

September 11, 2012

**Testimony of Edwin L. Fountain
Director, World War I Memorial Foundation**

Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

of the

House Committee on Natural Resources

on H.R. _____

“Frank Buckles World War I Memorial Act”

Chairman Bishop and members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Edwin Fountain. I am an attorney in private practice here in Washington, and the grandson of two World War I veterans. I am a co-founder and director of the World War I Memorial Foundation. I am pleased to appear today to testify in support of the “Frank Buckles World War I Memorial Act.”

Until he passed away last year at the age of 110, Mr. Buckles was the last surviving American veteran of World War I. The Foundation was proud to have Mr. Buckles serve as its honorary chairman.

In 2008, Mr. Buckles came to Washington for a ceremony in his honor at the Pentagon. During that trip he visited the District of Columbia War Memorial, located on the Mall between the World War II and Korean War memorials. He was distressed to see that it was only a memorial to the veterans of D.C., and not a national memorial.

Throughout our country’s history, towns and cities have erected their own war memorials, be they to local veterans of the Civil War, or of World War I, or of all the nation’s wars collectively. In Washington, there are of course numerous memorials to generals and statesmen of the Revolution and the Civil War. But until the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated thirty years ago, there were no national war memorials.

Today we have on the Mall national memorials to three of the four great wars of the 20th century, located in what has become a de facto “war memorial park” around the Lincoln Reflecting Pool.

There is, however, no national memorial to World War I. With the irony of hindsight, that war was at first called “the war to end all wars.” In retrospect, we now

know that “the Great War” was but the first time that American soldiers would go overseas in defense of liberty against foreign aggression. Over 4.7 million Americans served in uniform, and 116,516 gave their lives -- more than in Korea and Vietnam combined.

World War I was also the first great conflict of what has come to be known as “the American century.” It led directly to the Second World War, and its consequences are still felt today in ongoing conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Israel and Palestine, and Iraq.

Few Americans today know this history, and the absence of a national memorial to World War I on the Mall in Washington has become a glaring omission, all the more so because the centennial of the war is less than three years away.

H.R. 938 would fill that void by authorizing the construction of a national World War I Memorial on the Mall, thereby giving honor to the veterans of World War I that is equal to that bestowed on the veterans of the other major wars, while helping future generations of Americans to know the complete history of American’s 20th-century struggle against aggression and totalitarianism.

The Foundation also supports the designation of the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City as a national World War I memorial. While it may be unconventional to have two national memorials, there is no reason why there cannot be two, and there is every reason to commemorate a profound national event such as World War I more widely, rather than less.

Finally, the Foundation supports the provisions in the proposed Act to establish a World War I centennial commission.

Twenty-five million people, from around the country and across the world, visit the Mall each year. As we have heard from thousands of students, veterans and citizens around the country who support our cause, those visitors expect to honor the nation’s veterans in the nation’s capital -- as evidenced by the location of the other great war memorials in Washington.

Congress would be minimizing the sacrifice of Frank Buckles and almost five million other Americans in World War I, including 116,000 dead, if it did not honor them on the Mall in the same manner as the veterans of the wars that followed.

Respectfully submitted,

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