

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

December 30, 1981

Honorable Ronald Reagan  
President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We, the undersigned, respectfully urge you to request that Secretary of Interior James Watt withhold his signature from any documents that provide necessary permission to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, or its designees, to break ground to construct the so-called Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The enclosed article by James H. Webb, Jr. fully expresses our view that the design of this memorial conveys more shame than honor.

This proposed construction has been aptly described by a member of the design selection jury: "In a city of white memorials rising, this will be a dark memorial receding."

We feel this design makes a political statement of shame and dishonor, rather than an expression of our national pride at the courage, patriotism and nobility of all who served.

A new jury ought to be appointed, less intent on perpetuating national humiliation no matter how artistically expressed.

We who voted for enabling legislation to accomplish a Vietnam Veterans Memorial feel betrayed by the ultimate design selected. We share the view that this alleged memorial is "a black ditch that does not recognize or honor those who served" and fervently hope you and Secretary Watt will intercede to prevent this depressing and undignifying memorial from representing our Nation's public statement about men and women who deserve far better from us.

unedifying

Sincerely,

*Henry J. Hyde*

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Dear Republican Colleague:

I hate to intrude on your holiday respite, but a situation has arisen that requires immediate attention.

On March 1st -- two months from now -- ground will be broken on the Washington Mall to construct an alleged memorial to the Vietnam Veterans that, to my mind, is more of an insult than a monument.

Please study the enclosed artist's rendition of this proposed monument, which my office obtained from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.

What do you make of it?

In an article appearing May 7, 1981 in the WASHINGTON POST, the following appears:

"Washington architect Paul D. Spreigren, who served as a professional adviser to the memorial fund, quoted one of the jurors as saying: 'In a city of white memorials rising, this will be a dark memorial receding.' He said the jury, composed of two architects, two landscape architects, three sculptors and an architectural editor, had decided on a minimalist design because 'people can bring to it whatever they want.'"

How does a "dark memorial receding" honor the memory of those Americans "who died by serving our country in Vietnam, the memory of those who were wounded and the memory of those who served"? These foregoing criteria were the instructions given the selection jury by the VVM. Moreover, in 1980 when Congress authorized the use of public land for this memorial, the resolution provided that it should "honor and recognize the men and women of the Armed Forces .. who served in the Vietnam war." This underground black memorial lists only the names of the dead. No mention or consideration is given the rest who served. This design then, violates the provisions of the Congressional resolution.

Another guideline was to avoid having "political or military content." It seems to me, in words of Vietnam veteran and author James H. Webb, Jr. that this design is not a memorial but a mockery to Vietnam service, "... a wailing wall for future anti-draft and anti-nuclear demonstrators."

Please read Mr. Webb's article from the WALL STREET JOURNAL (enclosed) as well as Pat Bucha's recent CHICAGO TRIBUNE column. Most important -- recall the inspiring memorials that honor our service men and women everywhere, and then look at this proposed memorial that has shame not honor and pride as its essential message. The "Black Hole of Calcutta" needs no recreation on the Washington Mall, no matter how many architects think it is artistic.

If you agree with me that Secretary of Interior James Watt must not execute documents granting necessary permission to break National Park Service ground, and that a new memorial selection jury be formed composed of persons more interested in honoring our Vietnam Veterans, rather than using our war dead to perpetuate a guilt trip on America, please call my Washington office (202-225-4561) and tell my staff you have authorized your signature on the enclosed letter to the President and Secretary Watt.

Time is of the essence!

HENRY J. HYDE