

TESTIMONY OF ROBERT W. DOUBEK, PROJECT DIRECTOR  
VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND  
BEFORE THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS  
MARCH 9, 1982

MISTER CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION:

GOOD MORNING. I AM ROBERT DOUBEK, THE PROJECT DIRECTOR OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND (VVMF). AS YOU MAY RECALL, WE ORIGINALLY APPEARED BEFORE YOU LAST JULY, WHEN YOU APPROVED THE CONCEPT AND THE SITE LOCATION OF THE MEMORIAL. IN OCTOBER WE APPEARED TO PRESENT SELECTIONS OF STONE, AND IN NOVEMBER YOU APPROVED THE DESIGN AS DEVELOPED. IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE HERE AGAIN. I THANK YOU FOR PLACING THIS MATTER ON YOUR AGENDA TODAY, AND WE LIKewise WISH TO EXTEND OUR APPRECIATION TO SECRETARY WATT FOR REQUESTING YOUR EARLY ACTION.

AS YOU MAY KNOW, VVMF IS A NONPROFIT, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION FOUNDED, DIRECTED, AND MANAGED BY VIETNAM VETERANS. WE OBTAINED THE DESIGN CONCEPT FOR THE MEMORIAL THROUGH THE METHOD OF A DESIGN COMPETITION, WHICH BECAME THE LARGEST EVER HELD IN THE UNITED STATES. WE CONTINUE TO BE EXTREMELY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE WINNING DESIGN, AND ARE GRATIFIED THAT IT RECEIVED YOUR SWIFT APPROVAL AS WELL AS THAT OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION AND THE NATIONAL CAPITAL MEMORIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE. WE WERE ALSO GRATIFIED THAT NUMEROUS CORPORATIONS, THE MAJOR VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS, AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF INDIVIDUAL AMERICANS HAVE CONTRIBUTED THE FUNDS TO REALIZE THE DESIGN.

FROM THE START OUR HOPE HAS BEEN THAT THIS MEMORIAL WOULD BECOME, IN ADDITION TO A LONG OVERDUE TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO SERVED IN THEIR COUNTRY'S LONGEST WAR, A SYMBOL OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AS WELL. THE EARLY AND ENTHUSIASTIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE DESIGN BY A BROAD SPECTRUM OF AMERICANS LED US TO BELIEVE THAT OUR AIM WAS WELL ON ITS WAY TOWARDS REALIZATION. WE THEREFORE HAVE BEEN SADDENED BY THE FACT THAT THE DESIGN HAS SPARKED A LIMITED BUT SIGNIFICANT CONTROVERSY AMONG OUR BROTHER VIETNAM VETERANS.

THE BASIC CRITICISM CENTERED NOT SO MUCH ON WHAT THE DESIGN IS BUT ON THE FACT THAT IT LACKS ELEMENTS SPECIFICALLY SYMBOLIC OF THE HONORABLE SERVICE OF THE VETERANS AND OF THEIR DEVOTION TO COUNTRY. IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS IT BECAME APPARENT TO VVMF THAT THESE CONCERNS NEEDED TO BE ADDRESSED.

THUSLY, WE REQUESTED SENATOR JOHN WARNER OF VIRGINIA, ONE OF THE EARLIEST AND MOST DEDICATED CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORTERS OF THE PROJECT, TO ARRANGE AND MODERATE A MEETING AMONG VVMF AND THE LEADING CRITICS OF THE DESIGN, INCLUDING MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, TO ATTEMPT TO ACCOMMODATE THEIR CONCERNS. AFTER LENGTHY DISCUSSION, AND WITH THE SKILLFUL LEADERSHIP OF SENATOR WARNER, A CONSENSUS WAS ACHIEVED BY WHICH WE HOPE TO MOVE AHEAD ON SCHEDULE TOWARD COMPLETION OF THE MEMORIAL. UNDER THE CONSENSUS, VVMF AGREED TO ADD AN AMERICAN FLAG AND A SCULPTURE OF A SERVICEMAN AT THE SITE. IN TURN, THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BASIC DESIGN THAT HAD ALREADY BEEN APPROVED WOULD MOVE FORWARD ON SCHEDULE.

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LAST MONTH WE MET WITH SECRETARY WATT TO EXPLAIN THE AGREEMENT. HE EXPRESSED HIS PLEASURE THAT AN ACCOMMODATION HAD BEEN REACHED AND INDICATED HIS OWN WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT THE BASIC DESIGN AND THE CONCEPTS OF THE ADDITIONS. HOWEVER, AS THESE ADDITIONS ARE BY LAW SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THIS COMMISSION, SECRETARY WATT, BEFORE ISSUING A CONSTRUCTION PERMIT, NOW SEEKS YOUR ACCEPTANCE OF THEM IN CONCEPT.

WE ARE ALSO PAINFULLY AWARE THAT THESE ADDITIONS TO THE DESIGN MAY THEMSELVES SPARK CONTROVERSY, FOR IT IS RARE THAT THE DESIGN OF ANY MAJOR NATIONAL MEMORIAL CAN DEVELOP IMMEDIATE CONSENSUS AS TO ITS POTENTIAL POWER, APPROPRIATENESS AND AESTHETIC EXCELLENCE. WE WISH TO AVOID SUCH ADDED CONTROVERSY. WE THEREFORE WANT TO ASSURE YOU THAT WE WILL DO ALL THAT IS IN OUR POWER TO INSURE THAT THE DESIGN, PLACEMENT AND PROPORTIONS OF THESE ADDITIONS ARE DEVELOPED IN A MANNER THAT WILL RESPECT THE BEAUTY AND SIMPLICITY OF THE APPROVED DESIGN.

WE HAVE BEGUN TO EVALUATE ALTERNATE PROPOSALS FOR LOCATING THE FLAG AND SCULPTURE. FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE REVIEWED ALL THE ENTRIES IN THE DESIGN COMPETITION AND HAVE CULLED OUT AND REVIEWED ALL CONTAINING WORKS OF SCULPTURE. SENATOR WARNER WILL CHAIR A MEETING THIS WEEK TO DISCUSS THESE ENTRIES AND ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE ARTISTS WHO WILL BE INVITED TO SUBMIT CONCEPTUAL MODELS. WE INVITE THIS COMMISSION'S SUGGESTIONS IN THIS DELICATE SELECTION MATTER.

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WHEN THE SPECIFICS FOR THESE ADDITIONS ARE DEVELOPED, THEY WILL BE SUBMITTED TO YOU FOR YOUR DETAILED REVIEW AND APPROVAL. WE HOPE TO COMPLETE THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW SO THAT ALL ELEMENTS CAN BE COMPLETED FOR A DEDICATION OF THE MEMORIAL ON VETERANS DAY THIS NOVEMBER. YET, YOUR ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF THESE ADDITIONS IS NEEDED TODAY IN ORDER THAT CONSTRUCTION OF THE BASIC DESIGN MAY BE BEGUN THIS MONTH AND COMPLETED BY THAT TIME.

CONCURRING WITH THE VVMF IN THIS TESTIMONY ARE THE AMERICAN LEGION, THE MARINE CORPS LEAGUE, THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS, MRS. REGINA WILK OF THE AMERICAN GOLD STAR MOTHERS, MR. MILTON COPULUS OF THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION, AND BRIGADIER GENERAL GEORGE PRICE, USA (RET). THE THREE INDIVIDUALS AS WELL AS SPOKESMEN FOR THE ORGANIZATIONS ARE PRESENT. IN THE INTEREST OF SAVING TIME, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE NOT PREPARED TESTIMONY, BUT WILL BE HAPPY TO ANSWER QUESTIONS. I WISH TO NOTE THAT MRS. WILK, GENERAL PRICE, THE LEGION, AND THE VFW HAVE BEEN CONTINUOUS SUPPORTERS OF THE PROJECT, WHILE MR. COPULUS AND THE MARINE COPR LEAGUE HAVE BEEN AMONG THOSE WHO MOST STRONGLY BELIEVED THAT THE ADDITIONS WERE NECESSARY. THE PRESENCE OF ALL HERE TODAY IN SUPPORT OF THE BASIC DESIGN AND THE ADDITIONS REPRESENTS A COMING TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOAL OF EXPEDITIOUSLY COMPLETING THE PROJECT.

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IN CONCLUSION, I THANK YOU AGAIN FOR CONSIDERING THIS MATTER TODAY, AND ON BEHALF OF THE 2.7 MILLION AMERICANS WHO SERVED THEIR COUNTRY IN VIETNAM, I ASK THAT YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO PROCEED WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS LONG OVERDUE TRIBUTE.