

Congressman Robert A. Underwood  
Statement on H.R. 5010  
The District of Columbia and United States Territories  
Circulating Quarter Dollar Program Act  
September 7, 2000

Mr. Chairman:

I would like to thank you and my colleagues who have supported H.R. 5010, the "District of Columbia and United States Territories Circulating Quarter Dollar Program Act." Although separate from the program initiated in 1997 by the 50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act, H.R. 5010 will no doubt create the same interest and enjoy the same success as its predecessor.

It was hoped that Commemorative Coin Program will lead the American public to become more aware of the rich history of U.S. coinage, which dates all the way back to the 1790's; that the various designs will generate a collective pride among Americans -- not only their home States -- but also the United States in general; and that the 50 States Commemorative Coin Program will reflect similar values which exist in each of our 50 States while also celebrating our Nation's diversity.

This objective had partly been met. In addition to serious collectors, U.S. mint surveys indicate that about 15 million kids are collecting the commemorative quarters and, at the same time, learning about their country's history and heritage. Commemorative quarters have outsold Pokemon cards a hundred times over.

Unfortunately, by excluding the District of Columbia and the Territories in the 1997 coin program, we have shortchanged the American public and missed out on an opportunity to present a more accurate reflection of the history and diversity of this great nation. By the same token, many residents of the District, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have considered non-inclusion in the commemorative quarter program as the latest manifestation of disregard towards our membership and contributions to this country. If the Commemorative Quarter Program truly intends to celebrate this Nation's diversity, such an oversight is inexcusable.

I represent the island of Guam. In 1994, we commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of Guam's liberation after three years of occupation by the Japanese during World War II. We hold the distinction of being the only civilian American community to suffer occupation during that war. In 1998, we marked the hundred-year anniversary of the commencement of our relationship with the United States which resulted from the Spanish-American War. Last August, we commemorated the fifty-year anniversary of the enactment of the Organic Act of Guam which granted civil government and U.S. citizenship to the people of Guam. Together with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, we are the westernmost territories of the United States. Guam is "where America's day begins." These are some interesting points that we on Guam want to share with the American public and these are some of the points that will be conveyed to the American public if the commemorative quarter program is extended to the Territories and the District.

H.R. 5010, the "District of Columbia and United States Territories Circulating Quarter Dollar Program Act," will enable the District and the Territories to share in the pride brought about by commemorative quarters to the fifty states. It would serve the American public to be acquainted with the diversity and culture that defines the Territories and the District. More importantly, having commemorative quarters issued in honor of the District and the Territories, will go a long way towards recognizing areas of this nation that most citizens of the fifty states oftentimes overlook. Passage of this legislation will ensure the Commemorative coin program will finally cover all Americans and all areas where the U.S. flag flies. Seeing a latte stone or tapa cloth on the other side of a coin with George Washington's portrait will be a great testimony to this country's diversity. Who knows, a full examination of representative democracy for all these areas under the American flag could follow this effort to include the Territories and the District. This legislation is significant, important and necessary. It is worth much – much more than two-bits.

Again, I thank the chairman for introducing this bill. I urge my colleagues to support this bill and work towards its passage and enactment.

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