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Cong. Hearings
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STATEMENT OF JACK VAUGHN
DIRECTOR OF THE PEACE CORPS
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

November 14, 1967

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

For the Peace Corps this year, the distinguished members of this Committee constitute a form of appellate court.

From our original request for \$118.7 million for fiscal year 1968, an appropriation of \$115.7 million has been authorized by the Senate and recommended by the House Foreign Affairs Committee. However, the House Appropriations Committee has recommended \$105 million -- a reduction which, as noted in our recent letter to Senator Pastore, "would be a very serious blow to the Peace Corps."

Were the latter figure the final word of Congress this year, we would just have to cut our strength. Not, curtail growth; not, level off. Rather, become smaller. The Peace Corps is a two-year (actually about 27 month) service. Decisions made now, we live with two years from now. Last year, average Volunteer strength increased from 10,100 to 11,600 and will increase again this year to over 12,000. However, with funding of \$105 million, this Volunteer strength would drop to approximately 10,600.

With an appropriation of \$115.7 million, on the other hand, 1969 would see us holding our own, with average Volunteer strength of approximately 12,300.

As you may infer, we just have no other way to absorb the impact of a cut in funds except in the size of the Peace Corps. This agency is a deliberately lean business. We keep it that way, not only because it's our job to do so, but also because it is the most visible way we can remind trainees and Volunteers alike that we observe the same self-discipline we demand of them. And our demands at times are stringent indeed. In Tonga, for example, very careful assessment has pegged the Volunteer living allowance at \$28 per month plus a bag of seeds!

At home, we followed suit: We cut Washington overtime in half. We absorbed the full cost of last year's pay raise, and dropped printing costs by almost 25 percent. And while overseas staff was increased for better field support, we held the Washington staff to below 1963 size. Finally, average cost per Volunteer has been reduced from \$7,867 in 1966 to \$7,453 in the past fiscal year.

We have no frills, but we will go right on probing for economies. Whatever we find, however, simply won't pay the cost of training and fielding our planned number of Volunteers next year.

All of us who have been close to the agency since its beginning -- Members of Congress, administrators here and abroad, Volunteers, as well as friends in other lands -- all of us who have been the Peace Corps' partisans are disappointed and disheartened by the idea of a cutback in Volunteer strength.

On the basis of merit, it's not justified. On the strict basis of national interest, it has absolutely nothing to recommend it.

The Peace Corps has worked well; at times, it has worked wonders; at other times, we have learned how much we have to learn. But the close, personal, learn-at-the-problem-level way of life of the Volunteers has produced results unthinkable to veteran overseas officers just six years ago: Peace Corps students - public school children - winning prizes formerly the exclusive preserve of private schools in the Philippines; a fishing cooperative launched in British Honduras with Peace Corps help, grossing nearly a half-million dollars without Peace Corps help; a half-million children learning through television in Colombia; credit cooperatives tripling in number and membership in Ecuador in just two years; new promise in high-yield hybrid crops being introduced through agricultural programs in nearly half the nations where Volunteers serve.

These are achievements that call for growth rather than decline. The idea from which they flow merits enrichment rather than abatement.

Leaders overseas would be among the first to endorse a call for Peace Corps strength. They, more than others, see the job being done -- see achievements they know their people would want perhaps another generation to accomplish, and best of all, they see the work done by their own people, encouraged by Volunteers to find their own way.

For such reasons, President Bourguiba last month called the Peace Corps an enduring work of peace that "does honor to America." "It has done a great deal," he said, "to make the United States known and to make it appreciated by all the people of the world."

He added that "in the order of ideas" the Peace Corps "constitutes a work of peace, a work of mutual comprehension, and of affection, esteem and understanding that can develop and endure, and extend itself to every land."

Quoting from a conversation he had with our own President, President Diori Hamani of Niger told Volunteers in training recently,

"...if I must sacrifice one part of my program in the United States, it would certainly not be my visit to the Virgin Islands, since it will be an occasion for me to renew contact with the Peace Corps, to see in person the work which is being done there."

President Hamani added some thoughts Americans should treasure. He said:

"Being a Volunteer - this word is a whole program. To be a Volunteer is to make a free choice; to take the option; to give service to one's neighbor. And this is remarkable."

"For those who know the situation in the United States; the comfort one finds there for the young; the ease of living in the universities, schools and workshops; when one stops to compare certain of your fellow countrymen who at the age of 22 or 23 prefer parties on Sundays; where they dance the 'jerk' or the 'be-bop'; and when one sees these young people abandon all that to come to the Virgin Islands to undergo painful and hard training and climate, I am obliged to tell you that I admire you greatly -- you and your decision to accept such sacrifices."

One hardly hears remarks such as these every day -- even about Peace Corps Volunteers. But they certainly are symptomatic of the esteem in which the Peace Corps is held abroad.

And at home that esteem is no less. From a cold start six years ago, the Peace Corps is now the largest single civilian employer of the college generation. And among our other generations at home, I think it is accurate to observe that the mere existence of this outlet, this visible form of our nation's spirit, furnishing as it does proof that our nation is still very much in the people business -- this agency is welcome assurance for any American who cannot bear to see us slip into a character for which our nationhood was never ordained.

This, then, is hardly the time to cut back the Peace Corps. Yet cut back we must if our funds are reduced as presently proposed.

Our pressure point to do this is our training input. Already, we have shifted down from 11,000 to 10,300 to reflect a \$3 million cut in the Senate from our original request. But an appropriation of \$105 million would require us to reduce the 1968 training input to about 7,300 -- the lowest beginning level for any year since 1963.

At issue is more than momentum. I don't believe you can view the Peace Corps idea as purely cumulative. At issue, rather, are thousands of individual instances, for such is the nature of our service. Each site, where there would be no help in the next few years; each farm; each school; each village; each cooperative -- each man, woman and child for whom there would not be that very personal identity of the new, the different - and above all the possible; each young American, itching for a chance to try; each of them is a reason for the Peace Corps to continue to grow.

Nothing could be less a matter of mass, and more a preserve for the individual. Yet planning to serve, in each case, does entail allocation of our only resource: the remarkable Americans who volunteer. The number who enter training is the critical key to a hundred other decisions.

It is our handle on all other issues we resolve in the course of our work.

This year, that handle is in your hands. The issue to be resolved is purely one of national policy: the size of the Peace Corps.

Thank you.