

Written Testimony for the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

H.R. 1664 (Rep. Marc Veasey), To authorize the National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs, and for other purposes.

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Medal of Honor Recipient and National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation board member

Thursday, May 27, 2021

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee.

It is a privilege to be with you today to discuss the National Medal of Honor Monument Act. Before I continue, I would like to thank Congressman Veasey and Congressman Moore, a member of this subcommittee, for their leadership in sponsoring this important bill.

An estimated 40 million people have served in the United States Armed Forces since the Civil War. Fewer than 4,000 have received the Medal of Honor. I am humbled to be one of those 3,508.

Like my fellow recipients, I don't wear this Medal for myself. Each time I put it on, I do so for the men and women I fought alongside, for all those who serve, and especially for those who made the ultimate sacrifice I never got the chance to return home.

There was a time, not too long ago, when there were hundreds of living Medal of Honor recipients. Today, there are just 67 including Colonel Ralph Puckett who just received the Medal from President Biden last week. Colonel Puckett is 94 and served in Korea. He is now one of only four living Medal of Honor recipient from the Korean war.

Last month, we lost recipient Charles Coolidge from WWII leaving Hershel "Woody" Williams as the last living recipient from that war. Coolidge is one of three recipients who have passed away in 2021.

I tell you this to underscore the urgency and timeliness of the National Medal of Honor Monument Act which is before you. While this monument won't be erected to or for myself and my fellow recipients, I know we'd all like to be around to see it completed. So, we sincerely appreciate you scheduling this hearing today and your continued swift consideration.

In February 2020, myself and General Patrick Brady, a fellow Medal of Honor recipient, were able to testify at a hearing of the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission. We had a robust discussion

about this project and the significant impact it will have on the country, and we were very happy to earn their support. I believe this committee has a copy of the Commission's letter of support.

One of the unifying parts of the Medal of Honor is that it covers all branches of the military and every war since the Civil War. It is timeless and inclusive. Additionally, recipients of the Medal have come from all races, religions, and points on the political spectrum. While most were born in the United States, many were first generation Americans. What we have in common is love of country, willingness to serve our fellow man, and a strongly held belief in the values the Medal of Honor represents.

It is these values: courage and sacrifice, commitment and integrity, citizenship and patriotism which are the foundation of the Medal and are the foundation of our nation. This monument will be more about these shared values than individual acts of valor.

These are the values which guided us on the battlefield and in our lives ones we returned home. We believe these same values will inspire current and future generations of Americans in their daily lives. Whether they face difficult situations or decisions and find strength in our stories or are simply lifted by the knowledge we all have these shared values within us.

Recipients of the Medal of Honor aren't unique or special. Wearing this Medal does, however, open doors and afford us unique opportunities. One of those opportunities is to have a voice in the public arena and to be a force for good in a world which is too often divided.

The great thing about this project is how it has brought together Americans from every walk of life, every state in the union, and is even supported here on Capitol Hill in a completely bipartisan way.

We are hopeful that in these divided times, we can all find a moment of unity as we recognize our shared values through the Medal of Honor as well as the contributions great patriots have made to this country.

The National Medal of Honor Monument, like the Medal of Honor around my neck, will be a tribute for ALL Americans. Not just those who wear the Medal.

Thank you again for inviting me to join you today. We sincerely appreciate your interest in this historic project.