

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

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### Witness Statement

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**STATEMENT OF JOHN G. PARSONS, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR LANDS RESOURCES AND PLANNING, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, AND CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL CAPITAL MEMORIAL COMMISSION, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 3293, A BILL TO AMEND THE LAW THAT AUTHORIZED THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL TO AUTHORIZE THE PLACEMENT WITHIN THE SITE OF THE MEMORIAL OF A PLAQUE TO HONOR THOSE VIETNAM VETERANS WHO DIED AFTER THEIR SERVICE IN THE VIETNAM WAR, BUT AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THAT SERVICE.**

**March 16, 2000**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3293, a bill to amend the law that authorized the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. H.R. 3293 would authorize the placement of a plaque within the site of the memorial to honor those Vietnam veterans who died after their service in the Vietnam war, but as a direct result of that service.

The Administration opposes H.R. 3293, because we support the continued application of laws and policies that would have this plaque placed on military lands, not on the National Mall. We believe this is the appropriate way to honor those veterans.

The National Capital Memorial Commission met on March 7 to review this legislation and recommended against enactment of H.R. 3293. The Commission felt strongly that commemorative additions to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would interfere with its simple, reverent, powerful message - one that is so important to the memorial's many visitors. The Commission noted that the memorial already honors all who served in the war. The Commission also recognized that, as a memorial honoring military groups, the plaque authorized by H.R. 3293 should be placed on military property instead of the National Mall. Memorials to veterans who have died of causes related to a war would be clearly outside the definition of memorials that are permitted to be built on parkland under Sections 3(b) and 3(c) of the Commemorative Works Act of 1986. The Commission also recommended a correction to address conflicting language in the bill that requires the American Battle Monuments Commission, a Federal entity, to undertake responsibility for the installation of the plaque while also directing that no Federal funds be expended for its installation.

The Commission noted that the need for memorials to veterans groups was identified in the drafting of the Commemorative Works Act and, as a result, military properties were purposefully excluded from the requirements imposed on Department of the Interior and General Services Administration lands.

Since the authorization of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1980, the Department of the Interior has received several proposals for additions to the memorial, and has discouraged all of them. The Department

believes the aggregation of additions would result in a derogation of the current memorial and its deeply symbolic message. Further, we believe this perspective is in concert with the House and Senate Committees' 1988 and 1989 conclusions when considering the Memorial to Honor Women who Served in the Armed Forces of the United States during the Vietnam Era.

At that time, the Committees recommended authorization of a new Memorial to Honor Women who Served in the Armed Forces of the United States during the Vietnam Era, not an addition, alteration or modification to the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial as is now proposed in

H.R. 3293. However, the committees mandated that if the new memorial were placed within the 2.2 acres known as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, that site would be complete after the construction of the Memorial to Honor Women who Served in the Armed Forces of the United States during the Vietnam Era. This action was taken with the knowledge that other proposals for additions to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial had been suggested and the committees' concerns that this emotionally powerful, great work of civic art should not be encroached upon by other memorials or additions regardless of their size. As the Memorial to Honor Women who Served in the Armed Forces of the United States during the Vietnam Era ultimately was erected within the 2.2 acres, the stated intent of the committees is that the site be considered complete, with no more additions to be allowed.

Additionally, the provisions of the Commemorative Works Act of 1986 also preclude consideration of this proposal as a separate commemoration on parkland. In Section 3 of that Act, Congress specifically precluded memorials to groups of individuals until after the 25th anniversary of the death of the last surviving member of the group. Further, Congress restricted military memorials to wars and branches of the Armed Forces.

We believe that a commemorative work honoring the sacrifices of these veterans, however meritorious such recognition may be, on land in the Nation's Capital governed by the Commemorative Works Act is contrary to the provisions of that Act, its legislative history, and the legislative history of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

On the basis of the advice of the National Capital Memorial Commission, as well as our experience and understanding of the legislative history of the Commemorative Works Act, we believe Congress intended that future military memorials, other than those explicitly allowed by the Act, be placed on military land. We believe the important contributions of all our nation's Vietnam war veterans are honored by the present memorial and that any additional memorialization is not necessary. If, however, it is decided that an additional memorial is warranted, we would strongly recommend that H.R. 3293 be amended to provide for the placement of this memorial on military lands within Washington, D.C. or its environs.

That concludes my prepared testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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