

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN P. MARTIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 2419 AND H.R. 4882, BILLS TO ENSURE THE PROPER REMEMBRANCE OF VIETNAM VETERANS AND THE VIETNAM WAR BY PROVIDING A DEADLINE FOR THE DESIGNATION OF A VISITOR CENTER FOR THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL.

May 16, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 2419 and H.R. 4882, bills to ensure the proper remembrance of Vietnam Veterans and the Vietnam War by designating a site for a visitor center for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The House of Representatives passed H.R. 4882 as amended on March 28, 2006, by a vote of 404-4.

The Department supports development of a visitor center (center) for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We also support the processes governing such development as set forth in the Commemorative Works Act (CWA), which separates the authorization of memorials and the site and design approval processes and provides for public input, as well as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which describes a vision for balancing environmental, cultural, and economic goals and provides for cooperative problem solving by requiring public comment on the environmental effects of federal actions.

We are making significant progress in the site approval process for the center as provided for under the CWA and the National Park Service (NPS) is nearing completion of the Environmental Assessment provided for under NEPA that was requested by the National Capital Planning

Commission (NCPC). The NPS plans to release the Environmental Assessment for public comment before the end of May and submit our preferred site for the center to the NCPC by June 30, for approval at its August 3 meeting. If the NCPC agrees with our preferred site, the site selection process will be completed this summer.

S. 2419 and H.R. 4882 would amend section 6 of Public Law 96-297, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Act, by authorizing the location of the center for the memorial at Henry Bacon Drive, 23rd Street, Constitution Avenue and the Lincoln Memorial in the District of Columbia. S. 2419 also would authorize a deadline for the final approval of the center no later than 30 days from the date of enactment of this legislation in section 2(c). Should the subcommittee decide to move forward, the Department recommends that the additional language in section 2(c) of S. 2419 be removed because it is confusing and does not make a distinction between the site selection and the design process. The siting process for the center is currently underway; however, the center has not yet undergone the design phase and those decisions cannot be completed within 30 days.

The CWA developed a process for establishing memorials in the Nation's Capital. This process has worked well for 20 years, and we support this process. While it has been amended, these

The CWA identifies the roles and responsibilities of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, the NCPC, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and the Secretary of the Interior. The NCPC and the CFA both play critical roles in the site selection and design process. We believe that the expertise offered and the approvals required by these entities as well as the process of gaining the approval of the Secretary of the Interior has resulted in new memorials of

the highest quality. In addition, the CWA provides the American people with the opportunity to be involved in the decisions regarding how the historical events and persons will be honored in the Nation's Capital by providing public involvement in the siting and design of the memorials.

Some of the organizations authorized by public law to erect memorials have been frustrated by the delays brought about by the opinions of these public bodies regarding the location or design of their projects. But by the time these memorials were dedicated, many have agreed that their commemorative work was of a higher quality due to the process used along the path to completion.

The Act authorizing the center states that the provisions relating to siting of memorials under the CWA would apply. This includes approval of the site by both the NCPC and CFA. The CFA reviewed and conditionally approved the site at its September 15, 2005 meeting with the proviso that the design not detract from the Lincoln Memorial and Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Their conditional approval was based on a documentation of alternative sites evaluated for the center, which followed a similar format that other memorial sponsors have used since the enactment of the CWA. As mentioned above, NPS will complete its portion of the process by the end of June with the NCPC's consideration of NPS' site submission in August. We, thus, plan to complete the siting process by the end of this summer.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other subcommittee members might have.