

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 11, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon,  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin,

We write to you today to demand that the Department of Defense immediately suspend all removal activities related to the Reconciliation Monument located in Arlington National Cemetery until Congress completes the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations process. As its removal does not align with the original intent of Congress, outlined in Section 370 of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (P.L. 116-283)<sup>1</sup>, the House of Representatives took action to prevent the removal of the Reconciliation Monument in the Fiscal Year 2024 Department of Defense Appropriations Act.<sup>2</sup> The Department of Defense must comply with this request or risk denigrating the delicate balance of the principles of separation of powers between Congress and the Executive, outlined in the Constitution.

As you well know, in 1898, following the Spanish-American War, where Union and Confederate veterans fought side-by-side under one flag, President William McKinley declared in the heart of the South, Atlanta, Georgia, that the U.S. government would commit to sharing in the burden of honoring and properly burying the Confederate dead, stating, “sectional feelings no longer holds back the love we feel for each other. The old flag waves over us in peace with new glories.”<sup>3</sup> In 1900, Congress authorized Confederate remains to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, and in 1906, Secretary of War, William Howard Taft, permitted construction of a monument honoring our country’s new shared reconciliation from its troubled divisions. Finally, in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson unveiled this new memorial to national unity – designed by a Jewish-American sculptor, the memorial is topped with a woman crowned by an olive wreath to symbolize peace.<sup>4</sup>

Beginning with the unveiling of the statue and carrying on through modern times, each year, it is custom for the President to send a wreath to the memorial. This tradition, which demonstrates tremendous national unity and respect, has been carried on regardless of the party or politics of the

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<sup>1</sup> [Section 370 of the William M. \(Mac\) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 \(P.L. 116-283\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> [H.Amdt.364 to H.R.4365](#), introduced by Rep. Andrew S. Clyde (R-GA), and passed the House of Representatives on September 27, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> [Section 16](#), Arlington National Cemetery

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

sitting President. Even President Barack Obama understood the importance of the Reconciliation Monument in the context of what it stands for, unity not division, when he continued the presidential tradition of sending a wreath to the monument in 2009.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, former Democrat U.S. Senator Jim Webb from Virginia, a decorated Marine Corps officer who served combat tours in Vietnam and as the Secretary of the Navy, recently published an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal about the Reconciliation Monument at Arlington. In his op-ed, Senator Webb describes his own journey of reconciliation following his combat tours in Vietnam. He explains how he hosted a delegation of Vietnamese officials in Washington to encourage them to be peaceful toward former South Vietnamese veterans, who were labeled and treated as traitors after the war. Senator Webb recalls how to make his point to the delegation, he brought them to the Reconciliation Monument in Arlington, pointing across the Potomac toward the Lincoln Memorial, indicating that old wounds can be healed. The Virginia Democrat concludes, “If [the monument] is taken apart and removed... it would send a different message, one of a deteriorating society willing to erase the generosity of its past, in favor of bitterness and misunderstanding.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite bipartisan support for this monument, the Naming Commission, established by the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, clearly overstepped its legislative authority when it recommended that the Department of the Army remove the Reconciliation Monument from Arlington National Cemetery. The Naming Commission’s authority, provided by Congress, empowers these individuals to recommend removal of “all names, symbols, displays, monuments, and paraphernalia that honor or commemorate the Confederate States of America.”<sup>7</sup> Yet, as described previously, the Reconciliation Monument does not honor nor commemorate the Confederacy; the memorial commemorates reconciliation and national unity. Furthermore, the Naming Commission’s authority explicitly prohibits the desecration of grave sites. Considering the hundreds of gravestones encircling the monument, it would be impossible for these graves to remain untouched if the Department of the Army proceeds with its proposed removal of the monument – both being a clear violation of Congress’ enacted statute and legislative intent.<sup>8</sup>

For all of the reasons described previously, earlier this year, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4365, the Fiscal Year 2024 Department of Defense Appropriations bill, which included House Amendment 364, introduced by Rep. Andrew Clyde (R-GA), that would prevent the Department of Defense from using FY24 funds to administer, implement, or enforce (1) the proposed action outlined in the Notice published by the Department of Army to the Federal Register on August 4, 2023 (88 Fed. Reg. 51786); or (2) recommendations of the Naming Commission regarding any monument in Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> [Save the Confederate Memorial at Arlington](#), Former United States Senator Jim Webb (D-VA), Wall Street Journal, August 18, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Subsection (a) of [Section 370 of the William M. \(Mac\) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 \(P.L. 116-283\)](#).

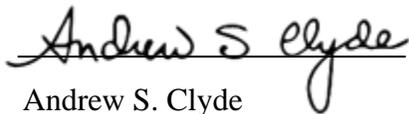
<sup>8</sup> Subsection (j) of [Section 370 of the William M. \(Mac\) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 \(P.L. 116-283\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> [H.Amdt.364 to H.R.4365](#), introduced by Rep. Andrew S. Clyde (R-GA), and passed the House of Representatives on September 27, 2023.

Therefore, we are demanding that the Department of Defense immediately suspend all removal activities of the Reconciliation Monument located in Arlington National Cemetery until Congress completes the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations process. The Department of Defense must respect Congress' clear legislative intentions regarding the Naming Commission's legislative authority, and to move forward with removal of the Reconciliation Monument would be a clear affront to the separation of powers principles outlined by our Founding Fathers in our Constitution.

We look forward to your response by December 15, 2023.

Sincerely,



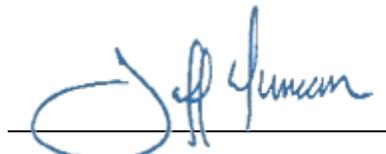
Andrew S. Clyde  
Member of Congress



Mike Rogers  
Member of Congress



Ken Calvert  
Member of Congress



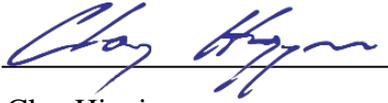
Jeff Duncan  
Member of Congress



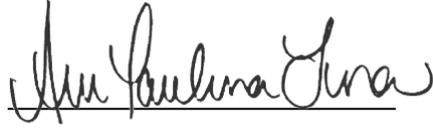
Andy Biggs  
Member of Congress



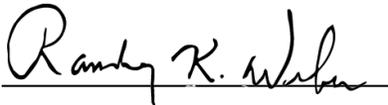
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Member of Congress



Clay Higgins  
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Anna Paulina Luna  
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Randy K. Weber  
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Michael Cloud  
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Member of Congress



Eric Burlison  
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Andy Harris, M.D.  
Member of Congress

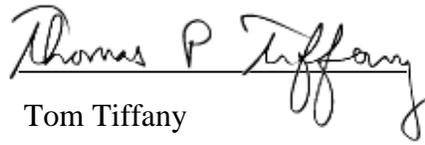


Bill Posey  
Member of Congress



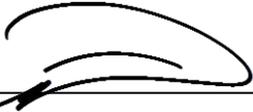
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Dan Bishop  
Member of Congress



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Tom Tiffany  
Member of Congress



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Scott DesJarlais, M.D.  
Member of Congress



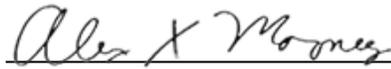
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Harriet M. Hageman  
Member of Congress



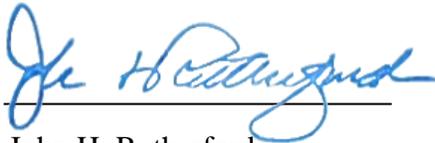
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Glenn Grothman  
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Alex Mooney  
Member of Congress



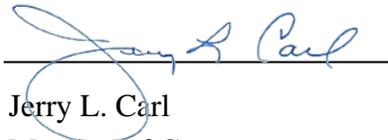
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John H. Rutherford  
Member of Congress



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Chuck Edwards  
Member of Congress



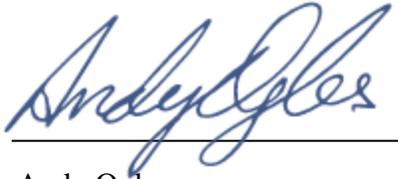
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Member of Congress



Lisa C. McClain  
Member of Congress



Matthew M. Rosendale, Sr.  
Member of Congress



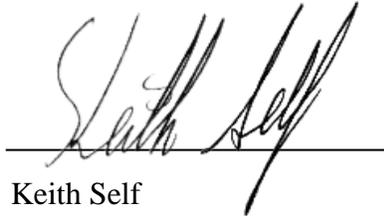
Robert B. Aderholt  
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August Pfluger  
Member of Congress



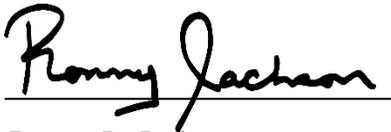
Keith Self  
Member of Congress



John Carter  
Member of Congress



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.  
Member of Congress



Ronny L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



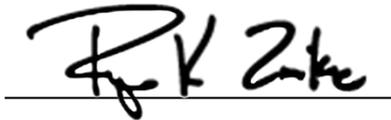
Sam Graves  
Member of Congress



Ben Cline  
Member of Congress



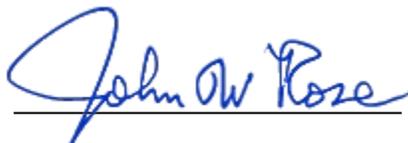
Russell Fry  
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Ryan Zinke  
Member of Congress



Lance Gooden  
Member of Congress



John Rose  
Member of Congress



Wesley P. Hunt  
Member of Congress

CC:

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