

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1980, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE GOLD STAR MOTHERS NATIONAL MONUMENT FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL MONUMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

November 3, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1980, a bill that would authorize the Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation to establish a national monument in the District of Columbia.

The Department cannot support H.R. 1980 because it does not conform to the Commemorative Works Act. This position is consistent with the finding of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, which reported its views to the House Committee on Natural Resources on August 17, 2011.

This bill proposes to both establish a national monument to mothers of members of the Armed Forces who have died in the service to our country, and to designate the monument as a unit of the National Park System. H.R. 1980 also directs that the monument be established according to the requirements of the Commemorative Works Act of 1986.

The Department appreciated the opportunity to discuss the proposal with the Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation when it met with National Park Service staff and the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission. Of course we believe that recognition of the role of mothers of members of the Armed Forces is important. We also believe that commemoration should be accomplished in a manner consistent with the Commemorative Works Act as enacted by Congress. We also note that the Gold Star program itself is a commemorative program. It is to recognize and honor those who have sacrificed their lives in service to our Country, as well as their mothers. Memorials are not always bricks and mortar. The Gold Star program is an excellent example, and it is a commemoration that has endured in various ways for almost a century.

H.R. 1980 is in conflict with the Commemorative Works Act in two key areas. First, the Act states that a military commemorative work may be authorized only to commemorate a war or similar major military conflict, such as the Korean War, or a branch of the armed forces, such as the Navy Memorial. Secondly, the Act permits consideration of memorials only if the last surviving member of the group being commemorated has been dead for 25 years.

While the proposed commemoration is outside the scope of the Commemorative Works Act, other suitable options to honor the Gold Star Mothers could be explored.

The Department also notes that the legislation directs that the memorial be established as a unit of the National Park System. Ordinarily, the National Park Service does not recommend such

designation without first conducting a Congressionally-authorized Special Resource Study to determine if the resource warrants designation as a national park.

We further note that H.R. 1980 does not contain language providing for the disposition of unspent funds that may be privately raised for a memorial. The Department recommends legislative sponsors include such provisions in proposals to establish memorials regardless of the proposed location. Should the committee choose to advance this legislation in some form, the Department would encourage consideration of language to provide direction regarding unspent funds and we can assist the committee with suggested language.

That concludes our prepared testimony on H.R. 1980, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.