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National Park Service, Planning Environment and Public Comment (PEPC)

**Subject: Triumphal Arch – Section 106 Assessment of Effect and Draft
Programmatic Agreement**

I am a Veteran and a resident of Washington, DC. My parents, interred in section 66, were a Vietnam Veteran and his Army Wife/Nurse. I served for 29 years in the US Army, and my wife is a Veteran of the Persian Gulf War. We also have several ancestors who served in the US Armed Forces dating back to the early 19th Century.

These are my personal comments, keyed to specific documents in the review package:

1. Drawing #2A in Appendix C, does not currently capture the significant impact (which I will describe below) to specific sections of Arlington Cemetery proper that will be within view of the viewing platform and statuary atop the Arch (and vice-versa). The “Direct Effects Boundary” described in Drawing #2A should be expanded to include all current gravesites that will have line of sight to the Arch. I would suggest that, as was done for specific National Historic Landmarks, renderings be produced that illustrate this impact from each section of the Cemetery within line of sight.

Additionally, unlike the renderings currently provided to date, renderings should also illustrate the impact during winter months, when trees lack foliage, as well as at night, when the planned Arch spotlights will likely obliterate the otherwise serene viewshed.

Based upon my personal observations (I visit the Cemetery often), the Viewshed of/from Sections 55, 56, 57, 73, 74, 75, 76, and 60 are certain to be impacted year round, and should be added to be within the Direct Effects Boundary. There may be others (possibly including 66, where my own parents are buried), but without formal analysis, I cannot say for sure – which is why a detailed study must be made before any decision to move forward with updating designs can even be considered.

Based on my personal observations, I believe the Taft Memorial in Section 30, and several additional sections to the North of Memorial Avenue are likely to be impacted once leaves have fallen from the trees. The same is likely true for the high ground in the vicinity of the Memorial Amphitheater and the Tomb of the Unknowns, for example the high ground of Section 35.

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After further analysis, I believe it very likely that several portions of the AOE Table contained in Appendix D should also be revised.

Impact/Why this is Very Important: as several Veterans have shared with me, just as important as the tone and solemnity of the formal entrance to Arlington Cemetery is, so too is the solemn environment of the actual gravesite locations.

I am providing a photo (Figure 1), to illustrate this issue. This photo was taken on May 31, 2026, overlooking Section 75 in the Northeast direction, The Niche Wall containing cremated remains can be seen along the tree line at the boundary of the Cemetery. The Washington Cathedral and Rosslyn are visible in the far background. Without professional renderings, it is difficult to appreciate how much of the Arch will be in view from this location, with and without leaves on the trees. There are frequent funerals in this area, in fact many recent nearby graves are currently awaiting installation of headstones.



Figure 1 - Section 75 Viewshed Looking Northeast – What is the Arch Impact Here?

Should this undertaking proceed, it is my strong belief that the Viewshed in this area will be severely impacted by the installation of a Triumphal Arch (even more

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so in Winter than this photo would suggest). To make matters worse, many of the recent graves in this area contain the remains of our Vietnam Veteran cohort, the vast majority of whom served honorably after being drafted, and then returned to a country that did NOT appreciate their service (to say the least). Several of them have remarked about the fact that while they were drafted and served, our current President (and his family) did not. Others, including a Gold Star mother I was honored to speak with, remarked that she is offended by the idea that tourists on a viewing platform would be able to look down upon her as she visits her son's grave.

Given this, it's vital that a much more thorough review of the impact to the interior of Arlington Cemetery be performed with cemetery personnel, historians (including military historians) and docents, and perhaps even Ladies of Arlington who are the most intimately familiar with both the grounds as well as funeral operations, but most importantly with the families of veterans, and veterans themselves who may be considering Arlington as their final resting place.

Absent such analysis, I do not believe that the American people, the team assessing this proposed undertaking, or their elected officials could possibly make any decision other than to reject the proposed arch as currently envisioned.

2. Any undertaking at Memorial Circle must respect those interred there, their descendants (current and future generations), and remain consistent with the solemn symbolism provided by the linkage of the Lincoln Memorial, Memorial Bridge and Drive, the Hemicycle and the Women's Military Museum within it, the Eternal Flame and the Kennedy Gravesite, and the former Custis Lee Mansion now known as Arlington House. In fact, if anything, a solemn Memorial, never a Monument, and certainly not a Triumphant edifice, is called for here, in order to promote a further unification of our country and respect these very hallowed grounds. The best way to ensure that modifications to Memorial Circle support, rather than insult, Arlington Cemetery, is to follow the law: **Fully collaborate on the design with affected stakeholders, and present the project to the US Congress for approval.** To do otherwise is disrespectful to our heroes and their families, and indeed to all current Service Members. I understand that the project lead currently hypothesizes that the 1920s era proposed columns (illustrated in Appendix B) provide evidence of prior Congressional approval, but this is laughable. The historical documents clearly show columns that would be spread far apart, be limited to 166' in height, leave the center of Memorial Circle open, and would never have included a viewing platform looming over the Cemetery, let alone triumphant gold statuary atop it. While I am not arguing that such columns should be built today, those at least would not have offended the Cemetery, should they be presented to the Congress as a potential undertaking.

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3. No Renderings of Lighting. While there is, for the first time in the evolution of this undertaking, some information regarding lighting, there are no renderings that would support an assessment, good or bad, of the impact. In addition to renderings for Winter, Night Renderings are also essential. As is well known, many of the most awe-inspiring views of Washington are seen at night. The prominence of Arlington House, the Air Force Memorial, and the Flag at Quarters 1 on Ft Myer at night is subtle, respectful, and breathtaking. Especially breathtaking is the ability to see the Eternal Flame from many locations at twilight and beyond. In fact, I have recently encountered other citizens coming out at twilight to observe the Eternal Flame, all expressing concerns that they wanted to see this one last time before the view is destroyed by the Arch. While the Arch may not block these views for an observer located in perfect alignment so as to look through the Arch, the better viewing angles would be from the center line of the roadway on Memorial Bridge, a dangerous place to stand! And the intensity of lighting is also of serious concern, as the current lighting of the historical landmarks in Virginia is very soft/subtle, and likely to be overwhelmed by the lighting of the Arch (and compromised by any aircraft warning lights).

For those who do not frequent Washington at night, below at Figures 2 and 3 are snapshots taken from the Watergate Steps, and the area East of Memorial Bridge, to illustrate the as-is condition. Again, emphasizing the need to carefully assess the impact of the proposed Arch/undertaking at Night, in addition to Daytime and Winter renderings. Anything on Memorial Circle should be carefully designed so as to not overwhelm these solemn views. I also suggest renderings from additional locations along the banks of the Potomac be provided as a prerequisite to expending any effort or resources on the design.

4. The design of the winged statue at the top of the Arch (depicted in numerous renderings) is the singularly dominant feature of the Arch, since it alone can be seen from the West Front of the Capitol, the Mall, and many other locations. I am confused as to what it signifies to a viewer from those locations, but any sculptures should reinforce the solemnity of the nearby hallowed grounds. For people in automobiles, Memorial Circle is much more an entrance to Arlington Cemetery than it is to the City of Washington. The entrance to Washington is Memorial Bridge itself, its statuary, and the Lincoln Memorial.
5. The choice of “One Nation Under God” should be very carefully reconsidered. I recognize it is a traditional sentiment from our Nation’s History, but in 2026, I would suggest that E Pluribus Unum would be a better choice (witness the choices of icons atop the standard government issue headstones chosen by the fallen or their families today). Regardless, the choice of quotes should be very deliberately designed to help further unify our country and be approved by the American People through their elected members of Congress.

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To conclude: I believe that further analysis, when presented to the many Consulting Partners, will show that this undertaking must be stopped right now. It is a vainglorious insult to the living descendants of those interred at Arlington, and future graves yet to be occupied. Our country needs unifying efforts now; this is the opposite. **Follow the law**, as is being done by the team developing the Global War on Terrorism Memorial today, and the currently under construction Gulf War Memorial. This is the best way to select a site and design a monument that marks the longest surviving republic on Earth (as Franklin said – “if you can keep it”).

This is a permanent, hundreds of years monument. Do not rush it, and do not place it on Memorial Circle. Adjusting the “Direct Effects Boundary” and reviewing additional renderings as described above, while staying faithful to the true purpose of Memorial Circle, I am certain that most Americans would agree that this Arch project should not be undertaken at this hallowed location.

Respectfully,

/s/

Gary E. Langston, Jr.



Figure 2 (Above): Night View from the Watergate Steps, May 19, 2026

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Figure 3 (Below): Night View from East of Memorial Bridge, May 19, 2026

