

**Opening Statement of Marcel C. Acosta
Executive Director, National Capital Planning Commission
Joint Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
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Good morning, Chairwoman Pratt and Members of the Joint Committee on the National Capital and External Territories. I am Marcel Acosta, Executive Director of the National Capital Planning Commission, also known as NCPC. NCPC is the federal agency that provides planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the National Capital Region, including Washington, DC. The twelve-member Commission includes three presidential appointees and representatives from Congress, federal agencies, and the District of Columbia.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak with you about NCPC's role in Washington's commemorative works process.

2011 was a watershed year for commemoration in Washington. We saw strong public interest in the unveiling of our newest memorial, honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We also marked the 25th anniversary of the Commemorative Works Act (CWA). Signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1986, this law formalized many ad hoc aspects of the commemorative process and is still the basis for how we make decisions on authorization, siting and design of memorials today.

Congress passed the CWA in an effort to preserve the integrity of the comprehensive design of Washington's L'Enfant and McMillan plans; to preserve, protect, and maintain the city's limited amount of open space; and to ensure that future memorials are appropriately designed, constructed, and located.

The CWA governs commemorative works on National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) lands. These include most public parks in Washington, such as The National Mall and the many circles, squares and other spaces that make up the historic L'Enfant City and where most new memorials are located. Memorials built on lands under jurisdiction of other entities, such as Department of Defense or local District of Columbia government, follow a separate process.

In summary, the CWA:

- Defines commemorative works;
- Provides guidelines for the subjects of commemorative works, such as requiring memorials to be of significance to the American people;
- Separates the legislative process from the site and design approval process:
 - Requires Congress to authorize each new commemorative work (subject) by separate law;
 - Requires NCPC and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) to approve site and design;
- Establishes a Reserve, where no new commemorative works may be constructed;

- Establishes a hierarchy of sites, shown in Appendix C (the most significant memorial subjects qualify for Area I and require a second authorization by law);
- Establishes the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, which advises the Secretary of the Interior, Congress, and sponsors on topics related to commemoration;
- Precludes the acknowledgement of donors on the sites of commemorative works;
- Authorizes NCPC and CFA to jointly develop design guidelines.

Commemoration is a complex setting of human expression no matter where one resides, but in Washington, as in many capital cities, commemoration takes on heightened significance. Our memorials reflect relationships among nations, of national remembrance, and of some of the most important events and figures in our nation's history. Our memorial landscape is truly a topic of genuine interest for Americans. Thus, we actively incorporate opportunities for public engagement during authorization, site selection and design. For example, NCPC holds monthly public meetings, and when memorial projects are submitted for site and design approval, our staff recommendations are made available for public comment. Members of the public may provide written or oral testimony directly to the Commission. NCPC requires compliance with environmental and historic preservation laws, which each include public consultation as part of the process.

One of the most important aspects of Washington's commemorative process is the relationship between public and private entities. Although Congress is responsible for authorizing each new subject by law, most memorials are privately initiated and funded by citizens groups or non-profit organizations. The memorial sponsor also proposes potential sites and selects the design team. NCPC and CFA are responsible for review and approval of site and design. Once the memorial is completed, the National Park Service maintains and interprets the work in perpetuity. On rare occasions, Congress may play a stronger role in initiating a new memorial.

Finally, the memorial landscape is ever-evolving. In an effort to remain engaged and proactive, NCPC and the agencies involved in the process periodically come together to jointly address issues of common interest for memorial sponsors and the public. Examples of plans include NCPC's 1997 *Legacy Plan*, which called for recentering Washington on the U.S. Capitol and encouraged the distribution of new museums and memorials to all quadrants of the city. The 2010 *Monumental Core Framework Plan* identified specific redevelopment strategies to bring this vision into reality. The 2001 *Memorials and Museums Master Plan* identified a diverse set of 100 sites throughout Washington where new memorials can be located. This document has successfully guided five recent projects to terrific locations off of the National Mall.

Our most recent study provides for the first time an opportunity to look closely at trends related to memorial content. This initiative included the development of the first ever publicly accessible catalog of memorials on federal land in Washington, with entries classified by attributes such as theme, key dates, and location. The data can be mapped and analyzed with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and is currently available in the Google platform online.

Thank you for inviting me to share NCPC's work on commemoration and to brief you on our role in the process. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

