

Voting starts to choose DC quarter design (Numismatic News)

By David L. Ganz

D.C. residents finally got the vote.

Not for their congressman, but for the design of the coin that, in January 2009, will follow Hawaii's 50th state coin as the 51st coin in a 56-unit program that includes the nation's capital and five insular territories: Puerto Rico, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

When the 50 state coin program began, it began with a promise from its sponsors that the District of Columbia and the insular territories would be included in what would be a 56-coin program. It took from 1997 until December 2007 for that goal to be realized.

For those who don't remember the historical details, the state quarter program emerged from a concept advanced by the Citizens Commemorative Coin Advisory Committee in 1993-1994, refined at a hearing of the House coinage subcommittee in 1995, and thereafter several different congressional laws passed to first study the project, then implemented it.

Among early objectors were the elected representatives of the five insular territories plus Washington, D.C. Their non-voting delegates in Congress spoke up in debate and were promised consideration at a later point in time after passage.

Issuance of these coins was promised by Rep. Michael Castle, R-Del., when he was chairman of the House coinage subcommittee, and Rep. James A.S. Leach, when he chaired the House Banking Committee. Leach is now retired from Congress and Castle, precluded under GOP rules from chairing the coinage subcommittee because of longevity, moved on to other interests.

The state quarter program issuance began in 1999 with Delaware, and since then five coins each year are being produced at a rate of one every 10 weeks by the U.S. Mint until, at the end of 2008, the entire 50-state series will be completed. Since there are six coins in 2009, the coins will be produced at an even greater pace, once every eight weeks or so.

Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton introduced her own legislation in 1999 after Castle's bill had already been enacted. Castle had

pledged his support for the add-on of America's trust territories, but had stepped down as committee chair.

His successor, Rep. Spencer Bacchus, R-Ala., according to Norton, "pledged full support and cooperation in helping with this effort," but that legislation went nowhere. The leadership move behind this bill seemed to assure its ultimate success - but no one expected it to take nearly the whole life of the state quarter program..

Rep. Faleomavaega commented that "American Samoa has a long, proud history of supporting the United States - ever since the traditional leaders of the main island of Tutuila ceded their island to the United States on April 17, 1900."

H.R. 5010 was introduced in the 106th Congress, eight years ago, to fulfill the same goal of equalizing the territories and the District of Columbia with the states whose coins are to be issued. Norton participated in the debate, making sure to lobby for Washington, D.C., as a coin component.

"I appreciate especially the initial work of the then chairman of the committee, the gentleman from Delaware (Castle), and, of course, the gentleman from Alabama (Bacchus), the current chair, who has worked as tirelessly with us as we have with him to make sure that we would get to the day when all American jurisdictions would be included in the coin commemoration act under discussion here today," she said.

"When the District and the four insular areas were inadvertently left out of the 50-State Commemoration Coin Program Act, we did not see any reason to hold everyone else up. We thought that the act should proceed so that the 10-year period for incorporating States could go forward because we had the assurance of the gentleman from Delaware that D.C. and the insular areas would indeed be included. I knew he would keep his word. There was never any doubt about that."

She continued with the time line of events. "Not only did he move immediately in that direction by joining all of us who are delegates as a co-sponsor of the bill, but the gentleman from Alabama also never lost a beat in continuing in that tradition until the work was done. "

Significantly, she said, "no damage has been done because there is a 10-year period according to date of admission to the Union, and, therefore, they would not have gotten to us anyway before now.

"We are very pleased that the first 10 States are already on-line, some of them joyously touting their coin. We know that the differences between the States, the District and the territories was never meant to be invidious and never has been in this body; and we have never been so treated in this body. We are all Americans, and we appreciate that this body has, for the most part, included all of us whenever possible. That was always the intent on both sides of the aisle here."

It did not turn out that way, for despite 1999 passage, it came to naught. Then on Sept. 7, 2000, the Banking Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy which handled coinage matters approved two bills by voice vote, H.R. 5010, the District of Columbia and United States Territories Circulating Quarter Dollar Program Act, and H.R. 3697, the 2002 Winter Olympic Commemorative Coin Act.

Norton testified at the September 2000 hearings on the legislation that, "The District of Columbia and the four insular areas were inadvertently excluded from the 50-states bill when it went to the floor on suspension. Rather than seeking to stop the bill on the suspension calendar, we worked with Congressman Mike Castle, then Chair of this Subcommittee, who agreed to co-sponsor a bill.. [that] would make D.C. and the insular areas part of the 11th year of the program."

Overwhelming approval was then given by the House of Representatives on Sept. 18, 2000, to H.R. 5010. By a margin of 377 to 6, with 50 members absent and presumably campaigning in tough election fights, the House approved the legislation initiated by House coinage subcommittee chair Spencer Bacchus, Senate Banking chair Jim Leach former coinage subcommittee chair Michael Castle and representatives from each of the territories.

In the ensuing presidential election battle, the proposal got lost in the Senate and it took another year to get it back on track.

The six in opposition in the House were GOP members Rep John Boehner, Ohio; Peter Goss, Fla.; Gary Miller, Calif.; Ron Paul, Texas, Edward Royce, Calif., and Bob Schaffer, Colo.

Boehner commented that "none are states and they should not be treated as such," adding that the remedy he would have is to require them to apply for statehood.

Miller said through his press secretary that "they are not states" and that he wanted the program kept "to the 50 states."

Paul

said through a spokesman that there were "too many coins to collect" and that he had constitutional objections to the issuance of these additional pieces. This year, 2008, he is running for President.

Four

times in the past 10 years, the house of Representatives voted to issue the new coins; the Senate took no action and the measure died.

Passage by the House on Oct. 7, 2002, went nowhere.

Another

bill identical to the old legislation was sent on to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs in mid-2004; that committee which already had custody over H.R. 2993, introduced in the House by coinage subcommittee chair Peter King, R-N.Y. The measure passed the House on March 25, 2004, and was sent over to the Senate four days later where it was ignored.

Castle took the

opportunity of the House passage of the measure to praise the 50-state quarter program that he legislatively authored. "The State quarter program - which reached the halfway mark at the end of December - has dramatically increased general knowledge of the historical contributions of our 50 states."

He continued, "The legislation

passed today would do the same for the District and the territories. These areas have some of the highest enlistment rates in our armed forces; have made many historical, cultural and athletic contributions to our nation, and this bill we consider today is a great opportunity to recognize them, in artwork on the reverse of the quarters."

Although

he had moved from chair of the House coinage subcommittee to chairing an education subcommittee, he expressed the thought that, "As an education tool, recognizing D.C. and territories is imperative. Students are learning about the 50 states with this program, unfortunately they may know even less to begin with about the history and role of D.C. and the territories. This legislation will serve as a great tool to rectify that problem."

Former Mint director

Henrietta Holsman Fore, now an assistant secretary of state, took a different perspective. She told me that, "The United States Mint does not comment on pending legislation," which is always the view that the Mint takes on a prerogative of issuing coins, which is given to Congress by the Constitution.

But she then jumped in with both feet: "However, the United States Mint recognizes the continuing enthusiasm for the 50-State Quarters Program with more than 130 million Americans collecting. If the District of Columbia and United States Territories Circulating Quarter Dollar Program Act is approved, the United States Mint will ensure that the mandate is carried out with beautiful and evocative designs that befit them all."

In the 109th Congress, it was the same story, only this time Norton's bill, H.R. 3885, was introduced. Its quick history: Sept. 22, 2005, it was introduced in the House; a year later, on Dec. 9, 2006, the Committee on Financial Services was discharged from consideration, and it passed the House the same day, only to die on the vine in the Senate.

Year 11 of the 50-state program was, signed into law by President George W. Bush on Dec. 26, while aboard Air Force One en route to Crawford, Texas, for some holiday relaxation, all as part of the Omnibus spending measure that had tied Congress up in knots since Thanksgiving. The state quarter measure, though important to some special interest groups, was incidental.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, also known as the omnibus measure, made appropriations for the Department of State, foreign operations, and related programs for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2008.

Section 622 of the 1,235 page bill is the operative one for collectors. It contains a mere 756 words in the context of a bill that contains some 279,154 words in all. But the words are those that residents of Washington, D.C., have sought to hear for 10 long years.

Washington, D.C., is a city that has an elected mayor and council, besides being the nation's capital. From the start, they entered the design phase with a solid chip on their shoulder, evidenced in a letter sent by Mayor Adrian M. Fenty to Mint Director Edmund Moy. (After the debacle involving artist Paul Jackson and the Missouri state design, the coin's design comes from a description or design concept - not a sketch).

Mayor Fenty wanted the D.C. coin motto to be like New Hampshire's "Live Free or Die," and similarly revolutionary. Specifically, he wanted to call attention to the fact that while D.C. residents can vote for President, their delegate to Congress has no vote and they have no representation at all in the Senate.

Wrote the mayor, "Inscribed within the

graphic is one of two phrases: "Taxation Without Representation," or "No Taxation Without Representation." He offered this explanation: "the phrase "Taxation Without Representation," the slogan currently used on vehicle license plates issued in Washington, D.C., is evocative of the battle cries which mobilized the founding of this nation."

The Mint put the kibosh on that together with a flag design that violated design guidelines. So it was revised again to include Frederick Douglass, the freed black abolitionist; Benjamin Banneker, the black surveyor, or the man for all seasons and taste, Duke Wellington.

Fenty announced May 23 that D.C. residents could vote their choice, three days after the Citizens Coin Advisory Committee criticized the design and a week after the Commission of Fine Arts had its say at a public hearing and told the Mint that it could truly do better. They "requested that the design alternatives be reworked."

Stephanie Scott, secretary of the District of Columbia, announced that Washington would launch online voting May 23 for the design that will appear on D.C.'s statehood quarter. The design shown is unlikely to be the final design given that the Fine Arts Commission rejected the rendering.

Scott said that D.C. residents have until June 18 to vote.

In a copyrighted story in the Washington Post, Scott was quoted as saying that the arts unit called for a head-and-shoulder bust to simplify the designs. Mint rules preclude that, however.

Residents can vote online at <http://www.dc.gov/quarter>, the voting site to vote for your favorite on the official D.C. Government balloting site.

Residents may also vote by calling (202) 727-5448, or mail their preference to D.C. Quarter, Office of the Secretary of the District of Columbia, 1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 419, Washington, DC 20004.

Voting ends at 5 p.m. June 18. The District of Columbia's design recommendation will be sent to the Secretary of the Treasury for final approval in July.