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Witnesses Discuss Importance of Thorough, Judicious Planning Process to Preserve Integrity, Dignity of National Mall

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands held an [oversight hearing](#) on the “*Future of the National Mall.*” Witnesses at the hearing discussed a broad perspective on the future of the National Mall including the need for cautious deliberation and Congressional consideration of potential changes and additions to the historic area.

“Each year Congress must consider potential changes and additions to the National Mall and deliberate how each proposal could affect this important resource and its finite capacity. In recent months we have seen exactly why it is important to advance memorials with caution. The memorial to President Eisenhower has gained significant attention and in my opinion, the process has failed to achieve a design with a consensus of support. As that particular situation is worked out, it is my hope that we can learn from that process, what was done well, and what we, as the Committee of jurisdiction, can do to legislate a better process in the future,” **said Chairman Bishop (UT-01).** *“Again, it isn’t to say that each of these isn’t meritorious on its own, but this committee must take a broader view and consider the future generations, and their heroes, and their historic events, that they may want to commemorate, before we devour the remaining space in a zealous attempt to immortalize our generation.”*

Considered by some as the most significant landscape in the United States and often referred to as “America’s Front Yard,” the National Mall stretches from the U.S. Capitol west to the Potomac River, and from the Jefferson Memorial north to Constitution Avenue. In 2003, Congress declared the National Mall a “substantially completed work of civic art” and stated that no new or unapproved memorials or visitors centers could be added within a select portion of the Mall labeled “the Reserve.” Despite this declaration, proposals new and old continue to be developed. Not only is the National Mall home to past and future monuments, it is also used for recreation, tourism, and First Amendment demonstrations. Therefore, it is important that the various agencies and Commissions involved in the planning and maintenance of the National Mall balance the competing interests of this finite space.

Witnesses at the hearing testified on the role of their respective agencies and commissions in the development and execution of new projects:

[Stephen Whitesell](#), Regional Director of the National Capital Region for the National Park Service, testified on the importance of a thorough and deliberate planning process due to

the “wide-ranging and constant demands” on the National Mall. *“The process is rigorous and sometimes lengthy, requiring multiple consultations and approvals on the site selection and the design, as well as extensive environmental and historic preservation compliance. It requires the active involvement of multiple agencies and organizations.”* According to Whitesell, *“each year there are over 3,000 applications for public gatherings, resulting in more than 14,000 event-days of use.”* Since 1986, *“over 100 bills have been introduced for memorials and 27 of those have been enacted. Of the 27 memorials, 17 have been completed, 5 are currently in progress, and 5 were not established before their authorization lapsed.”*

The Commission of Fine Arts plays an integral role in the creation and development of the National Mall. [Thomas Luebke](#), Secretary of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, discussed the role of the Commission in the planning and development of new projects. *“The Commission of Fine Arts is the principal federal agency for reviewing proposals for public and some private structures in the Nation’s Capital; the Commission provides advice on design and aesthetics to Federal agencies, private individuals and organizations, and the District of Columbia government.”* The Commission is *“committed to encouraging the highest quality of design for the development of the Mall as the Nation’s premier civic space.”*

Chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) [Preston Bryant](#) spoke of NCPC’s role in the national memorial process. *“The NCPC approves the site and design for each new commemorative work that Congress authorizes. ... Our goal is three-fold: to ensure that Washington’s commemorative landscape explores the diverse, rich stories of American history; to meet the expectations of millions of Americans who visit our nation’s capital; and to plan for future generations to have excellent locations for their memorial projects.”*

[Justin Shubow](#), President and Chairman of the National Civic Art Society, highlighted some flaws in the process using the current planning process of the Eisenhower Memorial as an example. *“When giving official approval to the design of the Eisenhower Memorial—which is entirely inharmonious with our greatest presidential memorials—the Park Service did not even bother to consider its cultural and historical impact on the Mall and other protected sites in the area. ... The aesthetic and cultural confusion demonstrated by these sorts of agency decisions is astounding”* stated Shubow.

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