

**Statement from Gary Marks, Chairman,
Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee to the
House Committee on Financial Services
Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy and Technology
July 20, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the matter of design quality for the coins and medals produced by the United States Mint.

I am the Chairman of the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee (CCAC). In 2003, Congress created the CCAC to “advise the Secretary of the Treasury on any theme or design proposals relating to circulating coinage, bullion coinage, congressional gold medals and national and other medals produced by the Secretary of the Treasury in accordance with section 5111 of title 31, United States Code.”

As a committee designed specifically to advise the Secretary of the Treasury, the CCAC serves in an independent capacity from the United States Mint.

Over the past three years, members of the CCAC have expressed concerns to Mint officials that design proposals for various medals and for circulating and commemorative coinage programs have lacked the quality appropriate for the United States of America. Specifically, the lack of design quality has been evidenced in designs that are cluttered and lack focus (see Exhibit A, attached, for example), the use of design devices that are so small they cannot be readily discerned by the naked eye, and the use of what I call “storyboard” depictions that attempt to illustrate design themes in literal terms rather than through the use of allegorical or symbolic devices. Historically, some of this nation’s most acclaimed coin designs have been achieved through the effective use of allegory and symbolism.

In other instances, the CCAC has been provided a single design proposal for a medal and asked to make a recommendation. If the CCAC finds the design unacceptable or lacking, production timelines are often so tight that the Mint is unable to provide alternate designs for review. In a similar vein, the CCAC was recently provided a set of three proposed designs for the obverse of the silver dollar for the 2011 Medal of Honor Commemorative Coin Program. All three designs were virtually the same except for a few small variations (see Exhibit B attached). When the choices we are asked to make become nearly meaningless for the lack of variation or because only one design is proposed, the ability of the CCAC to effectively administer its advisory role is severely diminished.

In a recent review of the 2011 United States Army Commemorative Coin Program, the CCAC was presented with a design showing a United States

soldier pointing a rifle in the direction of a United States Army helicopter; giving the unintended appearance of trying to shot it down (see Exhibit C attached). In another example, the Army emblem was rendered with inscriptions reversed from their official position (see Exhibit D1 – actual emblem – attached, and Exhibit D2 – Mint design – attached).

Despite these examples, members of the CCAC have been hopeful that necessary changes would be made and that, in fact, a renaissance in United States coinage design would occur. This hope has been founded in a vision articulated by Mint Director Edmund C. Moy in 2007.

During the Art Medal World Congress held in Colorado Springs in September of 2007, Director Moy issued a stirring call “...to spark a neo-renaissance for coin design and achieve a new level of design excellence...”

I count myself as a strong supporter of the vision to bring about the neo-renaissance the Director has called for. I know that many of my fellow members on the CCAC share the same or similar convictions and desire to see a true modern revival of excellence for the designs of our nation’s coinage.

Yet, nearly three years after the Director’s call for design excellence, members of the CCAC continue to express dissatisfaction with the Mint’s design proposals.

Let me be very clear. It is not my intent to find blame or to point fingers, but rather to identify what must happen going forward to bring about the positive change we desire. Let me also be very clear that the Mint’s art staff is highly skilled and very capable of producing high quality designs. I have seen moments of genius from these artists and I believe the answer will be found when we discover what changes need to be made to liberate them to perform at their full potential.

Therefore, acting in my statutory role of the CCAC’s Chairman, I recently appointed a Subcommittee on Coin Design Excellence comprised of five CCAC members. I have given the subcommittee the task of investigating the Mint’s design processes, identifying changes that would lead to improved designs and subsequently developing recommendations designed to further the needed changes. It is my intent that such recommendations would be issued by the CCAC to the Secretary of the Treasury within the next several months.

Once the CCAC has issued its design quality recommendations, I would be pleased to provide copies to this committee or to any Members who might be interested.

The CCAC’s FY2009 Annual Report has just been released and is available to all interested parties here in the meeting room.

Thank you for the opportunity to report to you on the design quality issue and the CCAC's recent efforts to develop recommendations for improvement. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have.