
UPDATE

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President Clinton Nominates Florida Congressman To Be First Ambassador to Reunified Vietnam

Douglas "Pete" Peterson, U.S. Congressman from Florida, was nominated late last month by President Clinton to be the first U.S. Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Congressman Peterson spent twenty-six years in the United States Air Force as a fighter pilot and commander, attaining the rank of full Colonel. He was shot down over North Vietnam in 1966, and spent six and one half years as a prisoner of war. He is currently chairman of the working group on the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs, working with Russian officials to uncover information about missing American Servicemen.

Mr. Peterson has maintained a close involvement in Vietnam affairs since his release. During two Congressional visits in 1991 and 1992 as a member of the House National Security Committee, he met with senior government officials, traveled in both northern and southern parts of the country, and visited the prison where he was a POW. He played a key advisory role in President Clinton's decision in July 1995 to establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam.

In an interview published in the New York Times on May 24, 1996, Congressman Peterson said, "It's time to move on with Vietnam, no doubt about it. It doesn't serve our national purposes or assist security in that part of the world to ignore Vietnam. We can enhance Vietnam's entry into the family of nations peacefully."

In his statement of nomination acceptance Congressman Peterson said, "In accepting this nomination, I am acutely aware that America's relationship with Vietnam is a special one. Our Nation's physical and psychological wounds resulting from the earlier conflict remain, but we must continue the healing process. I pray that my nomination and subsequent posting to Hanoi as Ambassador will help our Nation to mend even further."

Confirmation Hearing Set

A report in the Wall Street Journal of June 20, 1996 says Senator Craig Thomas was scheduling a Foreign Relations subcommittee hearing July 19 or 23rd, on the President's nomination of Congressman Pete Peterson as Ambassador to Vietnam.

A Visit to The Haiphong Public Library by Judith Henchy

As with many of my plans in Vietnam, my recent visit to Haiphong was disrupted by the preliminary meetings leading up to the Party Congress. In this case party activities prevented me from meeting my primary contact, Mr. Hoang Van Dinh, Director of the Office for Foreign Affairs. However, I was well received by his assistant, Ms. Nguyen Thi Kim Linh. Mr. Dinh had made arrangements for me to meet Mrs. Le Thi Tien in the Haiphong City Library. We discussed a provisional project proposal which I had already sent to Mr. Dinh as a part of our initial package of proposed projects with the City of Haiphong. My proposal was based on ideas from others who had visited the library and from Mr. Dinh himself. Beth Whitman and Khan Tran gave me excellent reports from the library.

I soon confirmed what others had observed: the library is well organized but is in need of more recent books, particularly in English, and also badly needs additional space for readers. The current facility can only accommodate 70 readers, and the use is often much higher than this. A new eight story library has been promised by the central government with a budget of 16 billion dong, and when this comes about there will be increased needs for computer equipment and other facilities.

The Haiphong library serves as the central facility for a regional system which includes twelve district libraries: four in the urban area, six in the rural vicinity and two in the nearby coastal islands. In all there are 15 out of the staff of 20 who have library training. Mrs. Tien herself was trained in library science in the former Soviet Union. The library is involved in literacy campaigns throughout the region and has used creative programming ideas such as poetry and essay writing contests to encourage a young readership.

With increased Internet connectivity in Vietnam, it will become part of a regional library network which will link it to the the National Library in Hanoi and other provincial libraries in the North. Training for computerization of library records using national cataloging standards has already taken place and many of the 200,000 books in the library are available on their on-line catalog, which is installed on their existing 486 machine.

Besides the five computers which they hope to have for the new library, the librarian requested reference books, including dictionaries, encyclopedia, professional guide books and books and equipment for learning English. The proposed GSVA library project would focus on English teaching materials, providing the basis of bicultural understanding through development of children's programming in English, while promoting understanding of the Seattle area through local educational materials.

While the details of a long-term project clearly need to be developed, we very much hope to demonstrate our commitment to this very important initiative as soon as possible by taking advantage of a tentative offer of free freight for our book donations this August. In order to work on soliciting book donations from individuals, bookstores or publishers, the Culture and Education Committees need help in letter writing, phoning, collecting and organizing donations. We are also looking for members to work with the Culture Committee to organize a proposed Vietnamese Writers symposium in October.

Interested persons may contact Judith Henchy at 543-3986, or Beth Whitman at 547-1016.

New Vice President for GSVA

Gary Johnson, a Neighborhood Coordinator for the City of Seattle, has been selected as Vice President of the Greater Seattle Vietnam Association. An ad hoc nominating committee proposed his selection, which was confirmed unanimously at the June meeting of the GSVA Board of Directors. Gary joined the Association in March of 1995, and has served as Chair of the Sister City Committee. He replaces John Sutherland, who resigned because of the burden of other activities.

Proposed Projects Reflect State's Interests

The Seattle-Haiphong Teaching English program is one of eight projects endorsed by the State of Washington for discussion with Vietnam's Ministry of Trade. The English language project was created by the Greater Seattle Vietnam Association in consultation with the Haiphong Foreign Language Center.

The eight projects were chosen by Governor Lowry to offer for discussion in Hanoi as a follow-up to talks there last fall. On September 26 Lowry and Trade Minister Le Van Triet signed a Statement of Intent to develop economic and trade relations to "create mutual prosperity for both sides." This was a highlight of the Governor's trade mission to SE Asia.

The new list was developed as the first step, a demonstration to the Ministry of examples of projects reflecting interests of the people of Washington. Also included are four projects in the maritime and fisheries sector. Kvichak Marine Industries seeks to introduce techniques and materials for building aluminum bot-tomed vessels; Tippett Marine has a plan for a modern shipyard to repair local and foreign ships and to train Vietnamese people in shipbuilding and maintenance skills; Certisure proposes a standardized fisheries program for quality assurance for seafood products; and SCS Refrigerated Services is offering a project for seafood storage facilities.

The list also includes one project already begun. Peace Trees Vietnam, a plan developed by "Earthstewards Network" of Bainbridge Island for clearing landmines and planting trees in Quang Tri province; a program proposed by the Burke Museum in Seattle would help Hanoi plan a new Museum of Natural History, and a joint program for supporting mining interests in Vietnam was proposed by the Northwest Mining Association, a nonprofit organization based in Spokane, Washington.

The Teaching English project was created by GSVA to be managed jointly by Seattle and Haiphong as part of the Sister Cities Alliance that the two port cities are establishing.

Vietnamese people and foreigners who have worked there say no other assistance project can bring more long term benefit to the country.

The emphasis is on training Vietnamese teachers who already are skilled in reading and writing English but who lack experience in conversation. They will learn the techniques that have been so successful in other countries of Asia for teaching English as a Foreign language. The training will take place in Seattle and in Haiphong.

Peace Trees Update

A co-director of Peace Trees Vietnam says the project in Quang Tri Province is ahead of schedule. Danaan Parry is back in Seattle after an inspection of the site near the old demilitarized zone that will be cleared of landmines and then planted in a botanical reserve to be called "Friendship Forest." The Vietnamese counterparts have exceeded goals set in the agreement signed with Peace Trees last January. They searched the entire province to find thirty-seven indigenous species of trees, and have created a nursery and begun propagating them for the November planting by participants from all over the world. Parry said the local participants also have started construction of the housing units for the 40 international participants and 40 Vietnamese citizens who will work together for the planting. In addition, work has begun for the Center for Landmines Awareness Education that is part of the project. The agreement with the Government of Vietnam provides that the Vietnamese Militia will have responsibility for removing the mines. Parry will be back in the area later this summer with a team of American experts in the disposal of unexploded ordinance and mine removal to provide the Vietnamese with the latest in mine detection devices, and to do a final check to make sure the area is safe for the November team.

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Greater Seattle Vietnam Association
A grassroots, non-profit, duly incorporated and registered organization dedicated to helping the people of Seattle Create
and maintain links with the people of Vietnam.

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