

This Just In—05/31/01

Congress, President End Delay to WWII Memorial

Frustrated by years of delays since a design was selected, Congress passed a bill to President Bush on May 22 that orders that the World War II Memorial, situated between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument on the Capital Mall, be constructed expeditiously. Bush signed the bill into law on Memorial Day, May 29. The law shields key decisions regarding the design and site of the monument from judicial review, which would negate a pending lawsuit, although it does allow administrative review.

Questions remain

"In a unanimous voice vote today the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that validates the National Capital Planning Commission's past approvals of the World War II Memorial and ensures a continuing role for both NCPC and the Commission of Fine Arts as design modifications and refinements for the project proceed," stated a May 22 press release from the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). The NCPC had planned a June 13-14, 2001, special meeting to review its prior actions approving the memorial site and design in response to a lawsuit supported, in part, by Save the Mall. The NCPC cancelled that meeting in light of the new law.

The law raises concern among people



View (toward Lincoln Memorial) of proposed memorial.

wishing to protect the integrity of the Capital Mall memorial axis. The World War II Memorial site is in the center of that axis. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) called the legislation a "radically destructive bill that will do irrevocable harm to the WWI Memorial itself by eliminating indispensable oversight for the largest and most significant memorial on the Mall since the Lincoln Memorial was constructed almost 80 years ago."

A ticking clock

"Today I have signed into law H.R. 1696, a bill to expedite the construction of the World War II memorial in the District of Columbia," President Bush announced on Memorial Day. "Now that debate over the site and basic design is concluded, the time has come for all concerned with the creation of the memorial to act with the same determination and sense of common purpose so wonderfully displayed by those we honor. We must get the job done, so that those who served are able to see the Nation's permanent expression of remembrance and thanks."

Of the 16.4 million World War II U.S. veterans, 4.9 million are alive today. An estimated 1,100 of those veterans die each day, Bush said at a White House ceremony after the signing.

With that signing, the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) to begin construction. The ABMC is sponsoring the memorial, which is to be funded "almost entirely by private donations," states a commission release.



President Bush signed the bill into law on Memorial Day. Among the witnesses were representatives of veterans groups and memorial advocate Bob Dole (far right).

Toned-down scale still raises criticisms

The primary criticisms of the memorial design are it was approved irregularly, will disrupt the vista between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument, will block current pedestrian and demonstrator use of its 7.4-acre site, will destroy the Rainbow Pool now on that site, and is fascist in its design character.

The ABMC refutes all these claims and more at its Web site. "The National WWII Memorial is the right statement in the right place," they state.

Rhode Island architect Friedrich St. Florian submitted the winning design in 1996. It was among 404 design submissions. The project has since been scaled down by two-thirds of its original scope. Included in the current concept is reconstruction of the Rainbow Pool; two 49-foot memorial arches; 56 stone pillars, 23 feet high, with bronze wreaths; 4 bronze eagles; 24 wall sculptures, 4,123 gold stars, and a waterfall.

The ABMC intends to select a contractor and begin construction this summer. Excavation at the site could be delayed until 2002, though, because conservationists first will have to trim the roots of the enormous but fragile elm trees lining the Reflecting Pool. ■