

Written Statement of Proposed Testimony – Pyramid of Remembrance Foundation
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
Thursday, September 5, 2002

Chairman Radanovich:

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HR 282. My name is Tracey Ash and I am a trustee with the Pyramid of Remembrance Foundation. Our organization seeks to establish a national memorial to honor members of our armed forces who have lost their lives during peacekeeping operations, humanitarian efforts, training accidents, terrorist attacks or covert operations.

I want to speak of our resolve and ability to raise the funds and lead this project to a successful completion.

The idea to honor military personnel killed during undeclared wars was first conceived in 1993 by Riverside High School students in Painesville Township, Ohio during the Somalian conflict in Mogadishu. The photo that appeared on our televisions and newspapers of Staff Sgt. William Cleveland being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu has forever been galvanized in their minds and consciousness. The event that most Americans have seen re-enacted in the recent movie, “BlackHawk Down” was the catalyst for these students to recognize the need for a monument honoring these forgotten soldiers and all military persons who have died in the line of duty. Events of the ensuing decade, including the bombing of the USS Cole and the tragedy of September 11 underscore the importance of their vision. Weekly we read in our papers of soldiers killed in military accidents. As one student remarked, “just because soldiers are killed during peacekeeping missions and training accidents doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be remembered with a memorial – their sacrifices are the same as those who perished in WWII and Vietnam.” What we have learned and must recognize is that our military personnel have chosen a career that is filled with inherent danger and that their lives are at risk everyday in order to allow us, as Americans the freedoms we enjoy today. We must “Remember” those who have died protecting them.

The National Capital Memorial Commission has said the Pyramid of Remembrance would fill a void in our nation’s military monuments. The idea has received endorsements from former President George Bush, former Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen and General Henry Shelton, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We have attached copies of their letters for your review.

We are dedicated to building this memorial because it is the right thing to do.

An undertaking of this scope will require a coordinated, nation-wide campaign. We have researched the efforts and chronology of other groups who are pursuing national monuments. These include the WWII Memorial on the Mall, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial on the Tidal Basin and the Air Force Memorial at the Navy Annex site overlooking the Pentagon. We are factoring their experiences into our plans. There is a challenging and complex road ahead of us.

Our organizational capabilities, board governance and fund-raising strategies are being developed in anticipation of legislation being passed by Congress in 2002. When President Bush signs Congressman LaTourette’s bill into law, support will escalate

rapidly across the country. We are positioning ourselves to “hit the ground running” when this occurs.

The Foundation achieved 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status earlier this year. A strategic plan was created using input from business professionals, community leaders, educators, students, veterans and other stakeholders. It includes our mission, values and objectives. Partnerships among businesses, civic organizations, government officials and community leaders at the local and national level will make this memorial a reality.

Management expertise has been secured from local and national organizations. Our Board of Advisors and Trustees are leaders in the community. They are professionals in business, legal, finance and marketing. They include educators and students. Some serve on the boards of other foundations and non-profit organizations. Our goal is to broaden our leadership base as the project moves forward to the national level.

Support for this memorial continues to expand well beyond the classroom walls where it began. It has grown locally to include our chamber of commerce and other community - based organizations. They have helped us take important first steps in this journey across America. It is now becoming a national undertaking. This is compelling testimony to the power of perseverance and collaboration – how a community can help a small group of civic-minded students make a lasting difference for an admirable cause.

Even at this early stage - without a bill being passed, executives from two national corporations with global operations are serving on our Board of Trustees. The Lubrizol Corporation and the STERIS Corporation are both listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Their headquarters are in Lake County, Ohio – close to where Riverside High School is located. One of those executives, David Enzerra, Lubrizol General Manager has joined me today to help answer questions. We have letters of support from the Chief Executive Officers of both of these organizations. They advocate the type of corporate involvement in community projects we need to be successful.

This enthusiasm is being extrapolated to the national level. We are confident as word of this project spreads, additional support, expertise and infrastructure will be secured to raise the funds to construct this memorial. We have contacted the offices of Senator DeWine and Senator Voinovich in this regard. Both indicate strong interest in sponsoring a companion bill to expedite passage in the Senate. We look forward to working with the appropriate committees in the Senate as we are doing in the House.

Once the bill is signed into law our fund-raising, site selection and monument design activities can proceed in earnest.

Regarding site selection and design - we will work responsively with the appropriate Federal agencies such as the National Park Service and the National Capital Memorial Commission. We intend to comply fully with the Commemorative Works Act.

Regarding financing - we will incorporate the best practices others have used to build memorials. We will seek endorsements from nationally known and respected individuals and organizations. These include military personnel, veterans groups and celebrities. We will utilize professional fund-raising expertise and proven strategies such as tiered giving from national corporations, foundations, individuals and stakeholders. Students across America will be involved because of the unique educational aspects of this endeavor.

In summary, please be assured the Pyramid of Remembrance Foundation is prepared to take full responsibility for managing this project and raising the required funds once legislation is passed. We appreciate any advice and assistance you can provide. You can be confident supporting HR 282 knowing that our Foundation has both the passion and the wherewithal to turn the dream of our students into a reality for America.