

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

September 7, 2021

Dear Gold Star Families,

Thank you for your letter. Both as Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee and as a proud American, I greatly honor and appreciate your loved ones' service to our country. Their sacrifice, like that of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and others who fell in battle before them, deserves a lasting place of remembrance. I was proud to support the creation of a national memorial in their honor in 2017, when Congress voted to authorize your request through the *Global War on Terrorism Memorial Act*.

As you know, Congress voted in 2017 to authorize the Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation (Foundation) to build a memorial in Washington, D.C., an effort I supported. That vote was the first step in a standardized process spelled out by Congress in the *Commemorative Works Act of 1986* (40 USC 89 et seq.), as amended in 2003, for the establishment and eventual construction of any such memorial in Washington. Had Congress objected to the proposal, it would have gone no further. I can assure you that my support and that of my colleagues for your proposal to build a memorial is as strong today as it was then.

The *Commemorative Works Act*, as amended, establishes the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (Commission) to advise the Secretary of the Interior and the Administrator of General Services, as appropriate, on policy and procedures for the establishment of, and proposals to establish, commemorative works in the District of Columbia and its environs. Congress passed this law and its amendments in recognition of the fact that Congress itself is not in the business of designing parks or making decisions about landscape architecture. Leaving construction, siting and architectural decisions to Congress had proven cumbersome and unrealistic, and Congress made the entirely correct decision to authorize a Commission of dedicated professionals to oversee future decisions. The current process ensures fair and independent consideration of the authorization, location and design of new memorials.

When Congress amended the *Commemorative Works Act* in 2003, it established what is known as the “Reserve” area of the Capitol region, declaring that portion of the National Mall a completed work of civic art as it stood. Congress clearly declared that within this completed work of art, “the siting of new commemorative works is prohibited.” The *Act* identifies the Reserve as “the great cross-axis of the Mall” extending from the United States Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, and from the White House to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial.

An authorized memorial, including the one you propose, may be sited in what is known as Area I, which is directly adjacent to the Reserve. Area I includes land on Theodore Roosevelt Island and abuts Arlington National Cemetery, offering considerable public access and appropriate space for memorials of truly national stature. After seeking a recommendation from the Commission, siting in Area I requires a subsequent act of Congress for final approval. Supporters of the construction of the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial, which broke ground at their approved site between the banks of the Potomac River and the Lincoln Memorial, followed this process to everyone’s great satisfaction. Their success represented nothing more and nothing less than the process working as intended.

The Global War on Terrorism Memorial merits consideration for Area I. The global war on terror is our nation’s longest military conflict and – in my view – qualifies as an event of “preeminent historical and lasting significance to the United States” as outlined in the *Commemorative Works Act*. There is no disagreement between us on the merit of the memorial you propose.

However, I understand that advocates for the memorial are seeking an exemption from the standard process and from the prohibition on new memorials in the Reserve. H.R. 1115, the *Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act*, contemplates the eventual siting of the memorial itself, providing that very exemption and identifying specific locations for the proposed memorial. As pointed out in the [National Park Service testimony](#) presented before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, there are issues we need to resolve to everyone’s satisfaction before finalizing the bill. With those issues in mind, it is important that this Committee hold hearings of its own to better understand the merits of the proposal and determine the best path forward. As my staff puts together the calendar for the remainder of the year, I assure you that I will be happy to hold formal proceedings on the bill.

Regards,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources