

July 29, 2013

The Honorable Mark E. Udall
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert J. Portman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Parks
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Udall and Ranking Member Portman:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our concerns about S. 1044, the “World War II Memorial Prayer Act of 2013.” This bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to add an inscription of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s D-Day prayer to the WWII Memorial.

Religious freedom is a fundamental and defining feature of our national character. Given our robust, longstanding commitment to the freedom of religion and belief, it is no surprise that the United States is among the most religious, and religiously diverse, nations in the world. Our religious diversity is one of our nation’s great strengths.

This bill, however, shows a lack of respect for this great diversity. It endorses the false notion that all veterans will be honored by a war memorial that includes a prayer proponents characterize as reflecting our country’s “Judeo-Christian heritage and values.”¹ In fact, Department of Defense reports show that nearly one-third of all current members of the U.S. Armed Forces identify as non-Christian.² Likewise, many of our veterans and citizens come from a variety of religious backgrounds, or have no religious belief; thus, it is inappropriate to honor the “power of prayer”³ in a national memorial.

Memorials are designed to bring our country together in a unified reflection of our past. Indeed, the WWII Memorial’s stated purpose is national unity.⁴ Instead of uniting us as we remember the sacrifice of those who served, the inclusion of this prayer on the memorial would be divisive: It would send a strong message to those who do not share the same religious

¹ See *Misc. National Parks Bills Hearing Before the Subcomm. on National Parks of the S. Comm. Energy & Natural Resources*, 112th Cong. (2012) (Statement of Senator Rob Portman) available at <http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=a64e4f88-18d3-4489-96a0-b1a89b2b51e6> (86:15).

² Religious Diversity in the U.S. Military, Military Leadership Diversity Comm’n, Issue Paper No. 22 (June 2010).

³ Press Release, Sen. Rob Portman, Portman Renews Effort to Commemorate FDR’s D-Day Prayer with the Nation at the WWII Memorial (May 23, 2013), <http://www.portman.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2013/5/portman-renews-effort-to-commemorate-fdr-s-d-day-prayer-with-the-nation-at-the-wwii-memorial>.

⁴ American Battle Monuments Commission (AMBC), National WWII Memorial, Facts, <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/default.asp?page=facts.asp&subpage=intro> (“Above all, the memorial stands as an important symbol of American national unity, a timeless reminder of the moral strength and awesome power that can flow when a free people are at once united and bonded together in a common and just cause.”).

beliefs expressed in this prayer that they are excluded and ““not full members of the . . . community.””⁵

The memorial, as it currently stands, appropriately honors those who served and encompasses the entirety of the war. The World War II Memorial Commission and the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) carefully chose the thirteen inscriptions already included on the memorial. The inscriptions contain quotes spanning from the beginning of U.S. involvement in the war following the attacks on Pearl Harbor to the war’s end, and already include a quote about D-Day and two quotes from President Roosevelt.⁶ These commissions thoroughly deliberated which inscriptions to include, selecting quotations that honor those who served and commemorate the events of World War II.⁷ As the National Park Service explained at a hearing on this legislation in the 112th Congress, “The design we see today was painstakingly arrived upon after years of public deliberations and spirited public debate.”⁸ The ABMC and National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, which was designated by Congress to consult on the design of the Memorial, have stated that “no additional elements should be inserted into this carefully designed Memorial.”⁹

The First Amendment affords special protections to freedom of religion. Because of these protections, each of us is free to believe, or not believe, according to the dictates of our conscience. The effect of this bill, however, is to co-opt religion for political purposes, which harms the beliefs of everyone.

Thank you for allowing us to share our concerns with S. 1044.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Hindu American Foundation
Interfaith Alliance

⁵ *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309–10 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465, U.S. 668, 688 (O’Connor, J., concurring); see also, e.g., *Trunk and Jewish War Veterans v. City of San Diego*, 629 F.3d 1099, 1124–25 (9th Cir. 2011), *cert. denied*, 567 U.S. __ (2012).

⁶ AMBC, National WWII Memorial Inscriptions, <http://wwiimemorial.com/archives/factsheets/inscriptions.htm>.

⁷ National Parks Service, World War II Memorial Inscription Controversy, <http://www.nps.gov/wwii/photosmultimedia/upload/WWII%20Memorial%20Inscription%20Controversy%20web.pdf>.

⁸ *Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1980, H.R. 2070, H.R. 2621, and H.R. 3155 Before the Subcomm. on National Parks, Forest and Public Lands of the H. Comm. on Natural Resources*, 112th Cong. (2011) (Statement for the Record from National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior) available at http://www.doi.gov/ocl/hearings/112/HR2070_110311.cfm.

⁹ *Id.*