

**Opening Statement by
The Honorable Ted Poe
At the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 919, H.R. 938, H.R. 1278, H.R. 2240, H.R. 2489, H.R. 3411 and H.R. 3440
Tuesday, January 24, 2012**

Thank you for inviting me here to speak about HR 938, the Frank Buckles WWI Memorial Act. I'm glad to be joined by Rep. Cleaver in introducing this bill and thankful for the 42 of my colleagues that have signed onto the bill so far.

Before I get into a summary of the bill, I'd like to talk about its namesake, Mr. Buckles.

Frank Buckles, Jr. was too young to officially enlist when WWI started but that didn't stop him.

He wanted to join the doughboys "over there" as the song by George Cohan put it.

So he told a Marines recruiter at the Kansas State Fair that he was 18, but even that was too young- he had to be 21.

After trying three more recruiting offices and being turned down, he finally went to the Army and gave the recruiter the family Bible to prove his age. The Army accepted it and off to WWI he went.

An old Army sergeant told Mr. Buckles that the Ambulance Service was the quickest way to get to France because the French were begging for ambulance services, so that's what Mr. Buckles did.

After the war, he came back home, although 116,000 of his fellow doughboys didn't. That's 25 times the number of soldiers we lost in Iraq.

He was in the Philippines when World War II started, and was captured by the Japanese and held in a prisoner of war camp for 3½ years. He was rescued, came back home to America and went to his farm in West Virginia, where his forefathers first settled back in 1732. He would ride his tractor until he was 106. On February 27, 2011, at the age of 110, Mr. Buckles passed away.

Mr. Buckles was a great American whose life encompassed nearly half our nation's history. But that's not the main reason I bring him up. Mr. Buckles was the last doughboy. This was a role he did not choose, but gracefully accepted. As the sole survivor of the 4 million that served in WWI, he felt it was his duty to make sure they were properly remembered.

His dying wish was for a memorial on the National Mall for all who served in WWI. You see, Mr. Chairman, we have a memorial for Vietnam veterans, we have a memorial for Korean veterans, and we have a memorial for World War II veterans. There is a small memorial for the D.C. troops that served in World War I, but there's no memorial on the Mall for all of the

doughboys like Mr. Buckles. And they have all died, all 4.7 million of them. It's our job to make sure they are not forgotten.

The Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to HR 938 honors all our WWI veterans.

First, the bill rededicates the DC memorial on the Mall as the District of Columbia and National World War I Memorial. DC should be left in the name of the memorial to honor the history of the memorial even while we add to its significance by making it a national memorial. The bill allows for a commemorative work, like a statue, to reflect the national nature of the memorial, but the memorial itself will stay the same. It is a beautiful and fitting memorial- we do not need to do any major reconstruction.

Second, the bill rededicates the Liberty Memorial of Kansas City as the National World War I Museum and Memorial. The Liberty Memorial has the only public museum specifically dedicated to the history of WWI and is important to our national remembrance.

Finally, the bill establishes a commission of 12 members to ensure the WWI centennial is properly observed, much like commissions established for the anniversaries of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. The members will be appointed by the President and party leaders in the House and Senate.

The United States is already behind the ball in getting commemorating efforts going. Australia and New Zealand have had a full commission set up since 2010. France has already released a dossier of their plans and appointed commemorative chairmen. The UK has appointed a Special Representative of the Prime Minister for the Centennial to take charge of their efforts.

Our WWI veterans are heroes. They faced some of the most horrific weapons of war ever invented by man.

Nations were still experimenting with just how lethal biological weapons could be during WWI. Biological weapons turned out to be so bad that the world would come together to sign the Geneva Protocol in 1925, one of the earliest treaties limiting weapons of war.

Then there were diseases like gang-green that thrived in the dark, wet, and muddy trenches that killed as many Americans in one year than perished in combat.

Despite these terrible sacrifices, the 4.7 million veterans who returned home never got a GI bill, didn't have a Veterans Affairs Department to watch out for them, and didn't get help in going to college or buying a house. But they would fight so that future veterans did.

Our veterans represent some of the greatest Americans. By properly honoring WWI veterans, we show our veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars today that we will never forget them.

To our shame, we did not get this done before Mr. Buckles passed, but we still have an opportunity to honor his and all his compatriots' sacrifice.

It is one thing to die for your country. It is another thing and the worst casualty of war to be forgotten by your country.

Thank you.