

June 3rd 2026

Jimi Shaughnessy Testimony to The National Capital Planning Commission regarding project: New Monumental Arch, file # 8778

I am here today to voice my opposition to the planned construction of the memorial arch. I speak as a private citizen: a Marine Corps combat veteran, son of a veteran, and grandson of generations of combat veterans spanning nearly 200 years.

Buried in Section 60 are my great-grandfather and great-grandmother. He was a combat veteran who led the charge on horseback against Pancho Villa. She was a combat nurse who tended to wounded young men during World War II. They never questioned whether they should serve — only how long they would be permitted to.

As a young Marine, I was shaped by their example. Their commitment to service and country became values I carried through my own enlistment and combat tour — a tour in which I lost friends before I could learn their full names.

For what did the sons and daughters of America die? Was it for fame? Will your children line up to become fodder for someone's vanity?

Now a gigantic arch threatens to cast its shadow over my family, my friends, and my fellow leathernecks — a monument to self-aggrandizement rising over hallowed ground.

A 250-foot triumphal arch topped with golden statues and an observation deck is a profound disruption at the entrance to sacred soil. The space at the gates of Arlington exists as a threshold — a transitory passage between service and burial. To preserve that integrity, it must remain open and unobstructed.

Service members and their families navigate many transitions throughout a military career and beyond. The transition out of the military is among the most dangerous periods a veteran will face. That final transition — from service to rest — is not theirs to manage. It is ours. It falls to us, the living, to receive our wounded and our dead with the highest esteem and care.

An arch is not what they need.

Who is this arch for? Is it for me? The president has already answered that question — it is for him.

This arch would obstruct the very sight line of the bridge, a symbol of unity and reconciliation connecting those divided by war and grief. Rather than honoring that unity, it deepens a wound that has not yet healed.

Hasty construction is no path to a monument worthy of this nation. Previous memorials were shaped by extensive public input and rigorous agency review, ensuring that the final design reflected our shared values. This proposal has had neither.

Others have already raised the serious safety hazards of placing a monument in a roundabout at a high-traffic intersection — consistent with this administration's pattern of placing pedestrians in harm's way.

Meanwhile, funding has been stripped from the VA, NPS, and DOI, degrading the capacity of the very agencies that provide direct services to veterans and their families. If you want to truly support the men and women who served, direct this money to those agencies. Our National Park Service is an ideal place for transitioning service members to find meaningful careers in public service — and healing along the way. Park staff provide safety, accessibility, and veteran-specific programming every single day.

How will this project be funded? With tax dollars? Redirected entrance fees from parks across the country? Anonymous private donations flowing into another undisclosed fund? The public deserves an answer.

No one needs this arch.

It is inappropriate, unnecessary, insulting, and a waste of our land, our time, and our money.

If the president wants his own arch, he is welcome to sift through the rubble of the East Wing demolition piling up along the banks of the Potomac and build one himself.

Jimi Shaughnessy

USMC Combat Veteran (2003-2010)