

Linsay Burnett NCPC Testimony

July 9, 2026

Re: New Monumental Arch

My name is Linsay Burnett. I was a combat photographer and public affairs sergeant with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, deployed to Iraq in 2004. One day I may be laid to rest at Arlington, across the river from where you propose to build. I am also the daughter of two retired National Park Rangers, who spent their careers protecting places like this one across our country. I come to you as the person this arch claims to honor, and the person raised to protect what it would destroy. It betrays both.

The Park Service's own report says this can be built twenty hours a day, year round, for up to three years, under cranes taller than the arch itself. Arlington buries its dead close to thirty times a day. Under this plan, families would lower their loved ones into the ground to the sound of pile drivers. Taps against a concrete pump. We ask our dead for everything. The least we owe them is silence, and for three years we would deny them even that.

You may look at Memorial Circle and see empty lawn. It is not empty. It was left open on purpose. Ninety years ago, two columns were approved for that spot and never built. Fourteen feet across, set hundreds of feet apart, they would not have touched the view. The open ground is the design. It lets the line between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington hold its meaning, a country made whole after the Civil War. And the excuse for skipping Congress is that same permission, for columns we were wise enough never to raise.

Free nations build arches to the dead. In Belgium, the Menin Gate is a triumphal arch carved with fifty-four thousand names of the missing, and every night a town stops its traffic to sound the Last Post beneath it. America's own law carries the same instinct. The Commemorative Works Act forbids a memorial to any person until twenty-five years after their death, so that history, not vanity, decides. America does not build monuments to its living rulers. Dictators do. Kim Il-sung built one in Pyongyang for his birthday. Saddam built one in Baghdad, cast from molds of his own arms. Asked by CBS's Ed O'Keefe who this arch was for, President Trump said, "Me." America does not gild the living.

On June 4th, this commission refused to approve the arch. You demanded answers from the Interior Department, on the height under the Height of Buildings Act, on the danger to air traffic, on pedestrian safety. Those problems have not been cured, and the deepest ones cannot be. Congress has never authorized it. The design was sole-sourced through an unrelated contract, to avoid open bidding. And Interior now swears it is "not a memorial," even as the President calls it his, so it can slip past the Commemorative Works Act entirely.

This is National Park Service land, the ground my parents gave their careers to keep, in the words of the Park Service's own founding law, "unimpaired for those who come after us." Your commission has its own charge, to protect the design of this city. Reject this arch.

Thank you.