

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING H.R. 2717, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE NATIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR MUSEUM FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH A COMMEMORATIVE WORK ON THE NATIONAL MALL TO HONOR THE EXTRAORDINARY ACTS OF VALOR, SELFLESS SERVICE, AND SACRIFICE DISPLAYED BY MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS.

May 15, 2024

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior’s views on H.R. 2717, a bill to authorize the location of a monument on the National Mall to commemorate and honor the extraordinary acts of valor, selfless service, and sacrifice displayed by Medal of Honor recipients.

The Department strongly supports honoring the extraordinary acts of our Nation’s Medal of Honor recipients, and we support establishing the monument authorized for that purpose in a place of national honor and prominence. However, since the establishment of the Reserve by Congress in 2003, the Department has endeavored to protect the Reserve by discouraging the establishment of any new commemorative works within it. It is for that reason that we do not support H.R. 2717 as currently drafted. This position is consistent with other testimony the Department has submitted on legislation that proposes new commemorative works within the Reserve.

H.R. 2717 would authorize the National Medal of Honor Monument to be established in the Reserve, as defined by the Commemorative Works Act (40 USC 89 et seq.) (CWA). The CWA was enacted to ensure that proper consideration is given to authorization, location, and design of new memorials within Washington, DC. Congress amended the Act in 2003, establishing the “Reserve” and declaring it a completed work of civic art where “the siting of new commemorative works is prohibited.” The CWA identifies the Reserve as “the great cross-axis of the Mall” which extends from the United States Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, and from the White House to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial.

Legislation to authorize the establishment of the National Medal of Honor Monument was enacted in December, 2021, as Public Law 117-80. This law authorizes the monument to be established on Federal land managed by the National Park Service or the General Services Administration in Washington, DC, in accordance with the CWA. The Department testified in support of authorizing the establishment of the monument with the understanding that the CWA, which includes a prohibition on locating new memorials in the Reserve, would apply.

The Department’s concerns about establishing the National Medal of Honor Monument in the Reserve are much the same as those expressed by the Department on similar legislation. Other sponsors of memorials have sought prominent locations as well, and have worked with the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the Commission of Fine Arts to secure sites outside of the Reserve that meet their needs. The National Park Service is committed to continuing to work with the sponsors of the National Medal of Honor Monument

to develop a site selection study that would identify a uniquely honorific and distinguished location for this monument that is not in the Reserve.

Congress' 2003 Reserve designation responded to a pressing need to preserve the integrity of the National Mall and rapidly diminishing public space in the city's monumental core. The pressures on the Mall's open space have amplified through time. In addition to hosting over 35 million visits each year, more than 9,000 permitted events, including 1,000 First Amendment demonstrations, take place on or near the National Mall annually. The space is also heavily used for recreational activities, national celebrations, critical operational and security movements associated with its placement at the city center, and park visitation. Maintaining the Mall's open spaces and existing architecture is essential to ensuring that it continues to convey its significance as our nation's premier civic space. We urge the Subcommittee to protect this special place for the enjoyment of Americans for generations to come.

Chairman King, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or the other members of the Subcommittee have.