

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1980, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE GOLD STAR MOTHERS NATIONAL MONUMENT FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL MONUMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

November 3, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1980, a bill that would authorize the Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation to establish a national monument in the District of Columbia.

The Department cannot support H.R. 1980 because it does not conform to the Commemorative Works Act. This position is consistent with the finding of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, which reported its views to the House Committee on Natural Resources on August 17, 2011.

This bill proposes to both establish a national monument to mothers of members of the Armed Forces who have died in the service to our country, and to designate the monument as a unit of the National Park System. H.R. 1980 also directs that the monument be established according to the requirements of the Commemorative Works Act of 1986.

The Department appreciated the opportunity to discuss the proposal with the Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation when it met with National Park Service staff and the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission. Of course we believe that recognition of the role of mothers of members of the Armed Forces is important. We also believe that commemoration should be accomplished in a manner consistent with the Commemorative Works Act as enacted by Congress. We also note that the Gold Star program itself is a commemorative program. It is to recognize and honor those who have sacrificed their lives in service to our Country, as well as their mothers. Memorials are not always bricks and mortar. The Gold Star program is an excellent example, and it is a commemoration that has endured in various ways for almost a century.

H.R. 1980 is in conflict with the Commemorative Works Act in two key areas. First, the Act states that a military commemorative work may be authorized only to commemorate a war or similar major military conflict, such as the Korean War, or a branch of the armed forces, such as the Navy Memorial. Secondly, the Act permits consideration of memorials only if the last surviving member of the group being commemorated has been dead for 25 years.

While the proposed commemoration is outside the scope of the Commemorative Works Act, other suitable options to honor the Gold Star Mothers could be explored.

The Department also notes that the legislation directs that the memorial be established as a unit of the National Park System. Ordinarily, the National Park Service does not recommend such

designation without first conducting a Congressionally-authorized Special Resource Study to determine if the resource warrants designation as a national park.

We further note that H.R. 1980 does not contain language providing for the disposition of unspent funds that may be privately raised for a memorial. The Department recommends legislative sponsors include such provisions in proposals to establish memorials regardless of the proposed location. Should the committee choose to advance this legislation in some form, the Department would encourage consideration of language to provide direction regarding unspent funds and we can assist the committee with suggested language.

That concludes our prepared testimony on H.R. 1980, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 2070, A BILL TO DIRECT THE
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO INSTALL IN THE AREA OF THE
WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA A
SUITABLE PLAQUE OR INSCRIPTION WITH THE WORDS THAT
PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT PRAYED WITH THE NATION ON
JUNE 6, 1944, THE MORNING OF D-DAY.**

November 3, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 2070, a bill which directs the Secretary of the Interior to install in the area of the World War II Memorial in the District of Columbia a suitable plaque or an inscription with the words that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt prayed with the Nation on June 6, 1944, the morning of D-Day.

The Department cannot support H.R. 2070, which essentially proposes adding another commemorative work to the existing World War II Memorial and as such is contrary to the Commemorative Works Act. We support the continued application of this law which, by prohibiting encroachment by a new commemoration on an existing one, respects the design of this completed work of civic art without alteration or addition of new elements.

The World War II Memorial was authorized on May 23, 1993, by Public Law 103-32. In 1994, Congress approved its placement in the area containing the National Mall in Public Law 103-422. Its location at the site of the Rainbow Pool was approved in 1995 by the National Park Service (NPS) on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). In July 1997, the CFA and the NCPC reaffirmed prior approvals of the Rainbow Pool site in recognition of the significance of World War II as the single-most defining event of the 20th Century for Americans and the world. Even so, there were challenges to the establishment of this memorial. The design we see today was painstakingly arrived upon after years of public deliberations and spirited public debate.

The Commemorative Works Act specifically states that a new commemorative work shall be located so that it does not encroach upon an existing one. It is not a judgment as to the merit of this new commemoration, simply that altering the Memorial in this way, as proposed in H.R. 2070, will necessarily dilute this elegant memorial's central message and its ability to clearly convey that message to move, educate, and inspire its many visitors. The Department strongly believes that the World War II Memorial, as designed, accomplishes its legislated purpose to honor the members of the Armed Forces who served in World War II and to commemorate the participation of the United States in that conflict. It should not be altered in the manner suggested by H.R. 2070.

The views of the Department are consistent with those of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, which reviewed this proposal at its meeting on September 14, 2011, and with the views of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) which was also represented at that same meeting. The ABMC, charged by the Congress in Public Law 103-32 to design and build the World War II Memorial, concurred that no additional elements should be inserted into this carefully designed Memorial.

That concludes our prepared testimony on H.R. 2070, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.