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## HOW PEACE CORPS GOT ITS NAME

*A Humphrey staffer remembers*

By Peter Grothe

While the Peace Corps is indelibly linked to the presidency of John F. Kennedy, there would not have been a Peace Corps without the efforts of Minnesota Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (later Vice President of the United States). I had the privilege of serving as the foreign relations adviser to Senator Humphrey and working for the newly created Peace Corps, and so I had an extraordinary front row seat to observe “how it all began.”

Unknown to most, Humphrey first put forward the idea of American volunteers serving abroad way back in 1948, in the Minneapolis living room of George and Dorothy Jacobsen. Also present was Humphrey’s close friend, Orville Freeman (later Governor of Minnesota and Secretary of Agriculture) and Freeman’s wife, Jane. George Jacobsen was active in the cooperative movement and he was discussing the great benefits of community development. According to Jane—who recently told me about the now-historic living room conversation—Humphrey leapt to the idea of a volunteer corps serving overseas and became very enthusiastic as he spoke about its potential.

However the idea lay dormant for many years while Humphrey worked on legislation for his wide range of interests. (It was said that he “had more solutions than there were problems.”) The volunteer corps idea jumped back into his consciousness after a talk in 1956 with Ed Snyder, then the congressional lobbyist for

the Quakers. They spoke about the admirable work that Quaker volunteers were doing abroad and Humphrey reaffirmed his keen interest in legislation whereby the U.S. government would fund a corps of young volunteers. He spoke about his idea on a number of speeches in the late 1950s.

I went to work for the senator in 1960 and came across the Peace Corps idea in his files (although it still didn’t have a name) and asked him whether I could work on it. Humphrey was busy running in the Democratic presidential primaries and so he didn’t have much time to spend developing the legislation. He responded with an enthusiastic “Absolutely!” I spent part of the next six weeks interviewing anyone I could find who worked for organizations whose focus was assisting peoples in the developing countries (which mainly meant Christian missionary groups), and then wrote a draft of the legislation. The Senator said, “It looks good, but take it over to the people at the foreign aid administration (then called the International Cooperation Administration, or ICA) and see what they think.”

I talked with six top ICA administrators—an hour each—and five of the six had the same reaction, which can be summarized as: “It is a lovely-sounding idea, but it will never work! We would be sending over all these young people to countries where age and experience are so respected. Also, the young volunteers would have to adapt to very different cultures, and they

might mess up. Sorry to say it, but it just won't work!"

I returned to the office discouraged. I was a young man in my 20s and, I thought, those older, experienced people at ICA surely knew a lot more than I did. I reported their reaction to the senator and his response was vintage Humphrey.

"That's the trouble with those people in the Eisenhower administration!" he exploded. "Their attitude is 'let's not try anything new, no new starts!' All they see are the problems! They place the problems so high (and he raised both arms over his head) that they don't see the challenges. They don't see the opportunities. I want to grasp the opportunities! Peter, draft me a bill!"

I returned to my office and drafted a bill, based on Humphrey's vision and on what I had learned from many, many interviews with persons who had done volunteer work abroad. Now, the question arose, what do we call this thing? Humphrey had some pieces of legislation and proposals with the word "peace" in them; the "Food for Peace" legislation was the best-known example at the time. To be consistent with the Humphrey "peace" theme, I toyed with the name "Works for Peace Corps." However, that seemed a bit cumbersome and so I just wrote down the name "Peace Corps." I floated it to a number of friends who worked in government. Some said, "Peace Corps sounds really communistic!" Others said, "Don't call it 'Corps.' That sounds too militaristic!"

But Humphrey liked the name and somehow "Peace Corps" stuck and is still with us today.

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