

# The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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The Honorable Ted Poe, Chair  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Poe:

This letter is to provide comments of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City on H.R. 938, a Bill "To establish a commission to ensure a suitable observance of the centennial of World War I and to designate memorials to the service of men and women of the United States in World War I". H.R. 938 was the subject of a hearing by the Subcommittee on January 24, 2012.

H.R. 938 would designate (rename) the "District of Columbia War Memorial" as the "District of Columbia and National World War I Memorial" and The Liberty Memorial of Kansas City at the America's National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Missouri would be designated as the "National World War I Museum and Memorial". As you know, there is now a general consensus in the Washington, D.C. civic and political community that the "D.C. War Memorial" should continue to be known by that name. The Committee of 100 on the Federal City supports that position.

The Committee of 100 has long been concerned with protecting and enhancing the various elements of the National Mall. The District of Columbia War Memorial was completed and designated in 1931, and occupies a location on a portion of the National Mall that was developed a few years earlier, generally in accordance with the McMillan Commission Plan. The District of Columbia War Memorial honors those residents of the District of Columbia who served in the military services (more than 26,000, including 499 who gave their lives) in the World War (now referred to as World War I).

The Committee of 100 is concerned that appropriate steps be taken to provide for suitable interpretation of the D.C. War Memorial. The Committee of 100 presented testimony on the restoration of the District of Columbia War Memorial before the National Capital Planning Commission on October 1, 2009. A copy of that testimony is attached.

We believe that some points made in that testimony are even more pertinent today since the restoration and rehabilitation of the D.C. World War Memorial has been completed and our country is now more than two years closer to centennial observance of World War I (2014-2018) which will include the centennial of the entry of the United States into the war in April 1917.

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City commends the National Park Service for the recently completed work of restoring the District of Columbia War Memorial and in improving the landscape setting of the Memorial. However, at the present time there is no interpretive signing at the site to explain the purpose and background of the Memorial (other than the words carved in stone on the memorial).

The District of Columbia War Memorial occupies an especially important site on the National Mall. It is located south of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool and north of the Tidal Basin. Nearby are the World War II Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Korean War Veterans Memorial, as well as the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. Nearby to the south, on the west side of the Tidal Basin, are the recently completed Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and the Franklin Roosevelt Memorial. Further south is the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. Although the District of Columbia War Memorial is a “local” memorial, this special location on the National Mall means that the millions of visitors (some local visitors but primarily visitors from across the United States and around the world) who will see it each year will view it in a national context.

It is therefore important that appropriate interpretive information be provided. The Committee of 100 on the Federal City recommends that the Congress direct the National Park Service to provide appropriate interpretation of the District of Columbia War Memorial. The Committee of 100 believes that three key points should be made:

- 1) The background and purpose of the Memorial should be explained, including information on the number of District residents who served in World War I. The recent restoration of the Memorial should be noted.
- 2) The point should be made that residents of the District of Columbia have served in all the wars of this country since the city was founded in 1791, despite not enjoying the full rights of American citizens.
- 3) The point should be made that the District of Columbia War Memorial was one of hundreds of local memorials to the World War (I) that were constructed across the United States in the years after 1918. We understand that over 1,500 such local memorials have been identified in cities and towns across America and that there are probably many more.

General information about World War I memorials across the United States will help place the District of Columbia War Memorial in a larger national context. In the immediate future, the National Park Service should provide this type of background information on a series of information panels, located near the Memorial but designed so as not to distract from it. In the relatively near future, in time for the World War I commemoration period, this information should be provided on a durable and timeless material such as stone near the memorial. Careful design will be needed to ensure that the information panels are compatible with the Memorial setting.

The District of Columbia War Memorial is located on the axis of 19<sup>th</sup> Street, NW. but in fact this relationship is not now visible. The Committee of 100 suggests that studies be made to see if a vista could be opened along the 19<sup>th</sup> Street axis, thus making the Memorial visible from north of the National Mall.

The World War I commemoration period will provide an opportunity for Americans to reflect on this important period in our country’s history. In Washington, visitors will be able to visit the DC War Memorial. In addition, there are numerous other nearby sites from the World I period and the following years, or sites that commemorate

that period, including the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery, the Pershing Memorial on Pennsylvania Avenue, various military memorials, Wilson House and other sites. There will undoubtedly be exhibits and programs about World War at our national museums and at other locations.

Visitors can also better understand how Washington, D.C. changed in the World War period and the following decade. For example, the Lincoln Memorial was completed in 1922. In other words, during the World War I commemoration period, both local residents and visitors will be able to think about that period through visits to different sites that are related to the World War I period in some way. The District of Columbia War Memorial will be an important element in that network of relevant sites.

In summary, the Committee of 100 on the Federal City supports the concept that name of the “District of Columbia War Memorial” remain as it is now, but strongly recommends that additional interpretive steps be taken to make the Memorial a more visible and meaningful element on the National Mall, and to take steps to increase the educational and historical value of the Memorial in the national World War I commemoration period.

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City recommends that H.R.938 be appropriately amended to retain the present name of the District of Columbia War Memorial and to make its history more visible and understandable so it has greater meaning in a local and national context.

Sincerely,

*John Fondersmith*

John Fondersmith, AICP

*Richard Houghton*

Richard Houghton, AIA, Chair  
Planning Subcommittee

Attachment