided by which Americans can serve their country in the cause of world peace and understanding and simultaneously assist other nations toward their legitimate goals of freedom and opportunity.*^[7]

7. Americans across our nation were inspired to serve as Volunteers supported by the leadership and vision of Sargent Shriver, the first director of the Peace Corps from 1961 to 1966. The Volunteers shared his vision, which became the mission of the Peace Corps: “To promote world peace and friendship through community-based development and intercultural understanding.”^[8] Volunteers were strongly encouraged to respect local customs, learn the prevailing language, and live in comparable conditions.^[9]

8. Volunteers’ service is guided by the three goals of the Peace Corps:

a. “To help the countries interested in meeting their need for trained people.” Volunteers exchange skills and knowledge with community members in their welcoming host countries to help create sustainable change through work in the six sectors mentioned in paragraph 2.

b. “To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.” Through their service, Volunteers share America and its values, and they learn about local cultures, opportunities, resources, and people in their host countries.

c. “To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.” Volunteers immerse themselves in local cultures and share their experiences when they return home with family, friends, and the public. Their outstanding contributions to nations of the world help promote cultural understanding, volunteerism, and public service.^[10]

9. During a Rose Garden ceremony at the White House on April 23, 1985, accompanied by Vice President George Bush and Peace Corps Director Loret Miller Ruppe, President Ronald Reagan wished Volunteers success for their assignments in Africa saying, *Soon you'll be in Africa, where you'll be a vital part of the relief aid to help the millions suffering from malnutrition and starvation. You'll be living in some of the most impoverished countries of the world, working in food production, soil conservation, fisheries production, forest preservation, and water supply development. By bringing your training and skills to bear on the underlying problems of agricultural and economic development, you can help your host nations make the difficult but vital journey from dependence on short-term aid to self-sufficiency.*

Vice President Bush returned from his trip to the famine-stricken regions of Africa, he gave me a personal account of the heartbreaking conditions in that land. While there, he visited one Peace Corps project, and he told me of the outstanding work of the Peace Corps volunteers. The crisis in Africa is severe and the problems deeply rooted, but relief efforts are already making a great difference.^[11]

10. Peace Corps senior leaders, staff, and Volunteers have always honored President Kennedy's vision and legacy for the Agency. During a March 1, 1996 speech for the 35th anniversary of the Peace Corps, Sargent Shriver said, *The Peace Corps represents some, if not all, of the best virtues in this society. It stands for everything that America has ever stood for. It stands for everything we believe in and hope to achieve in the world.*^[12]

11. The pioneering creation of the Peace Corps by President Kennedy and support by United States Government administrations for 65 years, has proven to be one of the most successful American foreign policy programs in our nation's history. The importance of the Peace Corps was reinforced in a May 24, 2017 opinion article by Gen. Colin Powell, retired Secretary of State, when he said, *Indeed, we're strongest when the face of America isn't only a soldier carrying a gun but a diplomat negotiating peace, a Peace Corps Volunteer bringing clean water to a village, or a relief worker stepping off a cargo plane as floodwaters rise.*^[13]

12. The global accomplishments and resolute service to the United States by Volunteers toward world peace and friendship are deserving of robust public recognition and respect. As President Kennedy said, after signing the Executive Order creating the Peace Corps, *The initial reactions to the Peace Corps proposal are convincing proof that we have, in this country, an immense reservoir of such men and women--anxious to sacrifice their energies and time and toil to the cause of world peace and human progress.*^[14] Some Volunteers made the ultimate sacrifice while in service. According to the Fallen Peace Corps Volunteers Memorial Project, more than 300 Volunteers have died in service or following close of service as a result of service-related causes since the Peace Corps began in 1961. Their significant sacrifices and service to our nation and their host countries should be honored with reverence.^[15]

13. During the 2019 COVID pandemic, over 7,000 Volunteers were recalled from their work in host countries. Though they were evacuated for health reasons from their assigned projects, they continued to volunteer when they returned to the United States to support the national response to a global health crisis. Former Peace Corps Director, Jody Olsen, who supervised the complex and immediate recall process said, *Odysseys by individual Peace Corps Volunteers forging over six decades made the total evacuation possible. As I sent out the immediate evacuation order on March 15, I trusted that in sixty-one countries, the thousands of host country families, teachers, clinic directors, local taxi drivers, community security officers, airlines, and medical officials that support Volunteers would selflessly offer their help. These thousands shared painful good-byes and supported the safe movement of all of the volunteers to capital cities, international airports, charter flights to the US over the course of nine days without illness or accident.*^[16]

When Volunteers returned to home, many shifted their work to support domestic initiatives, including COVID-19 surveillance and health programs in collaboration with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA connected returned Volunteers with roles in public health for pandemic response efforts in the United States.^[17] Meanwhile, the Peace Corps launched the Virtual Service Pilot (VSP), allowing returned Volunteers and other United States citizens to work remotely with international partners on community projects across sectors like health, education, and agriculture. The VSP expanded rapidly, demonstrating the potential for virtual service to complement traditional Peace Corps work, providing flexible opportunities for returned Volunteers to contribute globally from home.^[18]

14. Returned Volunteers promote a better understanding of other peoples and cultures when they share their experiences and knowledge about their service overseas with Americans at home – the Third Goal of the Peace Corps mentioned in paragraph 8(c). With regard to the Third Goal, the Peace Corps said, *During their service, Volunteers learn the languages, customs, traditions, and values of the people they live and work among. Volunteers bring the world back home by sharing their experiences with family, friends, and the American public during and after their service. They directly connect Americans with local individuals and communities both independently and through Peace Corps-supported programs. They deepen and enrich Americans' awareness and knowledge of other countries, cultures, and global issues. Long after they return from their assignments abroad, returned Volunteers continue their service by promoting a better understanding of other cultures, encouraging and supporting volunteerism, and engaging in public service.*^[19]

15. Volunteers should be acknowledged and thanked publicly for their service to the United States and their host countries whenever the appropriate occasion arises. Admiral James Stavridis USN (Ret.), former NATO supreme allied commander, said, *What someone brings when they come back from typically two years [of Peace Corps service] is just a remarkable sense of our nation and a remarkable sense of the world, and really a ... stronger sense of themselves and being part of those bigger things. As a retired military guy ... people constantly come up to me and say, 'Admiral, thank you for your service.' And it means a lot to me. It means a lot to every veteran to hear that. So whenever I do an interview where I have a chance to, I say to Peace Corps Volunteers, "Thank you for your service."*^[20]

16. On December 6, 1987, about 120,000 current and returned Volunteers and Peace Corps staff received the Beyond War Award.^[21] The inscription on the poster for the recipients of the award reads: "Presented to the 120,000 Current and Returned Volunteers of the Peace Corps 'to learn peace, to live peace, and to labor for peace, from the beginning of their service to the end of their lives.' A Peace Corps mission statement."^[22]

17. The United States Peace Corps was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by members of the 107th Congress. In a June 27, 2002 letter to the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, ten members of

Congress signed the letter saying, *The impact of Volunteers on international peace through understanding and cooperation goes far beyond development projects. Volunteers bring people and cultures together. They share ideas and ideals of their home community, but they also learn to speak the language, eat the food, sing the songs, and incorporate the qualities of their host communities into their own lives. They travel overseas to represent the United States, and they return home to represent the world within the United States. The central mission of all Volunteers, both overseas and after they return home, is peace.*

The Peace Corps and the community of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, represented by the National Peace Corps Association, create the climate, the conditions, the momentum, and the spirit of peace that is needed all over the world. For this reason, they deserve the Nobel Peace Prize.^[23]

18. In February 2011, members of the 112th Congress recommended to President Barack Obama that the Peace Corps should be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. The letter to President Obama, authored by Congressman Sam Farr, said, *For a half-century Peace Corps has served as a vehicle of peace and hope for impoverished communities around the world. Now more than ever, as the world suffers from divisive transnational conflicts and escalating threats, Peace Corps continues to stand as an unparalleled beacon of peace and optimism. Bestowing the Peace Corps with the Nobel Peace Prize will undoubtedly work to promote volunteerism and inspire the next generation of Americans to be peaceful stewards of both their country and the world.*^[24]

19. The United States will be forever grateful and indebted to Volunteers for their excellence in numerous professional fields, essential and dedicated contributions to communities of their host countries, effective means of communicating the American spirit of peace and friendship, and sharing their experiences during service overseas with citizens of the United States.

20. On behalf of the United States, Congress expresses the highest public gratitude for the distinguished contributions of Volunteers for the past 65 years. The Congressional Gold Medal has been deemed an appropriate award to recognize the outstanding achievements of Volunteers for their valued service to the United States, and their role in promoting world peace and friendship, as a significant component of United States foreign policy.

SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.

(a) Presentation Authorized. —The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a single gold medal of appropriate design to the United States Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, DC, in recognition of Peace Corps Volunteers' dedicated and distinguished service to our nation and promotion of world peace and friendship.

(b) Design and Striking.—For the purposes of the presentation described in subsection (a), the Secretary of the Treasury (in this Act referred to as the "Secretary") shall strike the gold medal with suitable emblems, devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Secretary.

(c) United States Peace Corps.—

(1) In general.—Following the award of the gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal shall be displayed, as appropriate, at the United States Peace Corps headquarters, where it will be available for research.

(2) Sense of Congress.—It is the sense of Congress that the United States Peace Corps headquarters should make the gold medal, awarded pursuant to this Act, available for display elsewhere, particularly at appropriate locations associated with Peace Corps Volunteers and that preference should be given to locations affiliated with the United States Peace Corps.

SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.

(a) In General.—The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in bronze of the gold medal struck under Section 3, at a price sufficient to cover the costs of the bronze medals, including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

(b) Proceeds of Sales.—The amount received from the sale of duplicate medals under subsection (a) shall be deposited in the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund.

(c) Authority to Use Fund Amounts.—There is authorized to be charged against the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be necessary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under this Act.

SEC. 5. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of the Congress that the United States Mint should expedite production of the gold medal and duplicate medals under this Act to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the United States Peace Corps, coinciding with numerous national patriotic celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, so Peace Corps Volunteers are honored in a timely manner in 2026.^[25]

SEC. 6. STATUS OF MEDALS.

(a) National Medals.—Medals struck under this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States Code.

(b) Numismatic Items.—For purposes of section 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

SEC. 7. DETERMINATION OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purposes of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled “Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation” for this act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman

of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.^[26]

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- [1] This draft Congressional bill follows the format of Public Law 116–125, March 13, 2020, 134 STAT. 171 for the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to United States Merchant Marine veterans of WWII. Additional information on the Congressional Gold Medal process is contained in the Congressional Research Service’s Report No. R45101, updated July 18, 2024; <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45101>.
- [2] Peace Corps Worldwide, First Volunteers to Serve: On this day — August 28, 1961, Aug 28 2021 (from National Peace Corps Association); <https://peacecorpsworldwide.org/first-volunteers-to-serve-on-this-day-august-28-1961/>.
- [3] President John Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961; <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-john-f-kennedys-inaugural-address>.
- [4] Executive Order 10924, Establishment of the Peace Corps, March 1, 1961; <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-10924>; <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-10924-establishment-and-administration-the-peace-corps-the-department>.
- [5] President John Kennedy, News conference held at the State Department Auditorium, March 1, 1961; <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-192>.
- [6] Peace Corps Act, Public Law 87-293, September 22, 1961; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/87th-congress/house-bill/7500/text>.
- [7] President John Kennedy, Remarks Upon Signing the Peace Corps Bill, September 22, 1961; <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-upon-signing-the-peace-corps-bill>.
- [8] U.S. Peace Corps, Our Mission; <https://www.peacecorps.gov/what-we-do/our-mission/>.
- [9] Wikipedia, Peace Corps; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Corps.
- [10] U.S. Peace Corps, Our Mission; <https://www.peacecorps.gov/what-we-do/our-mission/>.
- [11] President Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring Peace Corps Volunteers for Africa, April 23, 1985; <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-ceremony-honoring-peace-corps-volunteers-africa>.
- [12] Sargent Shriver, Speech at the 35th Anniversary of the Peace Corps, March 1, 1996; <https://www.sargentshriver.org/archive/speeches/remarks-at-the-peace-corps-35th-anniversary>.
- [13] Gen. Colin Powell, American Leadership - We Can’t Do It for Free, New York Times, May 24, 2017; <https://peacecorpsworldwide.org/colin-powell-we-cant-do-it-for-free/>.
- [14] President Kennedy, Statement upon signing the Order establishing the Peace Corps, March 1, 1961; <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/peace-corps-establishment-19610301>.
- [15] Fallen Peace Corps Volunteers Memorial Project; <https://fpcv.org/>.
- [16] Jody K. Olsen, Trust: The Superpower for the Fulbright and Peace Corps Program, *Fulbright Chronicles*, Volume 1, Number 4 (2023); <https://fulbright-chronicles.com/issues/1-4/trust-the-superpower-for-the-fulbright-and-peace-corps-program/>.

- [17] EPA & Peace Corps Recognize Decade of Partnership in Celebration of EPA's 50th Anniversary;
<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-peace-corps-recognize-decade-partnership-celebration-epas-50th-anniversary>.
- [18] Peace Corps has developed a Virtual Service Pilot Program;
<https://peacecorpsworldwide.org/peace-corps-has-developed-a-virtual-service-pilot-program/>;
<https://www.peacecorps.gov/ways-to-serve/serve-with-us/virtual-service-pilot/>.
- [19] U.S. Peace Corps, FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan and FY 2023 Annual Performance Plan, page 9;
[https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/Peace Corps FY22-26 Strategic Plan and FY23 Annual Performance Plan.pdf](https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/Peace_Corps_FY22-26_Strategic_Plan_and_FY23_Annual_Performance_Plan.pdf).
- [20] Robert Nolan, The Admiral Thanks You for Your Service, WorldView Magazine, Fall 2023, pp. 10-11;
<https://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/the-admiral-thanks-you-for-your-service/>.
- [21] Beyond War Award ceremony video, 1987; <https://traubman.igc.org/bwaward.htm>.
- [22] Beyond War Award poster, 1987; <https://portal.museumca.org/catalog/03613ae8-6d1f-4925-b825-b3f1425451ef>.
- [23] Letter from Congress, Nobel Peace Prize nomination, June 27, 2002;
<https://web.archive.org/web/20020627011656/https://www.rpcv.org/pages/sitepage.cfm?id=503>.
- [24] Jay Nordlinger, A Nobel for the Peace Corps? National Review, January 20, 2011;
<https://www.nationalreview.com/2011/01/nobel-peace-corps-jay-nordlinger/>.
- [25] Text of Section 5 is based on Section 4 of Public Law 117-32;
<https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ32/PLAW-117publ32.pdf>.
- [26] Text of Section 7 is based on text Section 6 of Public Law 117-32;
<https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ32/PLAW-117publ32.pdf> and Section 8 of Public Law 117-320;
<https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ320/PLAW-117publ320.pdf>.