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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

October 2, 2013

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The Honorable Jonathan Jarvis
Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Jarvis:

Through this letter, the Committee on Natural Resources (“Committee”) requests that the National Park Service (“Park Service”) take steps as necessary to keep and not destroy documents related to the decision this week to restrict public access to the National World War II Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Korean Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, and other open-air monuments, memorials, and parks in the Washington, D.C., region. The Committee expects to soon send a formal document request as a follow up to this letter.

The Committee is also considering conducting an oversight hearing in the near future to better understand the Park Service’s closures, as well as the resources and staff time used to erect physical barriers to keep out veterans and other members of the American public from visiting these open-air sites. The World War II Memorial and other open-air sites are ordinarily accessible to visitors 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, and are normally staffed by Park Service rangers only from 9:30 am to 11:30 pm, with visitors able to tour the sites throughout the day and night. However, the Park Service has now determined these sites must be closed to all visitors at all times due to the lapse in appropriations.

In response to considerable public outcry against the decision to ban veterans and others from these sites, the Park Service today reversed course and announced it will permit certain veterans groups to visit and exercise their First Amendment rights at the World War II Memorial. It remains unclear whether other veterans groups and members of the public will be allowed to visit and exercise their First Amendment rights at the other open-air memorials and sites across the capital area that are currently closed. It is imperative that the Park Service remove the barriers and allow the American public to resume visiting these open-air memorials, monuments, and parks without further delay.

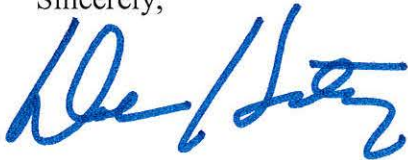
According to news reports earlier today, a Park Service spokesperson said the White House Office of Management and Budget ordered the Park Service to take such extraordinary steps as blockading public sidewalks and access roads around these memorials, suggesting the outrageous closure decision was made in order to make the current lapse in appropriations as conspicuous and painful to the public as possible.

The Park Service's earlier statements that such closures were necessary to protect the monuments and memorials and were required by law seem especially dubious given these reports and the Park Service's failure to take similar steps previously or at less visible Park Service sites in the capital area. For example, the Park Service did not close the Lincoln Memorial during the lapse in appropriations in 1996 and, in 2011, protestors were allowed to take over and occupy Park Service sites in the District of Columbia, some of which were damaged at considerable taxpayer cost. Here, the Park Service's decision to barricade the open-air memorials from veterans and other Americans flies in the face of common sense, given their interest in visiting memorials that honor their service and sacrifice to the country.

Among the issues of most concern to the Committee are whether the Park Service discussed or considered alternatives to actively excluding the public from these open-air sites, including allowing access to previously scheduled visits by veterans groups; whether direction or guidance came from the Department of the Interior or the Office of Management and Budget to actively restrict public access to these sites; the staff time and costs associated with the transport, erection, and maintenance of the barriers, including whether the barriers are owned or rented by the Park Service; the staff time and costs associated with trash removal from these sites, including any differences between such costs and the costs related to installing and maintaining the barricades; the staff time and costs associated with patrolling and securing these sites prior to and during their closure; the cost to operate these sites during overnight hours; and law enforcement policies and actions concerning trespass on the National Mall and other open-air monuments, memorials and parks throughout the capital region.

It is expected that the Park Service will cooperate with the Committee's oversight by not destroying potentially responsive records and providing records to the Committee upon request.

Sincerely,



Doc Hastings
Chairman,
Committee on Natural Resources



Rob Bishop
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Public Lands
and Environmental Regulation