

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL CAPITAL MEMORIAL
ADVISORY COMMISSION

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TUESDAY
AUGUST 11, 2026

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The National Capital Memorial Advisory
Commission met via Videoconference, at 10:00
a.m. EDT, Tammy Stidham, Chair, presiding.

PRESENT

TAMMY STIDHAM, Chair, representing the Director
of the National Park Service

STEPHEN BRUCH, representing the Secretary of
Defense

EDWIN FOUNTAIN, representing the Chairman of the
American Battle Monuments Commission

JOSEPH IMAMURA, representing the Architect of
the Capitol

KIRSTEN KULIS, representing the Advisory Council
on Historic Preservation (non-voting member)

THOMAS LUEBKE, representing the Chairman of the
Commission of Fine Arts

DAVID MALONEY, representing the Mayor of the
District of Columbia

MARCEL ACOSTA, representing the Chairman of the
National Capital Planning Commission

KRISTI TUNSTALL WILLIAMS, representing the
Administrator of the General Services
Administration

ALSO PRESENT

DANIEL FOX, Commission of Fine Arts

LAUREL HAMMIG, Memorials Program Manager, NCMAC

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1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 10:02 a.m.

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: The National Park and
4 Memorial Advisory Commission Chairman
5 representing the Director of the National Park
6 Service.

7 Present for today's meeting are Marcel
8 Acosta, representing the Chairman of the
9 National Capital Planning Commission; Joseph
10 Imamura, representing the Architect of the
11 Capital; Tom Luebke for the Chairman of the
12 Commission of Fine Arts; David Maloney
13 representing the Mayor of the District of
14 Columbia; Kristi Tunstall Williams representing
15 the Administrator of the General Services
16 Administration; Stephen Bruch representing the
17 Secretary of War; and Edwin Fountain
18 representing the Chairman of the American Battle
19 Monuments Commission.

20 Also representing the Advisory Council
21 on Historic Preservation is Kristen Kulis. Ms.
22 Kulis participates with the Commission in a

1 nonvoting advisory capacity.

2 And finally, Laurel Hammig, our
3 Memorials Program Manager here with the National
4 Park Service, is with us today acting as the
5 Commission secretary as our original secretary
6 has taken another position in the Alaska region.

7 I would like to thank the Commission of
8 Fine Arts, specifically Dan Fox and Carlton
9 Hart, for your technical support for today's
10 meeting and, actually, every meeting that we
11 have. I don't think we could do this without
12 your help. So, thank you very much.

13 As most of you know who are here today,
14 this Commission was established by the
15 Commemorative Works Act of 1986 and is required,
16 by that act, to advise the Secretary of
17 Interior, the Administrator of the General
18 Services Administration, and committees of
19 Congress, on the establishment of commemorative
20 works in the District of Columbia and its
21 environs and to provide its views to the
22 appropriate committees of Congress when the

1 committees are considering legislation to
2 authorize commemorative works within the
3 District of Columbia and its environs.

4 Today, our agenda includes a review of
5 two House bills. Just a reminder that NCMAC
6 reviews proposed bills for alignment with the
7 standards and policies set out in the
8 Commemorative Works Act and provides advice to
9 Congress.

10 One change to the agenda is that we
11 will postpone the review of the updated bylaws
12 and charter until our next meeting.

13 We are still working through those
14 internally and will share as soon as those are
15 available.

16 I will note that because we are
17 conducting this meeting through the Zoom
18 platform, we don't have the ability to call upon
19 persons present in the room to see if they wish
20 to testify.

21 If you are attending today and wish to
22 testify, please email Laurel Hammig as soon as

1 possible at Laurel, underscore, Hammig, H-A-M-M-
2 I-G, at NPS.gov, or call her at 202-875-3609.

3 Again, that's Laurel, underscore,
4 Hammig at NPS.gov, or call at 202-875-3609, so
5 that we can make sure you have the opportunity
6 to speak.

7 Our first agenda item for today is H.R.
8 9600 to approve the location of a commemorative
9 work, the Thomas Paine, America's Indispensable
10 and Unsung Founding Father.

11 This bill is to approve the location of
12 a commemorative work for Thomas Paine, America's
13 indispensable and unsung founding father.

14 On July 6, 2026, Representative Jamie
15 Raskin introduced H.R. 9600, which was referred
16 to the Committee on Natural Resources.

17 The bill would allow the Thomas Paine
18 Memorial to locate within Area 1 as defined by
19 the commemorative works.

20 We have a number -- we have a few
21 testimonies. One is a video statement from
22 Representative Raskin, which Laurel will play

1 now.

2 While she's playing the video, a
3 reminder that if there is a member of the public
4 who has not signed up to speak, who wishes to,
5 please email or call her during the video.

6 So, Laurel, when you're ready.

7 REPRESENTATIVE RASKIN: Greetings to
8 all of the members of the National Capital
9 Memorial Advisory Commission.

10 I am delighted to appear before you
11 again. I will not launch into a complete
12 disquisition on the necessity of our erecting a
13 statue in honor of Tom Paine, because you all
14 have already engaged in the wise act of
15 recommending that and unanimously affirming it.

16 And so, I don't need to go through all of that
17 again.

18 I will just say that in this 250th year
19 of our country, going back to the Declaration of
20 Independence, that Tom Paine needs to be revered
21 and honored along with Thomas Jefferson and Ben
22 Franklin and the other founders.

1 Tom Paine, of course, published his
2 remarkable Common Sense, the most famous and
3 important pamphlet in American history, in
4 January of 1776.

5 It ignited the American Revolution. It
6 swept the country and sold more books than any
7 other book in the country other than the Bible.

8 And when George Washington was with the
9 troops at Valley Forge, he had them reading to
10 each other the entirety of Common Sense by
11 campfire light every night in order to give them
12 hope and courage.

13 1776 was a tough year, of course, when
14 our forebears fought for our freedom, fought for
15 democracy, and fought for the proposition that
16 all men are created equal. And we would say
17 today, all men and women created equal.

18 And in December of that year, Tom Paine
19 wrote yet another great pamphlet called The
20 American Crisis.

21 And in that, that's where he famously
22 said that these are the times that try men and

1 women souls. The summer soldier and the
2 sunshine patriot will shrink at this moment from
3 the service of their cause in their country, but
4 everyone that stands with us now will win the
5 love and the favor and the affection of every
6 man and every woman for all time. Tyranny, like
7 hell, is not easily conquered, but we have this
8 saving consolation. The more difficult the
9 struggle, the more glorious in the end will be
10 our victory.

11 So, we're going to make that victory
12 ours. In 2022, Congress unanimously passed --
13 overwhelmingly passed, in both houses,
14 bipartisan legislation to authorize the
15 establishment of the first memorial dedicated to
16 Tom Paine in the nation's capital in a place of
17 prominence.

18 In 2024, this commission, in
19 recognition of Tom Paine's enduring and
20 significant contributions to America,
21 recommended that the memorial be placed in Area
22 1 of the National Mall.

1 And you guys know the law and rules of
2 that far better than I do. That recommendation
3 has yet to be formally endorsed by Congress,
4 which is why I am now working across the aisle
5 with my friend Representative Victoria Spartz,
6 from Indiana's Fifth, to introduce the bill
7 that's before you today.

8 The Common Sense 250 Act simply
9 codifies this body's previous recommendation and
10 directs the Department of Interior to move
11 forward with an Area 1 site selection for the
12 Tom Paine statue.

13 I want to thank Representative Spartz
14 and other members on both sides of the aisle for
15 their partnership in this bipartisan effort, as
16 well as the dedicated advocates from the Tom
17 Paine Historical Association and everybody else
18 who's fought hard to secure the legacy of this
19 unsung American hero, the often overlooked
20 founding father, Thomas Paine.

21 Thank you for your time, thank you for
22 your hard work and consideration of this

1 legislation, and I hope that we can again secure
2 your support to keep this moving forward so we
3 can all celebrate together when the statue of
4 Tom Paine goes up. Thanks, everybody.

5 CHAIR STIDHAM: Great. So, also with
6 us today is Margaret Downey, with the Thomas
7 Paine Memorial Association, that will be
8 providing testimony.

9 If you could go ahead and promote Ms.
10 Downey?

11 (Pause.)

12 CHAIR STIDHAM: Good morning, Ms.
13 Downey. If you can turn your camera on and you
14 can get started whenever you're ready.

15 (Pause.)

16 CHAIR STIDHAM: You're on mute.

17 MS. DOWNEY: Oh.

18 CHAIR STIDHAM: There you go.

19 MS. DOWNEY: All right. Thank you.

20 Good morning, everyone. I am honored
21 to appear before you today as president of the
22 Thomas Paine Memorial Association.

1 Now, the first time I addressed this
2 commission was on September 4th, 2024. And at
3 that meeting, commissioners who were serving at
4 the time approved our proposal to create a
5 memorial honoring the life and legacy of Thomas
6 Paine in an Area 1 location and we remain deeply
7 grateful for that approval.

8 Since then, our board and advisors have
9 worked to enlist support from those who
10 appreciate Thomas Paine's extraordinary
11 contributions to our nation.

12 We are very pleased that
13 representatives Jamie Raskin and Victoria Spartz
14 have chosen to lead a bipartisan effort to
15 codify the commissioner's recommendation and
16 further authorize an Area 1 site for a Thomas
17 Paine Memorial.

18 The recently introduced bipartisan
19 House Bill 9600 is entitled, the Common Sense
20 250 Act of 2026.

21 House Bill 9600 takes its name from
22 Thomas Paine's landmark booklet Common Sense,

1 which was published in January of 1776.

2 As the nation commemorates the 250th
3 anniversary of both Common Sense and American
4 independence, we believe there could be no
5 better time to honor the man whose words helped
6 ignite the movement for liberty.

7 House Bill 9600 would further approve
8 the location of a Thomas Paine commemorative
9 work in Area 1.

10 The Thomas Paine Memorial Association
11 wants to continue working with the National
12 Capital Memorial Advisory Commission to create a
13 welcoming public space at a location befitting
14 Thomas Paine's historical importance.

15 We imagine a place where tourists, as
16 well as residents, can gather to learn about and
17 celebrate Paine's life as well as his literary
18 work.

19 We see our efforts as a partnership
20 with NCMAC and look forward to our ongoing
21 collaboration, and we welcome your guidance as
22 the process advances.

1 The Thomas Paine Memorial Association
2 intends to create a memorial that will serve as
3 a lasting educational destination for
4 generations to come in providing reflection,
5 education, and civic engagement.

6 We also intend to follow the L'Enfant
7 plan for Washington, DC, which establishes a
8 strong connection among memorials and statues
9 dedicated to patriots of the Revolutionary War.

10 Since we last met with NCMAC, the
11 importance of Thomas Paine's contributions
12 continues to be recognized by leading
13 historians, authors, researchers, and
14 journalists.

15 In his recent documentary, The American
16 Revolution, Ken Burns described Thomas Paine as
17 one of the most vital political writers of the
18 18th Century.

19 And Mr. Burns opened the six-part
20 series with Paine's prolific words. From a
21 small spark kindled in America, a flame has
22 arisen not to be extinguished.

1 And Mr. Burns also observed that Thomas
2 Paine's vivid prose electrified the
3 Revolutionary Movement helping to create the
4 momentum that led to the Declaration of
5 Independence.

6 Historians likewise agree that during
7 the darkest days of the Revolutionary War,
8 Thomas Paine's writings inspired the patriot
9 cause and strengthened the resolve needed for
10 the American experience in self-governance to
11 survive.

12 Now, Paine's Common Sense pamphlet
13 fundamentally changed the colonial conversation
14 and helped transform British subjects into
15 American citizens.

16 And as you previously recognized in our
17 immense gratitude, it goes to that Thomas Paine
18 well fits the criteria for an Area 1 designation
19 as a founder of preeminent historical and
20 lasting significance to the United States of
21 America.

22 I want to thank you for your continued

1 guidance, your careful stewardship of our
2 nation's memorial process, and the opportunity
3 to testify before you today.

4 We respectfully ask for your continued
5 support as we move forward making this long
6 overdue national memorial a reality. Thank you.

7 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you, Ms. Downey,
8 for being here today and providing your
9 testimony.

10 Do any of the commissioners have
11 questions for Ms. Downey?

12 (Pause.)

13 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. We do have one
14 more speaker, I believe, who contacted Laurel
15 when we got started.

16 Lisa Burton, who is the president of
17 the Thomas Paine Historical Association, if we
18 could get her, if she's here and could get
19 promoted, that would be great.

20 Here we go. Good morning, Ms. Burton.

21 MS. BURTON: Good morning, and thank
22 you for allowing me to testify this morning.

1 I am the president of the Thomas Paine
2 Historical Association. We are located at New
3 Rochelle, New York. We are over a hundred years
4 in our support of the legacy of Thomas Paine.

5 We will be submitting a written
6 testimony, but I wanted to take the time this
7 morning to give our full-throated support of
8 this monument and all of the work that has been
9 done up to this date to make it possible.

10 As we all know, Thomas Paine was
11 central to the revolutionary cause with his
12 seminal work of Common Sense.

13 It is a mystery why it has taken this
14 long for him to be recognized in our nation's
15 capital.

16 And to that end, we support
17 Congressman Raskin. We certainly support the
18 work that Margaret has been doing to get this
19 project off the ground and we support it moving
20 quickly through this process.

21 And, like I said, we will be presenting
22 written testimony and we will be providing

1 written testimony from members of our community
2 in New York as well as around the country and
3 the world.

4 So, thank you for this opportunity and
5 thank you for the great work that you're doing.

6 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you, Ms. Burton,
7 for your time today.

8 And to anyone else who is listening and
9 doesn't wish to testify, there is a 30-day
10 public comment period from today where you can
11 submit comments on this and the other bill that
12 we're reviewing. So, just a reminder there that
13 there is a 30-day opportunity to submit
14 comments.

15 Are there any questions for Ms. Burton
16 from any of the commissioners?

17 (Pause.)

18 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Thank you both
19 for your time today. I appreciate it. If we
20 could take Ms. Downey and Ms. Burton down, we
21 can move on to discussion. So, thank you for
22 your time today.

1 MS. BURTON: Thank you.

2 (Pause.)

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. So, as I stated
4 earlier, the bill before us is H.R. 9600 that
5 allows the Thomas Paine Memorial to locate
6 within Area 1 as defined by the Commemorative
7 Works Act.

8 Also, as a reminder, on December 29th,
9 2022, Public Law 117-328 authorized the Thomas
10 Paine Memorial Association to establish a
11 commemorative work on federal land in the
12 District of Columbia and to honor the United
13 States Patriot.

14 At its September 4th meeting, we, the
15 National Memorial Advisory Commission, reviewed
16 the Thomas Paine Memorial Association site
17 selection study and its justification for
18 locating the memorial within Area 1.

19 And during our review of the site
20 selection process, that evaluated 22 potential
21 locations and narrowed them to three sites for
22 further consideration.

1 The Commission also reviewed the
2 Association's justification that Thomas Paine
3 meets the statutory standard for placement in
4 Area 1 as an individual of preeminent and
5 lasting historical significance.

6 The Commission recommended the Thomas
7 Paine Memorial be eligible for placement within
8 Area 1 and directed its recommendation to be
9 forwarded to the Secretary of Interior.

10 As a bit of a reminder of our
11 discussion in 2024, we found that sites M, which
12 is at Pennsylvania Avenue and 12th Street
13 Northwest, and O at Constitution Avenue and 3rd
14 Street Northwest, were particularly appropriate
15 because they reinforce the intent of the
16 L'Enfant plan and complement the existing
17 concentration of Revolutionary War and patriot
18 memorials along Pennsylvania Avenue.

19 There was also recommendations that
20 further study of site M consider its proximity
21 to the Benjamin Franklin statue and that further
22 study of site O evaluate the utility

1 constraints.

2 Site E, Pennsylvania Avenue and 4th
3 Street Southeast, was also recognized as a
4 worthy additional consideration because of its
5 relationship to the Library of Congress.

6 So, the legislation before us today
7 aligns with the 2024 commission recommendation
8 that we made and is running parallel with the
9 administrative process for the Secretary of the
10 Interior to send the recommendation to Congress.

11 So, following our meeting, that
12 recommendation was sent up to the Secretary of
13 Interior and has been moving through the
14 Interior.

15 So, at this point, I would welcome
16 commissioners' comments on our observations
17 today and the testimony that we've heard.

18 Who would like to start? Mr. Fountain?

19 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: I have a
20 question first, Madam Chair.

21 We made our recommendation two years
22 ago, and that recommendation would have gone to

1 the secretary.

2 And the Secretary has had it for two
3 years and has not acted on it. And it would,
4 you know, it would be useful for us to know why
5 it hasn't been acted on in two years.

6 CHAIR STIDHAM: So, our recommendation
7 --

8 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: It's ultimately
9 the Secretary's duty to make the recommendation
10 to Congress. We're being asked now to bypass
11 that.

12 CHAIR STIDHAM: Yes, that is correct.
13 The recommendation was made to the
14 Secretary right before a change of
15 administration.

16 So, then the recommendation to the
17 Secretary was pulled back awaiting the new
18 administration.

19 It was resubmitted to the new
20 administration and has been moving through the
21 process since then.

22 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: Thank you.

1 Since I have the floor, I'll go ahead
2 and speak.

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: Go ahead.

4 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: We're in an
5 unusual position here on the merits. We are on
6 record as having supported location of the Paine
7 memorial in Area 1, as you described, with
8 reference to those three specific sites, and
9 certainly nothing has changed my mind in the
10 last two years to secondguess that endorsement.

11 And so, my concern is really a matter of
12 process.

13 I'm concerned that every time Congress
14 creates an exception to the processes and
15 criteria set forth in the Commemorative Works
16 Act, it makes it easier to continue to do so and
17 the Commemorative Works Act will start to lose
18 its meaning.

19 I find it ironic, and I say this with
20 amusement, that Congressman Raskin, who was a
21 constitutional law professor, is the one
22 introducing the bill to short-circuit the

1 processes set forth in the standing legislation.

2 And, again, under the statute, it's not
3 our -- it's not this commission's responsibility
4 to make the recommendation to Congress. It's
5 the Secretary's.

6 And so, I have qualms at a statute that
7 short-circuits that process and bypasses the
8 Secretary's role.

9 So, I mean, you know, I feel, I think,
10 we are in an unusual situation where we agree
11 with the objective, but I have qualms with the
12 process and recognize the significance of having
13 this done in the 250th anniversary year.

14 At the end of the day, I have no
15 objection to supporting the legislation, but I
16 do have those reservations about it. Thank you.

17 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you. I tend to
18 agree with you. It does not align with the CWA
19 process and I, too, have those same concerns
20 that every time that the process is bypassed,
21 that it becomes less important and less able to
22 enforce as it is the law and it is the

1 requirement. So, I tend to agree with you.

2 Anyone else have -- oh, Ms. Tunstall
3 Williams.

4 COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Just
5 following that thread, has there been any
6 analysis -- I assume it would be DOI's legal --
7 about whether this, as Commissioner Fountain
8 raised, the short-circuiting of the process is
9 that within, you know, is there any sort of
10 legal challenge with doing it that way?

11 Has there been any analysis of that?
12 Like, are we vulnerable if the Commission
13 chooses to do -- to approve the recommendation?

14 CHAIR STIDHAM: We have not talked to
15 the solicitors about this particular piece of
16 legislation and its short-circuiting of the
17 process, but I would say that Congress can make
18 decisions. They made the CWA, and they can make
19 other decisions along the same lines.

20 I think that our role is to look at the
21 consistency with the CWA. And, as Mr. Fountain
22 pointed out, the process is inconsistent.

1 It's not -- the objective is the same.

2 We are supportive of the Area 1 designation,
3 but the version of the process has come up often
4 in talking about many bills that have become
5 before this body.

6 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: As the lawyer
7 in the group and disclaiming any role as counsel
8 to the Commission, I would say, Commissioner
9 Williams, that certainly there's no challenge in
10 anything that we do, because we don't take
11 action. We only give advice.

12 And then Congress is certainly free to,
13 you know, legislatively carve out an exception
14 to its standing legislation, and that would not
15 be subject to legal challenge either.

16 COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS:
17 Excellent. Thank you for the clarification.

18 CHAIR STIDHAM: I can offer that the
19 package continues to make its way through the
20 Department of the Interior to the Secretary, to
21 just give you a sense of status.

22 Mr. Maloney?

1 COMMISSIONER MALONEY: Thanks. I guess
2 I agree with what's been said. It is a sort of
3 awkward situation where there's no -- no perfect
4 answer what to do.

5 I'm wondering whether or not it would
6 make any sense at all simply to send
7 correspondence to the Committee that essentially
8 states what we have said here that we think it's
9 a worthy proposal, but we're concerned about the
10 lack of following proper process and just let
11 that speak for itself.

12 CHAIR STIDHAM: That is definitely a
13 course of action we could take and that would be
14 consistent with both the CWA and our previous
15 recommendations and the process that's already
16 underway within the Department.

17 Mr. Imamura?

18 COMMISSIONER IMAMURA: Thank you, Madam
19 Chair.

20 I'm in agreement with Commissioner
21 Maloney and I think that's the appropriate
22 course of action.

1 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. I see a lot of
2 nodding heads. Should we take a vote and just
3 make sure that that's what everyone's direction
4 is?

5 So, the vote is to prepare
6 correspondence back to the legislators related
7 to this piece of legislation supporting the Area
8 1 designation, but calling out that it is making
9 its way through the Secretary of Interior's
10 process, which is called for through the CWA,
11 and that we do not support the bypass of the CWA
12 process.

13 And we will word it far better than
14 what I just scrambled together there. Are we in
15 agreement? If I could see a show of hands?

16 (Pause.)

17 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Great. So,
18 everyone agrees. So, we will craft a letter for
19 your review that is much more articulate than
20 what I just said moving that piece along. So,
21 thank you.

22 Okay. Our second agenda item is H. R.

1 9582, which authorizes the location of the
2 National Service Animals Monument on the
3 National Mall and for other purposes.

4 On July 2nd, 2026, Representative
5 Jennifer Kiggans introduced H. R. 9582, which
6 was referred to the Committee on Natural
7 Resources.

8 We received a statement, for the
9 record, from Congressman John Higgins, the bill
10 sponsor, and it should have been received in
11 your packages.

12 So, I was not going to read it here
13 today unless anybody wanted, because we have a
14 number of speakers that are also signed up to
15 speak.

16 So, I can go back to that if we need
17 to, but with us today are a number of speakers
18 testifying on H. R. 9582, formally named the
19 National Service Animals Monument Location Act.

20 I suggest that we hold questions until
21 everyone has a chance to deliver their
22 testimony. First to speak is Susan Bahary, if

1 she is with us and could be promoted.

2 And apologies in advance to anyone's
3 name who I butcher, which is clearly promised
4 that I will do so.

5 Okay. Ms. Bahary, if you could turn on
6 your camera, that would be great.

7 MS. BAHARY: I may need some help. You
8 know, I'm trying to see how to do that. It's
9 not showing up here for some reason. Let me get
10 my tech person to help.

11 CHAIR STIDHAM: Sure.

12 MS. BAHARY: Okay. Here, join as a
13 panelist. Let's -- and now the video. Here, we
14 got it.

15 CHAIR STIDHAM: Good to see you.

16 MS. BAHARY: Hello. Hi. Just one
17 moment, please. Yes.

18 Madam Chair and members of the
19 Commission, thank you for the opportunity to
20 appear before you today.

21 The National Mall tells America's
22 defining story. It is where our nation chooses

1 the people, events, ideals, and sacrifices that
2 deserve to be remembered for generations.

3 For more than 250 years, Americans have
4 never stood alone. From the founding of our
5 nation to the present day, service animals have
6 carried soldiers into battle, delivered life-
7 saving messages, detected danger before it
8 struck, guided those without sight, searched for
9 the missing, comforted the wounded, and
10 protected our communities.

11 Yet despite helping shape so many
12 defining chapters of our nation's history, their
13 story has never been permanently recognized on
14 our nation's most important commemorative
15 landscape, and that's why we are here today.

16 For more than 30 years, I have had the
17 privilege of listening to the stories of
18 veterans, handlers, first responders, guide dog
19 users, assistance animal recipients, medical
20 professionals, researchers, historians, and
21 families whose lives have been forever changed
22 by these extraordinary partnerships.

1 What began for me as a single-sculpture
2 commission involving the Marine War Dogs of
3 World War II, became a journey through the
4 course of American history.

5 One story changed my understanding in a
6 lasting way. During the 50th anniversary
7 commemoration of the liberation of Guam, a
8 Chamorro woman approached Dr. William Putney,
9 who had commanded the Marine War Dog platoons
10 during World War II.

11 She had never met him. She simply
12 wanted to thank him because she knew the Marines
13 and their war dogs had helped save her family.

14 Until then, much of my attention had
15 been on those who served. Her gratitude helped
16 me understand something larger.

17 These partnerships also changed the
18 lives of the people they protected and the
19 communities they helped liberate.

20 I stopped seeing this as one part of
21 military history and I began to understand it as
22 part of America's history.

1 Ultimately, this is a story about
2 America. It is a story of courage shared,
3 burdens carried together, lives saved,
4 independence restored, hope renewed, and the
5 extraordinary human-animal bond forged through
6 service that has strengthened our nation from
7 its founding to the present day.

8 Across generations of American history,
9 a few names have come to symbolize countless
10 others.

11 From the horses that carried George
12 Washington and the Continental Army through the
13 struggle for independence, these partnerships
14 were present at the birth of our nation.

15 During the first world war, more than
16 one million American horses and mules served
17 overseas.

18 They transported ammunition and
19 supplies, moved artillery, and carried the
20 wounded across terrain where machines often
21 could not go. Their service was indispensable
22 to the American war effort.

1 Cher Ami, the carrier pigeon whose
2 final flight helped save the lost battalion,
3 reminds us that animals served in extraordinary
4 ways beyond transport as well.

5 In 1928, Buddy, America's first seeing-
6 eye dog, helped open the door to greater
7 independence, mobility, and opportunity for
8 generations of Americans who were blind.

9 During World War II, Smoky served
10 alongside American troops and later brought
11 comfort to wounded service members during their
12 recovery, an early and celebrated example of the
13 healing role animals could play beyond the
14 battlefield.

15 During the Korean War, the horse
16 Sergeant Reckless repeatedly carried ammunition
17 to the front lines and evacuated wounded
18 Marines, making many dangerous trips on her own
19 without a handler under heavy enemy fire,
20 becoming a lasting symbol of courage and
21 selfless service.

22 During the Vietnam War, military

1 working dogs are widely credited with saving
2 thousands of American lives through scouting,
3 sentry, patrol, and detection work.

4 Over the past century, these
5 partnerships have expanded dramatically. From
6 guide and assistance animals providing
7 independence to people with disabilities, to
8 search and rescue dogs responding to national
9 disasters, law enforcement canines -- where are
10 we?

11 Okay. Over the past century, these
12 partnerships have expanded dramatically from
13 guide and assistance animals providing
14 independence to people with disabilities, to
15 search and rescue dogs responding to national
16 disasters, law enforcement canines protecting
17 our communities, and animals now detecting
18 disease and supporting veterans with invisible
19 wounds.

20 Each represents countless others whose
21 names history may never record, but whose
22 service helped shape the nation we know today.

1 This monument will honor these animals
2 and the Americans who serve beside them as
3 handlers and partners, including those who gave
4 their lives in that shared service.

5 Today, that same spirit of partnership
6 continues through military working dogs, law
7 enforcement canines, mounted police horses,
8 guide and assistance animals, search and rescue
9 teams, therapy animals, medical detection dogs,
10 and many others whose service continues to
11 protect, heal, and enrich American lives every
12 day.

13 The remarkable aspect of this history
14 lies in both its breadth and its continuity.
15 From the founding of the nation through every
16 generation since and into the future, Americans
17 have benefited and will continue to benefit from
18 these partnerships.

19 The values they embody, service,
20 courage, sacrifice, loyalty, resilience,
21 compassion, freedom, and independence are among
22 the very values commemorated throughout the

1 National Mall.

2 The monument's significance stands on
3 its own. Within the National Mall Reserve,
4 visitors could understand this enduring national
5 partnership in its full historical context.

6 Its story reaches across war and
7 sacrifice, freedom, public service, resilience,
8 and independence subject central to the nation's
9 principal commemorative landscape, yet the
10 partnership itself has never been brought
11 together and permanently recognized in a
12 national monument.

13 The written testimony before you
14 reinforces the breadth and national significance
15 of this history.

16 It brings together leaders of national
17 museums and memorials, historians, researchers,
18 veterans, military and law enforcement handlers,
19 guide and assistance dog organizations, search
20 and rescue professionals, disability advocates,
21 and families whose lives have been changed by
22 these partnerships.

1 They bring first-hand knowledge of
2 service across war, public safety, disability,
3 assistance, disaster response, medicine,
4 recovery, and remembrance, as well as the
5 responsibility involved in commemorating
6 nationally significant history in Washington.

7 Collectively, their testimony documents
8 this service from our country's founding to the
9 present day. Together, they show how deeply
10 this history is embedded in the American
11 experience.

12 The Reserve was established to protect
13 what Congress described as a substantially
14 completed work of civic art.

15 Its commemorative record contains no
16 national monument dedicated to service shared by
17 Americans and animals since our country's
18 founding.

19 An exception would address that
20 omission while respecting the purpose and
21 integrity of the Reserve.

22 We understand why exceptions to the

1 Reserve must remain rare. We believe this is
2 one of those rare cases because this history has
3 extraordinary breadth, continuity, and national
4 reach with a clear historical and commemorative
5 nexus to many of the people and events already
6 commemorated there.

7 The Commission is being asked to advise
8 Congress whether this history has the
9 exceptional national significance that warrants
10 an exception to the Commemorative Works Act and
11 placement of the monument within the National
12 Mall Reserve.

13 If Congress subsequently authorizes
14 that placement, we understand that the specific
15 site will be determined through the established
16 federal review process.

17 We look forward to working with the
18 appropriate agencies to identify the best
19 location for the monument within the Reserve.

20 We respectfully believe that this
21 history meets the exceptional standard before
22 you.

1 If the Commission agrees, we believe a
2 location near the U.S. Park Police Horse Stables
3 and Educational Center offers a rare opportunity
4 to connect that history with a continuing
5 tradition of public service that visitors can
6 still experience today.

7 In that setting, visitors can observe
8 members of the U.S. Park Police Mounted Unit
9 carrying out their daily responsibilities and,
10 at times, members of the Park Police Canine Unit
11 as well.

12 The monument and Park Police operations
13 would have distinct purposes and any
14 relationship would be developed only in
15 partnership with the appropriate agencies, but
16 the proximity offers something unusual, a living
17 connection between the history represented by
18 the monument and a tradition of service that
19 continues today.

20 As a sculptor, I know that a successful
21 work should respond thoughtfully to its
22 surroundings.

1 Wherever its final home is established
2 through the federal process, my hope is that
3 this monument will feel meaningful, welcoming,
4 and lasting without overwhelming the landscape.

5 The monument's public purpose would
6 extend beyond remembrance. Service animals
7 naturally engage children, opening a doorway to
8 learning about American history, service,
9 sacrifice, compassion, citizenship, and
10 responsibilities we share.

11 Family, school groups, veterans, first
12 responders, people with disabilities, and
13 visitors of all ages could encounter these
14 lessons together in a welcoming setting near the
15 stables.

16 Through on-site interpretation, a QR
17 code, and the monument's website, visitors could
18 explore the people, animals, events, and forms
19 of service represented there and continue that
20 learning long after their visit.

21 I often imagine a family visiting the
22 National Mall many years from now. A child may

1 look up and say, I never knew service animals
2 and their handlers were such an important part
3 of our history. And perhaps the parent would
4 answer, neither did I.

5 That moment would mean the monument had
6 fulfilled its purpose. It would have transformed
7 recognition into understanding, revealing how
8 this partnership has served the nation across
9 its entire history and inspiring future
10 generations to carry forward its values.

11 A place within the National Mall
12 Reserve would provide the context and permanence
13 that purpose requires.

14 Madam Chair and members of the
15 Commission, the National Mall tells America's
16 defining story.

17 The National Service Animals Monument
18 reveals an enduring national partnership that
19 has helped shape our country from its founding
20 and continues to serve Americans today.

21 For more than 250 years, Americans have
22 never stood alone. Together, people and service

1 animals have defended our freedom, protected our
2 communities, guided those without sight, found
3 the lost, comforted the suffering, advanced
4 medicine, restored independence, and saved
5 countless lives.

6 History remembers America's heroes.
7 Today, we respectfully ask that it also remember
8 the service animals who served beside so many of
9 America's heroes and helped make their
10 achievements possible.

11 It is time this partnership, spanning
12 the life of our nation, receive permanent
13 recognition nationally within the National Mall
14 Reserve. Thank you for your consideration.

15 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you very much for
16 your testimony and your time this morning.

17 Our next speaker is Ron Aiello, and you
18 are with us?

19 MS. BAHARY: I don't think so.

20 CHAIR STIDHAM: No, I'm not seeing him
21 either.

22 MS. BAHARY: Yeah, I don't think Ron,

1 and I'm not sure about Michael Hingson we could
2 try.

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Michael Hingson?

4 Okay. I'm not seeing him either.

5 How about David Lim?

6 (Pause.)

7 CHAIR STIDHAM: Good morning, Mr. Lim.

8 If you could turn on your camera and you can
9 proceed as soon as you're ready.

10 (Pause.)

11 CHAIR STIDHAM: Mr. Lim, if you could
12 hear me, you are on mute. And if you could turn
13 on your camera, you can get started as soon as
14 you're ready.

15 (Pause.)

16 CHAIR STIDHAM: Mr. Lim, can you hear
17 me?

18 (Pause.)

19 CHAIR STIDHAM: So, maybe we jump to
20 the next speaker and we'll come back to Mr. Lim.

21 Maybe he's having some technical difficulties.

22 Okay. Let's see. How about Marshall

1 Mirarchi in the list of participants.

2 (Pause.)

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: Mr. Mirarchi, if you
4 can hear me, turn on your camera and unmute and
5 you can get started as soon as you're ready.

6 (Pause.)

7 CHAIR STIDHAM: Great. We can see you.

8 MR. MIRARCHI: Good morning.

9 CHAIR STIDHAM: Good morning.

10 MR. MIRARCHI: My name is Marshall
11 Mirarchi and I served with the United States
12 Secret Service as a handler of the special
13 operations canine Hurricane.

14 When an intruder breached the White
15 House grounds in 2014, canine Hurricane engaged
16 him and stopped his advance.

17 Canine Hurricane was injured, but his
18 actions protected officers and helped secure one
19 of the most important sites in our country.

20 That moment demonstrates why these
21 animals belong in the historical record. Their
22 work is an essential part of operational

1 security.

2 They are trained to act when human
3 lives and national security are at risk and they
4 accept the dangers that cannot possibly be
5 understood in human terms.

6 The Reserve should tell visitors that
7 the service animals have protected not only
8 individual people, but the institutions of the
9 United States.

10 I respectfully ask the Commission to
11 give that history the national standing it has
12 earned. Thank you.

13 CHAIR STIDHAM: Great. Thank you for
14 your testimony.

15 Our next speaker is Retired Sergeant
16 Rick Wagner.

17 (Pause.)

18 CHAIR STIDHAM: I'm not seeing him on
19 the list of participants.

20 (Pause.)

21 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Let's go to the
22 next participant. I believe we have testimony

1 by John Burnham, who is not available to be here
2 today, but his testimony is going to be read by
3 Marla Schneiderman.

4 Is Ms. Schneiderman here? I'm not
5 seeing her listed either, unless I've missed
6 her.

7 (Pause.)

8 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. I'm not seeing
9 her listed. How about Deborah Coach?

10 (Pause.)

11 CHAIR STIDHAM: I'm not seeing her
12 either.

13 Valerie Cramer, which I actually
14 believe is going to be read by Ms. Susan Bahary,
15 if we could bring her back up.

16 (Pause.)

17 CHAIR STIDHAM: You're muted. There
18 you go.

19 MS. BAHARY: Hi. Yes, we do have Marla
20 Schneiderman here, who is speaking for John
21 Burnham.

22 And I can speak for Valerie Cramer

1 right now if you would like.

2 CHAIR STIDHAM: Sure. We're not seeing
3 -- I'm not seeing Marla in the list of
4 participants.

5 MS. BAHARY: She was, though. Laurel
6 had that.

7 CHAIR STIDHAM: Laurel, Dan, do either
8 of you see her?

9 MR. FOX: No.

10 MS. BAHARY: I'm happy to -- if there's
11 a glitch in -- I'm happy to read it if you'd
12 like.

13 CHAIR STIDHAM: Sure. She is not in
14 the list of participants. So, if you're --

15 MS. BAHARY: Sure.

16 CHAIR STIDHAM: So, whom are you reading
17 for at the moment?

18 MS. BAHARY: I can read for Marla, and
19 this is the statement of John C. Burnham.

20 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Go ahead then.

21 MS. BAHARY: Right. I will read a brief
22 statement by Retired US Army Master Sergeant

1 John C. Burnham, a highly decorated Vietnam War
2 veteran and German Shepherd scout dog handler.

3 John writes: During many dangerous
4 combat missions, Clipper, my German Shepherd
5 scout dog, was the tip of the spear leading
6 combat patrols into the treacherous jungles of
7 enemy territory.

8 Clipper detected hidden ambushes,
9 underground tunnels, tripwired booby traps, and
10 hidden enemy base camps.

11 Clipper's valiant efforts saved my life
12 and countless other American infantrymen. Scout
13 dogs were so effective that the enemy hunted
14 them for rewards.

15 When Scout dogs were killed in action,
16 we buried them with honor in our war dog
17 cemetery.

18 I had to leave Clipper behind because
19 he was classified as expendable equipment.
20 Clipper died in Vietnam, but remains alive
21 inside me, my books and my documentaries.

22 Military working dogs are a part of a

1 broader breed of service animals that National
2 Service Animals Monument Project represents.

3 I believe that the contributions of
4 these extraordinary service animals meet the
5 merits and criteria for placement within the
6 National Mall Reserve.

7 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you.

8 Were you also going to be reading
9 Valerie Cramer's statements?

10 MS. BAHARY: Yes. I can read those who
11 aren't here who I know were planning on being
12 here.

13 Valerie Cramer. Good morning, Chair --
14 and this is, by the way, Valerie Cramer,
15 Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Guide
16 Dog Foundation and America's VetDogs.

17 Good morning, Chair and members of the
18 Commission. My name is Valerie Cramer, and I am
19 the Director of Strategic Partnerships for the
20 Guide Dog Foundation and America's VetDogs.

21 I had the distinct privilege of
22 training and placing Sully H.W. Bush with

1 President George H.W. Bush.

2 To many Americans, Sully came to
3 represent what a service dog can mean to one
4 person.

5 To me, he represents the thousands of
6 guide and service dogs whose quiet partnership
7 changes and saves lives every day.

8 Our guide dogs help people who are
9 blind, or have low vision, live and travel more
10 safely, confidently, and independently.

11 Our service dogs help veterans, active
12 duty service members, and first responders
13 living with physical and emotional disabilities,
14 including PTSD, and regain their independence,
15 restore their confidence, and reconnect with
16 their families and communities.

17 For more than 250 years, service
18 animals have helped Americans live with greater
19 freedom, dignity, opportunity, and purpose, yet
20 they have never been recognized with a permanent
21 national tribute.

22 The National Service Animals Monument

1 will honor Sully and the generations of service
2 animals whose partnerships have strengthened our
3 nation and enriched countless lives.

4 I respectfully ask the Commission to
5 recommend the National Service Animals Monument
6 for placement within the National Mall Reserve.

7 Thank you for your consideration.

8 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you. I believe
9 our next speaker is with us, Andrea Hering.

10 (Pause.)

11 MS. HERING: Hello.

12 CHAIR STIDHAM: Good morning.

13 MS. HERING: Good morning.

14 CHAIR STIDHAM: You can get started as
15 soon as you're ready.

16 MS. HERING: Sure.

17 Good morning. I am Andrea Hering, co-
18 founder and CEO of Crisis Response Canines. At
19 Crisis Response Canines, we witness every day
20 the incredible power of the human-animal bond.

21 Our specially trained canine teams
22 support first responders, military members,

1 veterans, youth, survivors, families, and
2 communities following traumatic events, as well
3 as those facing grief, substance use, mental
4 health challenges, and the impact of suicide.

5 Our canines have unique ability to meet
6 people exactly where they are. Their calm,
7 nonjudgmental presence can ease distress, break
8 down barriers, and create connection when words
9 simply cannot.

10 Sometimes that connection is the
11 opening someone needs to talk, accept help, or
12 even take the next steps forward.

13 This work is about the partnership
14 between canine and handler built through
15 training, trust, and a shared commitment to
16 serve others.

17 Together, they step into moments of
18 crisis, tragedy, and profound loss to offer
19 comfort, connection, and hope.

20 The National Service Animals Monument
21 would honor these extraordinary partnerships and
22 help recognize the profound role service animals

1 have played, and continue to play, in the lives
2 of people and communities across our nation.

3 I respectfully ask the Commission to
4 recognize the exceptional national significance
5 of this story and support the placement of the
6 National Service Animals Monument within the
7 National Mall Reserve. Thank you.

8 CHAIR STIDHAM: Great. Thank you for
9 your testimony.

10 I think Ellen Gehrke is next and I
11 believe she is with us.

12 (Pause.)

13 CHAIR STIDHAM: Good morning. Apologies
14 for botching your last name.

15 DR. GEHRKE: Oh, that's okay. It's
16 always that way. It's Gehrke, but that's all
17 right.

18 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Thank you.
19 Thank you for that.

20 DR. GEHRKE: No problem.

21 CHAIR STIDHAM: You can go ahead and
22 start whenever you're ready.

1 DR. GEHRKE: Okay. Yeah. Thank you for
2 the opportunity to speak to this commission
3 today.

4 My name is Dr. Ellen K. Gehrke. I'm a
5 professor, an author, and the owner of a horse
6 ranch where my horses provide therapeutic work
7 to at-risk populations.

8 Since 2005, I have researched the
9 human-animal bond documenting the physiological
10 and psychological impact horses have on human
11 healing.

12 For over 10 years, I have worked with
13 combat veterans living with PTSD and I've
14 witnessed horses intervene in moments of
15 suicidal crisis reaching veterans when nothing
16 else could.

17 This relationship with the horse
18 creates an opportunity for healing that
19 conversations alone may not reach.

20 Across the country, horses are helping
21 veterans, first responders, and others rebuild
22 their lives. This reflects an important

1 American commitment to recovery and human well-
2 being.

3 Recognition within the National Mall
4 Reserve would allow visitors to understand the
5 valuable role these animals play in the lives of
6 people and families.

7 I respectfully ask this subcommittee to
8 find this history worthy of that national
9 recognition. Thank you for this opportunity.

10 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you.

11 Our next speaker is Aaron Neely.

12 (Pause.)

13 MR. NEELY: Am I up?

14 CHAIR STIDHAM: Yep, you're here.

15 MR. NEELY: Oh, my god.

16 CHAIR STIDHAM: Go ahead.

17 MR. NEELY: Okay. Thank you so much.

18 Hey, my name is Aaron Neely. I served
19 as a Religious Program Specialist, Fleet Marine
20 Force Warfare qualified with 3rd Battalion, 4th
21 Marines and 1st Battalion, 7th Marines on the
22 March to Baghdad, and Operation Vigilant Resolve

1 in Fallujah and the election stabilization in
2 Fallujah, and there we did ministry during
3 combat operations.

4 And also, I've done about 10 years
5 after I've had the help of these animals,
6 volunteering to raise awareness for shelter dogs
7 becoming -- and funds to become service dogs
8 and, you know, I've seen lives transformed, but,
9 for me personally, this is a little bit of my
10 testimony for me and Murphy.

11 Being with Marines when they take their
12 last breaths has left an indelible mark on my
13 soul.

14 After being told and telling others
15 that death was not the end, experiencing a slow
16 decay of my own faith in God, country, and
17 humanity, left me little reason to live and, on
18 multiple occasions, I chose to try to take my
19 own life.

20 For many of us, we are haunted by our
21 own actions towards the enemy, as well as our
22 families upon our return home.

1 That dark cloud has been lifted for me
2 by the unconditional love of my service dog
3 Murphy.

4 What once felt like a life of defeats
5 now feels like hope-fueled triumph. Murphy has
6 traveled nearly 100 flights.

7 After being found in a ditch at two
8 days old, Murphy was rehabilitated and trained
9 to be my service dog.

10 He's traveled on 100 flights to mourn
11 the lives of Marines so I could seek medical
12 care and, most importantly, for me to parent my
13 children, Elbair and Gracie.

14 I thought I was going to live out a
15 mere existence drooling on myself from over-
16 medication and unable to care for my basic
17 needs.

18 I'm on a journey of recovery,
19 independence, and a real life, and a wonderful
20 family, and that's because of Murphy.

21 And not only am I witness to my own
22 change through Murphy and other animals, I've

1 seen countless veterans' lives be transformed at
2 Shelter to Soldier, where these shelter animals
3 are being placed with high-risk veterans.

4 And the most beautiful part about this
5 story to me is not only these veterans' lives
6 being rescued by these dogs, but also these
7 wonderful shelter dogs given an opportunity to
8 have purpose when they otherwise may have been
9 euthanized or left for dead.

10 So, I appreciate the Commission looking
11 into this. I know I'm only one person and all
12 this is way above my pay grade, but I'm just so
13 grateful to be here and share with you a little
14 bit about Murph.

15 And if you got one second, I've taken
16 up too much time and this is probably
17 inappropriate -- come here, buddy -- but Murphy
18 always seems to cheer people up. So, I just
19 wanted him to say hello.

20 Murphy does not look like a service
21 dog. Sometimes he doesn't even act like one,
22 but he's been to NFL football games. He's

1 helped parent a child into UCLA. He's helped
2 parent a new child into JV soccer.

3 They're growing up fast, but Murphy has
4 been an integral part of the family and, really,
5 his paw prints just aren't on my heart. They're
6 on the hearts of my family and friends that have
7 seen me regain my life. So, thank you.

8 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you, and he's
9 beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

10 MR. NEELY: Thank you.

11 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you for your
12 testimony today.

13 MR. NEELY: I appreciate your time.

14 CHAIR STIDHAM: And our last speaker is
15 Christian Harris, who I believe is with us.

16 (Pause.)

17 MR. HARRIS: Click on the audio.
18 Hello.

19 CHAIR STIDHAM: Hello.

20 MR. HARRIS: It's been a long time since
21 I've been on a Zoom meeting.

22 CHAIR STIDHAM: We can see and hear

1 you. So, please go ahead and start whenever
2 you're ready.

3 MR. HARRIS: Well, terrific. Thank you
4 for the opportunity to talk to you.

5 My name is Christian Harris. I'm a
6 retired Department of Navy civil servant and
7 today I'm speaking to you as a private citizen.

8 Prior to that, though, for more than 20
9 years I had the extraordinary privilege of
10 working with the Navy's Marine Mammal Program
11 training dolphins and sea lions and deploying
12 with them to perform tasks which still can't be
13 replicated by technology.

14 So, this program isn't really widely
15 known and largely unrecognized, but the fact is,
16 is that for more than 30 years there was zero
17 public acknowledgment that the program even
18 existed.

19 The truth is, though, that from the
20 dawn of the space age to now in the digital age,
21 the Navy Marine Mammal Program has been there
22 from Vietnam right up through the Global War on

1 Terror.

2 And today, as we meet, Navy dolphins
3 and sea lions, alongside their super dedicated
4 staff, are providing unmatched capabilities to
5 our nation 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

6 The scope and the breadth of animal
7 services for this country is broadly and, to
8 some extent, unrecognized.

9 It was great hearing all this testimony
10 today because it sheds a light on much of that.

11 So, including this subject, the Navy
12 Marine Mammal Program, in the Reserve would
13 bring a little-known maritime record before the
14 American public in a way that they've not been
15 privy to before.

16 So, thank you for the opportunity to
17 speak with you today, and I would respectfully
18 ask the Commission to recognize the history of
19 America's service animals and their handlers on
20 land and sea.

21 It's of exceptional national
22 significance, and I believe that it warrants

1 inclusion within the Reserve. So, thank you so
2 much.

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you. Thank you
4 for being here today.

5 That is the last of our planned
6 speakers. And just as a reminder, if you wanted
7 to provide testimony and were not able to sign
8 up in advance, you still have the ability to
9 submit testimony.

10 And you can reach out to Laurel Hammig
11 with her phone number if you have any questions
12 or need help, and that is in the chat for
13 everyone.

14 With that, we are moving on to our
15 discussion regarding this bill. So, if we could
16 take down any remaining speakers, that would be
17 great.

18 Thank you. So, as I stated earlier,
19 the bill before us is H.R. 9582, the National
20 Service Animals Monument Location Act, which
21 would approve the placement of the previously
22 authorized National Service Animals Monument

1 within the Reserve within Washington, D.C.

2 And, as we previously -- this
3 commission also previously reviewed and
4 supported the legislation that authorized the
5 National Service Animals Monument in March of
6 2022.

7 Following that authorization, work
8 began on a site selection study. The NPS staff
9 have met with the sponsor's team several times
10 and we've had two work sessions with CFA and
11 NCPC Commission staff looking at potential sites
12 for both Area 1 and Area 2.

13 The legislation that is now before us
14 would authorize placement of the monument
15 specifically within the Reserve.

16 So, to be clear, the monument has
17 already been authorized by Congress. So, it has
18 the ability to create a memorial within Area 2.

19 What the legislation does is address
20 the location of the monument by creating an
21 exception to the Commemorative Works Act
22 prohibition on new commemorative works within

1 the Reserve. So, that is what is before us.

2 You have heard the testimony and, as we
3 discussed previously, our role is to look at the
4 alignment within the commemorative works and,
5 from the outset, this bill overrides Section
6 8908C of the Commemorative Works Act, which
7 prohibits the placement of new commemorative
8 works within the Reserve.

9 The Reserve is intended to preserve the
10 integrity of the National Mall's monumental core
11 and has historically been protected from the
12 addition of new memorials.

13 So, this question is, does approving
14 this exception establish a precedent for future
15 requests to locate memorials in the Reserve?
16 Might be something to discuss as we discuss the
17 bill.

18 Also the appropriateness of the
19 location, that was mentioned in the testimony
20 which is not part of the bill. The bill speaks
21 just specifically about the Reserve, but not a
22 specific location. And then, of course,

1 consideration of the public testimony.

2 So, I open it up for discussion.

3 Commissioner Fountain?

4 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: Madam Chair, I
5 had a question for the sponsors before we move
6 into discussion.

7 CHAIR STIDHAM: Sure. Let me bring
8 Susan Bahary back up. And I should have asked
9 if there were questions of other speakers as
10 well. So, after we hear from the sponsor, we
11 can bring up anyone else.

12 Susan, if you can turn your camera on?
13 There you go.

14 MS. BAHARY: There we go, okay.

15 CHAIR STIDHAM: Go ahead, Commissioner
16 Fountain.

17 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: Ms. Bahary,
18 have you all conducted any sort of site
19 selection survey? Any analysis of potential
20 sites within Washington for your proposed
21 memorial and the --

22 MS. BAHARY: Yes. Yes, we did

1 Commissioner. We -- extensively. We went
2 through all the sites.

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: So, Commissioner
4 Fountain, what I should add is that there's been
5 consultation with Park Service staff and
6 commissions, but the sponsor has not completed
7 their site selection and brought it before this
8 commission for review.

9 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: All right.
10 Thank you.

11 CHAIR STIDHAM: Any other questions?

12 COMMISSIONER ACOSTA: Just a quick
13 question for the sponsor. This is Marcel Acosta
14 at NCPC. Thanks again for your presentation.

15 So, I know you haven't presented the
16 site selection study to this commission yet, but
17 would it be fair to ask if the sites that you're
18 considering also included sites outside of the
19 Reserve?

20 MS. BAHARY: Yes, of course it's fair.

21 COMMISSIONER ACOSTA: Okay.

22 MS. BAHARY: Yeah, we certainly did. We

1 certainly looked in Area 2 and Area 1 and --
2 yes, we did.

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: Any other questions?

4 (Pause.)

5 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Thank you, Ms.
6 Bahary.

7 MS. BAHARY: Thank you.

8 CHAIR STIDHAM: Are there any questions
9 the commissioners have of other speakers, and
10 apologies for jumping ahead.

11 (Pause.)

12 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. So, I can kick
13 off this discussion if that is helpful to get us
14 moving.

15 As I mentioned and as is our role, the
16 National Park Service has met with the memorial
17 sponsor on numerous occasions to discuss sites
18 and to move through this. And we've had some
19 work sessions with commissions -- commission
20 staff related to those and have provided
21 feedback back to the sponsor and have encouraged
22 the sponsor to complete their site selection

1 study and bring it before this body.

2 That has not occurred. So, the attempt
3 to bypass the Commemorative Works Act with this
4 legislation is something that I believe the
5 National Park Service would not support.

6 The process is in place for a reason
7 and the sponsor was following that process and,
8 in our opinion, needs to complete the process
9 and move forward.

10 Mr. Luebke?

11 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: There we go. You
12 can hear me?

13 CHAIR STIDHAM: Yeah.

14 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Yeah, this is a --
15 it's been a -- the subject of service animals, I
16 believe, has come up many times over the last,
17 feels like, more than a decade, really.

18 I guess the last time it was -- when it
19 was actually authorized was four years ago; is
20 that correct?

21 CHAIR STIDHAM: Yeah, 2022.

22 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: And can you

1 clarify that was to exist, but not on location
2 Area 1, Area 2, etcetera, right?

3 CHAIR STIDHAM: Right.

4 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Okay.

5 CHAIR STIDHAM: So, the initial
6 authorization puts everything in Area 2.

7 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Right.

8 CHAIR STIDHAM: And then the -- right.

9 And then the process would be to justify in
10 Area --

11 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: To justify.

12 CHAIR STIDHAM: -- 1 or --

13 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Okay. So, my
14 next question --

15 CHAIR STIDHAM: Yes.

16 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: And, by the way,
17 it's such an interesting topic. I mean, you get
18 everything from, you know, guide animals and
19 marine support.

20 I mean, there's just -- it's a really
21 interesting story worth telling. Everybody
22 should hear about this and understand it. It's

1 a really -- it's a compelling thing. It
2 obviously touches a lot of people.

3 But to go back to our process under the
4 Commemorative Works Act, I just want to make
5 sure I understand for the record.

6 The Reserve, the law says the Reserve
7 is closed. There are -- there shall be no --
8 okay.

9 And that being the case, there are no
10 criteria for measuring the proposal to say, oh,
11 but you could be in the Reserve anyway; is that
12 correct? There are no criteria?

13 MR. MIRARCHI: Correct, because we are
14 not to be considering --

15 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Right.

16 MR. MIRARCHI: -- anything --
17 (simultaneous speaking)

18 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Right. Okay.
19 So, it's a little bit of a hard wall, for those
20 of us who are trying to follow the law, that
21 there's really no debate about that. It would
22 have to come from Congress to override.

1 What it seems like the issue is --
2 whether it belongs in Area 1 or Area 2 is the
3 issue.

4 And I believe the question is -- what
5 is lasting importance to the American people and
6 its history or something, that's for Area 2.

7 Area 1 is preeminent, I believe, is the
8 language, preeminent significance to the
9 American history and culture, and there is
10 nothing that would actually guide going into the
11 Reserve.

12 So, it's a little bit -- it's strange
13 to have to be vetting this when I believe the
14 question is actually between Area 2 and Area 1.

15 I was going to note that there were
16 these -- there have been two -- the interesting
17 thing about the service animal, again, super
18 fascinating story.

19 It's a group. It's a -- in other
20 words, it's not an event. It's not a -- it's
21 not a person. It's not a specific act. It's
22 actually sort of a generic group of animals

1 which do all sorts of things, and have for
2 centuries, in the aid of these efforts in
3 creating our nation and its history.

4 We have examples of other memorials
5 that touch this kind of -- I think of the Peace
6 Corps Memorial, which is also kind of, you know,
7 deals with a group of people who have promoted
8 those peace efforts in the world.

9 For example, is the Fallen Journalist
10 Memorial. Again, a group that is not about a
11 single person or a single event. It's sort of a
12 long -- it's a -- there's sort of a generic --
13 it's a category rather than --

14 CHAIR STIDHAM: I believe the
15 authorizing legislation speaks of the value of
16 animals in our history and --

17 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Yeah.

18 CHAIR STIDHAM: -- to the human mind.
19 And just to clarify, the authorization
20 authorizes for Area 2.

21 So, the sponsor, if they were seeking
22 it, an additional area, it would be a request

1 and justification for Area 1 would be what would
2 be normal.

3 COMMISSIONER LUEBKE: Well, I'm just
4 trying to set it against what's already, you
5 know, what the thinking has been.

6 There clearly are -- you can call it
7 the value, you can call it the group, you can
8 call it -- it's a -- there are memorials in Area
9 1 which seem to fall into that category of
10 significance and breadth, which is what I'm
11 talking about with the role of the animals.

12 I mean, there's even a little
13 distinction here that we have to kind of think
14 among ourselves.

15 To some extent, it's one thing to be a
16 fallen journalist who has a will and agency in
17 it, and, to what extent, regardless of the value
18 of the animals, do they -- the animals
19 themselves are in a trained situation.

20 Do they have will and agency in what
21 they're doing? Are they simply doing what
22 they've been trained to do?

1 It's a little -- it's a hard question,
2 but I do believe the issue is actually about
3 Area 1, Area 2, and I have a hard time
4 supporting the idea that we would talk about the
5 Reserve with absolutely no other criteria to
6 measure it against.

7 And it's clearly against the law that
8 we have in front of us and are supposed to
9 measure to.

10 So, I'm in support of the statement
11 that you made at the beginning that your -- the
12 Park Service is not supportive of changing the
13 process.

14 The problem is that it has been
15 happening and it does, of course, weaken the
16 entire thing and we have what's at stake is
17 actually -- well, it's a -- it's a question of -
18 - I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

19 CHAIR STIDHAM: The exact wording from
20 the original legislation was, historic deeds and
21 sacrifices of service animals and handlers of
22 service animals in the United States, to be

1 clear about that original authorizing
2 legislation.

3 Commissioner Imamura?

4 COMMISSIONER IMAMURA: Thank you, Madam
5 Chair.

6 I just want to acknowledge a comment
7 throughout the entire testimony that many of
8 those who testified today used, and it's asking
9 for national standing or recognition.

10 And I just want to say even in Area 2
11 provides national standing and recognition. And
12 so, I just want to, for those who testified
13 today and for the public, Area 2, Area 1, it all
14 provides national standing.

15 And then I just want to add one other
16 comment. If Mr. Neely is still listening, I
17 just want to thank him for his testimony and
18 make mention that I'm glad he's still here
19 because I know his family is too.

20 CHAIR STIDHAM: Absolutely.

21 So, to be clear, the National Park
22 Service is very supportive of this memorial and

1 the work that this sponsor is doing, but their -
2 - the best course of action is to complete the
3 site selection.

4 And if there is an interest in Area 1,
5 to come with a justification and a request for
6 that justification to be taken to the Secretary
7 of Interior for an Area 1 designation, but very
8 supportive of the theme of this memorial and the
9 placement within the District of Columbia and
10 its environs.

11 Commissioner Acosta?

12 COMMISSIONER ACOSTA: Thank you, Chair.

13 Again, I support Mr. Luebke's
14 observations and also your recommendation or
15 comments regarding the site selection process.

16 I know that my staff has been working
17 with you and the sponsors in terms of the site
18 selection process and getting that study off the
19 ground.

20 And then to the Commission -- or to
21 this commission, I think it's important that we
22 see all the sites and better understand kind of

1 the needs of the site accommodation issues that
2 this type of memorial might need.

3 And I think allowing the process to
4 move forward would give all of us kind of a
5 better sense of what's necessary, the best types
6 of sites that might accommodate this monument.

7 I also think the notion of there are no
8 criteria to review against an exception to the
9 Reserve is an important one.

10 Our responsibility, as a commission, is
11 to protect the Reserve and follow the law. And
12 I think that we also need to make that clear in
13 any correspondence that we send to the Hill.

14 Again, I do appreciate all the
15 testimony that we heard today. It is a very
16 important topic, as all of us agree.

17 And as we said before in the 2022
18 letter, we do support the intentions of this
19 memorial and we look forward to working with the
20 sponsors in terms of finding a site, either in
21 Area 2 or Area 1, if they're able to kind of
22 make that argument as part of our tapestry of

1 memorials in the city.

2 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you.

3 Commissioner Fountain?

4 COMMISSIONER FOUNTAIN: Thank you,
5 Madam Chair. And I'll try to abridge my
6 comments so as not to repeat what other
7 commissioners have said, all of which I second.

8 And I do have to point out I think
9 there's sort of very interesting contrast with
10 the Paine memorial. Because when they came
11 before us last time, they had done their site
12 selection, they identified 22 sites, they
13 narrowed it down to three sites, two of which
14 were in Area 1.

15 At that point, they came to us and
16 said, we'd like authorization to go to Area 1,
17 as opposed to just coming in and saying, we want
18 to go on the Reserve and we'll worry about the
19 site later.

20 Proper course is to figure out what's
21 the best site for your memorial, all factors
22 considered. And then if you need authorization

1 to go into Area 1 or the Reserve, seek it.

2 And as a side note related to that, I
3 don't like legislation that says, the memorial
4 shall be within Area 1 or the Reserve, as
5 opposed to, it may be within the area of the
6 Reserve, because the "shall" precludes that more
7 comprehensive site study.

8 Obviously, we all agree that the
9 statute in front of us says there shall be no
10 new memorials on the Mall.

11 It's easy for us to stop our analysis
12 and our recommendation at that point. But, as
13 we've discussed, I think we have a broader role
14 as well, which is to put the particular request
15 in a broader context of memorials in Washington
16 and I think it appropriate to give Congress the
17 benefit of those thoughts as well.

18 And we have done that in prior -- with
19 respect to prior legislation for exemptions on
20 the Mall, I think, most recently with respect to
21 the Medal of Honor Memorial and the Women's
22 Suffrage Memorial.

1 As others have noted, there is no
2 standard. The only, you know, the highest
3 standard we have under the statute is for Area
4 1. It must be of preeminent, historical and
5 lasting significance.

6 By extension, the criterion for an
7 exemption to the Reserve clause would be
8 something more than that, even, and I have to
9 say that I don't believe a service animals
10 memorial meets whatever that higher criterion
11 would be.

12 For instance, I mean, what's on the
13 Mall are primarily -- or in the Reserve are
14 primarily memorials to founding fathers and
15 others, such as President Lincoln, of such
16 significant contribution to the country's
17 history and then to the veterans of entire wars.

18 You know, with that, obviously the
19 World War I Memorial did not receive
20 authorization for placement in the Reserve.

21 As Commissioner Luebke pointed out, the
22 Peace Corps Commemorative, the Fallen Journalist

1 Memorials will be outside the Reserve.

2 The National Law Enforcement Officers
3 Memorial is outside the Reserve. As I said, the
4 Medal of Honor Memorial we recommended not be
5 approved for location in the Reserve.

6 The only memorial that I recollect that
7 this commission has indicated that might be
8 appropriate for placement within the Reserve was
9 the Women's Suffrage Memorial, and that was on
10 the view that that memorial stood for
11 essentially half of this nation's history in
12 terms of the contributions of the role of women
13 in the country's history.

14 So, taking a service animals memorial -
15 - and I will say that the first time this came
16 before us and I saw that was the -- that was the
17 title of the proposed memorial, I was dubious
18 about a memorial at all in the nation's capital.

19 And the testimony that was presented
20 the last time it came up, certainly changed my
21 mind on that and I do believe it appropriate for
22 a memorial in the nation's capital and the

1 testimonies today certainly confirm that.

2 But as I measure that memorial against
3 the array of other memorials located within the
4 Reserve and outside the Reserve and trying to
5 think of what rule or decision we would apply, I
6 can't conclude that a service animals memorial
7 meets that high -- that highest criterion for
8 placement on the Reserve.

9 So, for that additional reason beyond
10 the terms of the statute, I would recommend
11 against passage of the legislation. Thank you.

12 CHAIR STIDHAM: Great. Thank you.

13 Mr. Maloney?

14 COMMISSIONER MALONEY: Thank you. And,
15 again, I'll also be quick.

16 First, I'd like to associate myself
17 with all of the comments that have been made and
18 just point out two other points.

19 One is that only some of the members of
20 this commission are familiar with the area study
21 that has been going on.

22 And I think the sponsors may not

1 recognize this, but what they would be asking of
2 this commission is that the entire commission
3 vote on something where only a few members have
4 been briefed on the substance of the study. I
5 don't think that's appropriate to request the
6 Commission to do.

7 The other comment I'll make is there
8 was a suggestion that one possible site was at
9 the Park Service stables on the Mall.

10 That might be a site -- I'm not sure
11 that that would be the first place I would
12 choose for this memorial. I'm not sure that the
13 symbolic quality of the memorial would be best
14 served there.

15 And, for example, I think it might be
16 interesting to consider what sites there might
17 be at Arlington Cemetery with the veterans.

18 So, for those reasons, as well as
19 everything else that has been said, I think it
20 is appropriate to complete the site selection
21 study, bring it to this commission, and then we
22 can look about the question of appropriate

1 sites, and I feel certain there are appropriate
2 sites within Area 1 or 2. So, not having to
3 raise the issue on the Reserve. Thanks.

4 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you. Great
5 points.

6 Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

7 COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yes.
8 I think I'm last here. So, of course, I'll
9 align myself with the thoughtful comments of the
10 rest of the Commission.

11 One thing I'll say about process, and
12 there's often, you know, my background is in
13 preservation, there's often a desire to short-
14 circuit process because of a timeline.

15 And what I have found in my experience
16 over time, is that moving through the process
17 and allowing a thoughtful deliberation of all
18 the options results in a much better product at
19 the end.

20 And so, I encourage -- while it may be
21 dismaying to the sponsors, oh, we've got to go
22 back, we've got to do this, I really think that

1 your commission -- or your memorial will benefit
2 from it and then you can have a sort of full-
3 throated, unanimous, sort of, support of
4 whatever the final site is because, as
5 Commissioner Maloney said, many of us, myself
6 included, are not aware of what has been
7 evaluated.

8 So, it is hard to get behind it and
9 lend our support and sort of further comment to
10 really enhance your memorial.

11 So I, again, align myself with the rest
12 of the comments and would support asking the
13 sponsor to go through the site selection process
14 and bring that to us for consideration so that
15 we can accurately and adequately analyze what's
16 before us. Thank you.

17 CHAIR STIDHAM: Great. I think we've
18 heard from everyone -- oh, actually, we haven't.

19 Commissioner Bruch, I don't think we've
20 heard from you if you had anything to add to the
21 discussion.

22 COMMISSIONER BRUCH: No, I would say I

1 really appreciate the opportunity to hear the
2 testimony today on the various stakes with the
3 service animal memorial.

4 I actually concur with pretty much
5 everything said by the other commissioners and
6 appreciate the opportunity to, again, witness
7 this process.

8 I believe it's a premature question to
9 the Commission and I think -- so, I'm in
10 concurrence with a response that it is perhaps
11 inappropriate to deliberate a specific location
12 if the process has not played itself out to
13 present options for those locations to the
14 Commission.

15 CHAIR STIDHAM: Thank you very much.

16 Okay. Just to make sure that we're all
17 on the same page, we will draft a letter to go
18 back related to this piece of legislation not in
19 support of the legislation, but supportive of
20 the memorial itself and moving through the
21 process of site selection that would need to
22 come back to NCMAC for review and approval.

1 Just making sure that is what everybody
2 -- we'll draft the letter and you guys can
3 review.

4 But just to make sure we're all on the
5 same page, if you agree, just raise your hand to
6 make sure that I'm not missing anything.

7 Great. All right. We will do that.
8 And as a reminder to the public, there is a 30-
9 day comment period. So, please submit your --
10 any comments that you have related to either
11 piece of legislation, and those will be
12 considered in our response back as well.

13 So, we just have one last agenda item.
14 We have a number of authorized memorials that
15 are making their way through the various stages
16 of the process and Ms. Laurel Hammig is here to
17 highlight pieces of note on other existing
18 authorized memorials.

19 As you know, there are a number that
20 are currently in various stages, and I will pass
21 to Laurel to give you an update.

22 MS. HAMMIG: Thank you, Chair.

1 There were not a lot of changes since
2 the report that you received in March. This
3 month's report was distributed in your packet
4 and uploaded to our PEPC web page.

5 One item of note was that the Texas
6 Legation Memorial completed its financial review
7 and we expect it to be under construction in
8 this fall, and that is the tree box on Indiana
9 Avenue.

10 So, that was the main thing I wanted to
11 report, but happy to answer any questions if
12 anyone has any.

13 CHAIR STIDHAM: I guess I would add
14 that Desert Shield/Desert Storm is due to open
15 in October. They are making great progress and
16 they are on schedule.

17 Okay. Thank you, Ms. Hammig. So, the
18 National Park Service has no other business to
19 bring before this commission.

20 Are there other members who have
21 business that they would like to bring up before
22 we close?

1 (Pause.)

2 CHAIR STIDHAM: Okay. Seeing none,
3 this meeting is now adjourned. Thank you for
4 your time today and your attention and have a
5 wonderful rest of your day.

6 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter
7 went off the record at 11:39 a.m.)

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1 C E R T I F I C A T E

2 This is to certify that the foregoing transcript
3 was duly recorded and accurately transcribed
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10 employee of any of the parties nor counsel
11 employed by the parties, and I am not
12 financially or otherwise interested in the
13 outcome of the action.

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20 James Cordes
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