

Statement of
DISABLED VETERANS' LIFE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

Submitted by Mrs. Lois Pope

Co-Founder and Chairman

Before the House of Representatives

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Room 1324 Longworth House Office Building

Regarding

H.R. 4275

To amend Public Law 106-348 to extend the authorization for establishing a memorial in the District of Columbia or its environs to honor veterans who become disabled while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.

May 25, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the expedited consideration of H.R. 4275, and my thanks to members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak here today in support of extending the authorization for establishing a national memorial in our nation's capital to honor America's disabled veterans – the more than three million living brave military men and women who have given, and are continuing to give, so much of themselves to preserve and protect the freedoms that we all hold dear.

I am Lois Pope, the co-founder and chairman of The Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation, an organization created by an Act of Congress in 2000 (Public Law 106-348) and tasked with establishing a national memorial honoring veterans who became disabled while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States. The Memorial will celebrate these men and women who may be broken in body – but never in spirit.

I am honored to be joined here today by several disabled veterans who support this legislation, including Captain Leslie Smith, a veteran of the Bosnia conflict, who is serving as one of our most inspiring national spokespersons.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Representative Sue Kelly, a true friend to America's disabled veterans, for sponsoring H.R.4275, which would extend the Foundation's authorization. Although the Foundation has made considerable progress in its short life, its charter will expire at the end of 2007. Extending its charter until 2015 will provide ample time to raise the necessary private resources to complete construction of the Memorial.

With help from our sponsor, the National Parks Service, the Foundation has secured a Memorial site and a design concept. Both of which have been approved by the National Capital Planning Commission, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, National Capital Memorial Commission and the District of Columbia-Department of Transportation. No federal funds are being used for the Memorial's planning and construction. Only private funding will be solicited.

To date we have raised more than \$25 million of the \$65 million dollars needed to build the Memorial. Within the last two years alone, more than 550,000 individual Americans contributed in support of this Memorial. Local communities are staging fundraising events, state governments are making grants in the name of their states' veterans, national veteran service organizations are contributing and encouraging their members to participate, and America's leading corporations and foundations continue to make significant donations. This will truly be an American Memorial and I am deeply honored to be a part of it as well as being the inspiration for it. I have personally committed this year to match all public and private contributions up to a maximum of \$5 million.

The Foundation also thanks Representative Kelly for introducing H.R.1951 granting authorization to the U.S. Mint to strike a commemorative coin in 2010 to honor America's disabled veterans. There are currently 160 House cosponsors, nearing

the required 290 cosponsors needed for the bill to proceed. We want to thank the 11 members of this committee that have already signed on to H.R. 1951. For your convenience Representative Kelly just happens to have the cosponsor sign-up sheet here today for those of you still needing to sign it.

A companion Senate bill, S.633, introduced by Senator Tim Johnson, has already obtained the required two-thirds sponsors and is currently in mark-up for passage. The surcharge revenues gained from the sale of the coins along with private monies raised will help construct the Memorial.

This past year, the Memorial has become the center of several major planning developments that will significantly enhance its visibility in our nation's capital and complement the surrounding area. The National Capital Planning Commission's revitalization plan for the South Capitol Street corridor, the General Service Administration's Master Plan for 3rd and C Streets, and the new American Garden complex will create an urban space that is extraordinary. All participants in these revitalization efforts see the planned Memorial and its direct view of the Capitol building as a significant addition to the improvement of the urban landscape and public spaces in this neighborhood.

The Foundation is thankful for the support that has come forth from the American people to honor those who have honored us with their selfless duty. However, to be successful we need strong support and leadership by this Congress. Throughout our nation's history, service men and women have gone bravely into battle, risking their lives and livelihoods, sacrificing their safety to defend America. Sadly, for veterans seriously injured in the line of duty, leaving the battlefield does not mark the end of conflict. These permanently disabled soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen and coastguardsmen often carry home life-altering as well as life enduring disabilities – stern reminders of the price of freedom.

The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial will express lasting gratitude to the men and women whose lives were forever changed in their service to our country. It will also serve to educate current and future generations of Americans as to the human cost of war. With so many of our men and women in harm's way in Iraq, Afghanistan and regions we rarely read about or see on television, America needs to be reminded that courage, duty and honor are not lost values, thanks to our nation's veterans.

The Memorial will be accessible at all times to all visitors, especially the handicapped. It will be the first national military Memorial to honor disabled veterans, the first to represent all service branches, conflicts and generations, and the first to be specifically dedicated to our living and future heroes – disabled veterans whose service and sacrifices keep America free and strong.

And who are these living heroes? They are service men and women like those who have joined me here today.

There are over 3 million living disabled veterans in this country, whose ranks unfortunately grow daily. These men and women, soldiers of every race, creed, religion and color were severely injured while defending our freedom. You in this room and everyone else in Congress have done so much for our veterans. Now it's time we join hands to do even more, to give the Foundation the time we need to create this permanent tribute.

In their names, and in the names of their brother and sister disabled veterans, along with the growing number of American citizens who enthusiastically support the building of this Memorial, The Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation urges the Committee to approve extended authorization. We further urge prompt passage of HR 4275 by this Committee and the full House of Representatives. This bill is critical for our efforts to raise the necessary private funds and to build the Memorial in Washington, D.C.

In closing, I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of The Disabled Veterans LIFE Memorial Foundation in support of The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

Are there any questions from the distinguished members of the Committee that I might answer?

AND NOTE I WILL ANSWER ANY QUESTION EXCEPT MY AGE. I have a don't ask don't tell policy.