

November 10, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Chairman,

Unless H.R. 1949, the National Liberty Memorial Clarification Act, is approved by Congress before 2015 ends, the preferred location for a memorial to African American gifts to liberty and Independence may no longer be available or be so embedded in uncertainty that further efforts to secure it would be fruitless. The House approved the bill unanimously in September. National Mall Liberty Fund DC is optimistic that you will schedule a hearing as soon as possible and recommend that the Energy Committee report H.R. 1949.

H.R. 1949 would transfer the site and design responsibilities of the General Services Administration to the Department of Agriculture under the Commemorative Works Act. This would cure the duplication of effort, unnecessary and crippling delay and the use of Federal resources on employee time and constraints not required by the CWA. USDA, not GSA, would coordinate site and design approval with the National Capital Planning Commission and Commission of Fine Arts. This is a unique situation where the land owner, GSA, does not actually manage the property. Decades ago, GSA delegated the management of the landscape around the Jamie L. Whitten Building to USDA. USDA currently is using that authority to renovate the grounds, from 14th Street and Independence Avenue to Jefferson Drive and 12th Street.

The plans include the construction of perimeter security and a People's Garden to camouflage the installation. The garden would honor agriculture to which, until the American Revolution, the enslaved were doomed with scarcely no avenues to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The National Liberty Memorial will honor their embrace of the Revolutionary War as a demonstration that they, and their descendants, are "We the People."

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

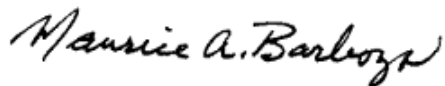
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In 2014, NCPC approved the preliminary plans for the People's Garden. These contemplate a "placeholder" for the National Liberty Memorial on the west side of Whitten along 14th Street. While USDA's plans are on hold pending a decision of Congress, there is a point when the agency will need to move on. The shared themes and history underlying these projects make it imperative that USDA and the Fund collaborate freely, and without micromanagement from elsewhere.

With your leadership, the sightlines of the Washington Monument and other landmarks could be woven by the National Liberty Memorial into a statement of vision, liberty and redemption.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maurice A. Barboza".

Maurice A. Barboza

Founder and CEO

cc: The Honorable Maria Cantwell

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley

The Honorable Christopher S. Murphy