

Representative Wm Lacy Clay
Testimony in support of HR 452
St. Louis Soldier's Memorial Military Museum

November 10, 2005

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee,

Today, our nation is at war, and across America plans are underway to commemorate another Veterans Day. I appreciate having this opportunity to speak to you about a treasured monument to our nation's veterans - the St. Louis Soldiers' Memorial Military Museum. This beautiful landmark is one of the most outstanding monuments ever built in tribute to those who have sacrificed their lives in service to our nation.

The St. Louis Soldiers' Memorial was initiated by the residents of St. Louis in the 1920s to honor the brave Americans who lost their lives in World War I. After several years of fund raising for the land acquisition and construction it was dedicated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on October 14, 1936, and officially opened to the public on Memorial Day 1938.

The Soldiers' Memorial also has a unique place in our nation's history as it is the only structure in St. Louis that is known to have been dedicated by a sitting U.S. President.

This soldier's monument is national treasure and an architectural masterpiece. Designed by one of the 20th Century's foremost art deco sculptors, Mr. Walker Hancock, the monument has four limestone sculptures flanking its entrance; they symbolize the most important virtues in a soldier's life - courage, loyalty, sacrifice and vision. The monument's loggia ceiling is a fabricated mosaic tile in the shape of a large gold star that is dedicated to the Gold Star Mothers, a national organization of mothers whose sons, daughters or husbands have been killed in military service. This edifice sits at the north end of an adjoining park with a prominent limestone sculpture, the Court of Honor, - which has carvings illustrating the various stages in a soldier's life.

Today, this Soldier's Memorial is an important cultural resource and gathering place. It

attracts nearly 48,000 visitors each year and provides the setting for more than 20 ceremonies, including national patriotic events hosted by veterans groups, change of command ceremonies, and military retirement ceremonies. This monument is the center of the Annual Veterans Day Parade and Observance, which is the largest of its kind in the Midwest, drawing participants from several surrounding states and boasting more than 100 marching units

In recent years, the Memorial's dedicated Administrator has sought contributions from active military personnel and veterans to help maintain this cherished structure.

At this time in our history, as we are engaged in a war against terrorism and as we mourn the more than 2,000 American service men and women who have given their lives in the Iraq war, we have a special need and a great interest in paying tribute to our veterans. I believe the American people want national shrines to commemorate their friends and family members who have given up their lives for this nation.

It is time for the Federal government to consider acquiring the St. Louis Soldier's Memorial Military Museum in its inventory of national monuments. I believe that a study of this monument will show that it is a historically significant structure with a national significance.

I ask the members of this Committee to give support to HR 452; this bill, which I sponsored along with Representatives Skelton and Carnahan, would allow the National Park Service to study the feasibility of acquiring this valuable landmark. This legislation is strongly supported by members of the Seafarers Union, and many groups and veterans organizations. I hope you will join this effort to help honor our nation's veterans and agree to move this bill forward.