

Statement of The Hon. Steven C. LaTourette

Consideration of H.R. 282 before the

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

House Committee on Resources

September 5, 2002

Mr. Chairman, when I first came to Congress in 1995, a group of students from Riverside High School in Painesville, OH, asked to meet with me and presented an idea for a military memorial in our nation's capital to honor the men and women of our Armed Forces who've died in training exercises, peacekeeping missions, humanitarian efforts and terrorist attacks. The students vowed to honor this sacrifice with a memorial called the "Pyramid of Remembrance."

While I was immediately convinced of the worthiness of the students' proposal, in all honesty I feared these students had stumbled onto a great idea that was already taken. Surely, I thought, there must be a memorial in Washington to honor those who die in peacekeeping accidents, training exercises, humanitarian efforts and terrorist attacks. I was wrong.

No such memorial exists. One should. Today, we have an opportunity to make this worthy military memorial one step closer to reality.

H.R. 282 will authorize a foundation to create the Pyramid of Remembrance. The memorial will be built on Department of Defense land here in the Washington area, and without the use of taxpayer funds. It is important to note, Mr. Chairman, that no one has suggested this memorial be placed on the Mall, and that is not under consideration. Instead, the Pyramid of Remembrance will be erected on DoD land. Fort McNair is one location that's been suggested, but site selection is many steps down the road.

The Pyramid of Remembrance has attracted some high-level endorsements --- from former Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Gen. Hugh Shelton, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and former President Bush.

Mr. Chairman, our nation has been reeling since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, and here in Washington we are especially mindful of the loss of life at the Pentagon. In the last Congress, we mourned the loss of life of 17 sailors who were killed when a bomb ripped a 40-by-40 foot hole in the hull of the great USS Cole in the Yemeni port of Aden. Nearly 40 other sailors were injured in that terrorist attack, including a young man from Lorain County in my home state of Ohio.

Today, there is no memorial in Washington to specifically honor these men and women of courage, largely because their heroism and sacrifice occurred in a time other than a declared conflict. Their sacrifice doesn't fall into one tidy category, but it is just as worthy of those who died fighting in our greatest wars. What's more, the sacrifice of the men and women of the USS Cole and the Pentagon surely reflects the changing role of our Armed Forces as we enter this new century and a host of new challenges, including terrorism directed specifically at the United States of America.

Mr. Chairman, the idea for the Pyramid of Remembrance originated in a classroom in Painesville, OH, and

was sparked by the sight of a U.S. soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia. That horrible image was seared into our nation's consciousness, and it spurred discussion of other worthy sacrifice that is regrettably overlooked. The National Capital Memorial Commission has already heard about our proposal for the Pyramid of Remembrance, and made it quite clear that they believe it will fill a void in our nation's military memorials.

Not only will the Pyramid of Remembrance honor those who died in terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the USS Cole, but also those who lost their lives in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Panama; during the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut; during the failed rescue attempt of American hostages in Iran; and in the far too many deadly training accidents that occur on land, in air and at sea so our forces can be ready for combat.

Mr. Chairman, September 11th has caused Americans to pause and ponder the true cost of our freedom. In all corners of the world, members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard lay their lives on the line every single day so our freedom remains secure. That has never been more true than in our current War on Terror.

Such heroism, courage and dedication to our country is to be commended, and deserves permanent recognition here in Washington. The Pyramid of Remembrance will be an enduring memorial spawned by the youth of America and pledged to all other generations as well. It will honor those who died defending our country in our nation's earliest days and for centuries to come. It will provide great comfort to the loved ones of those whose courageous sacrifice often fades from the public's memory after memorial services conclude and "Taps" has been played.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the students of Riverside High School for coming up with this wonderful idea, and for not giving up on their dream. I also thank the fine folks at STERIS Corp. and Lubrizol Corp. who have devoted their time to this worthy cause and the establishment of the Pyramid of Remembrance Foundation. I hope you will join me in supporting this worthy legislation, and am happy to address any questions you might have.

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