

**STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H.R. 6364 TO ESTABLISH A COMMISSION TO ENSURE A SUITABLE OBSERVANCE OF THE CENTENNIAL OF WORLD WAR I, TO DESIGNATE MEMORIALS TO THE SERVICE OF MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES IN WORLD WAR I, INCLUDING A NATIONAL WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL ON THE NATIONAL MALL IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**September 11, 2012**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior (Department) regarding H.R. 6364, a bill to establish a commission to ensure a suitable observance of the centennial of World War I, to designate memorials to the service of members of the United States Armed Forces in World War I, including a National World War I Memorial on the National Mall in the District of Columbia, and for other purposes.

As H.R. 6364 was only introduced yesterday, September 10, 2012, the Administration has not had sufficient time to fully review the legislation as introduced. Our testimony today is based upon a draft of the bill, and reflects comments provided on similar legislation earlier this year. We would like to reserve the right to submit additional comments about the introduced bill.

The Department appreciates and shares the sponsors' recognition of the sacrifices of Americans who served in World War I. The Department supports the recognition of those who served in World War I and we would like to continue working with Congress on appropriate ways to recognize that service.

With respect to the provisions of the bill, the Department has no objection to designating the Liberty Memorial of Kansas City at America's National World War I Museum as the National World War I Museum and Memorial, although we believe that a study to determine which of the various World War I Memorials in the United States would be best suited to be named the official National World War I Memorial would be appropriate. The Department defers to the General Services Administration on the establishment of the World War I Centennial Commission as this responsibility would not fall under the purview of the National Park Service. However, Congress has determined in the Commemorative Works Act that the Reserve, an area on the National Mall, is a completed work of civic art where no more memorials are to be located. Therefore, the Department has serious concerns about the placement of any new commemorative work in the Reserve and would like to work with the committee through the Commemorative Works Act process to find a more suitable location for a World War I memorial in the District of Columbia.

Section 10 of H.R. 6364 would authorize the World War I Memorial Foundation (Foundation) to establish a new commemorative work in the vicinity of Constitution Gardens in the District of Columbia, which is located within the Reserve. Section 8908 of the Commemorative Works Act precludes the addition of new memorials in the Reserve, defined as the great cross-axis of the Mall, from the United States Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, and the White House to the Jefferson

Memorial. However, this bill conflicts with original intent of the Commemorative Works Act, which was passed by Congress to govern the establishment and placement of memorials in the Nation's Capital so as to protect existing memorials, open space, and the integrity of the comprehensive design of the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans for the city of Washington. By designating the memorial site in Constitution Gardens, this bill exempts this proposed memorial from the Act's requirement that the site and design for the new memorial be developed in a public process that involves review and approval by the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.

World War I is an important era in American history that has been honored through a number of monuments throughout the nation and here in the District of Columbia. A national memorial to World War I veterans has already been established in Washington, D.C., near the White House, in Pershing Park, on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets. This memorial, authorized by the Congress in 1966 (P.L. 89-786) and constructed by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation and the American Battle Monuments Commission, includes a statue of General Pershing, as well as artwork detailing the major battles in World War I that involved U.S. troops. Quotations on this memorial include General Pershing's tribute to the officers and men of the American Expeditionary Forces of World War I and a commemoration of those who served in the United States Navy in World War I. Rather than duplicate this memorial by establishing a new memorial to World War I, the Department would encourage enhancement of the World War I Veterans Memorial in Pershing Park. We would be happy to work with the Foundation and the committee to explore this possibility.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be glad to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.