Chairman and members of the Commission,

I am Colonel Anne Johnson, retired from the US Air Force last year after 30 years of service.

I want to talk to you about what this proposed arch represents, and what it says about whose service this country chooses to honor.

I spent three decades serving this country. I served alongside the first female fighter pilots and other women who broke barriers, carried enormous responsibilities, deployed, led troops, and made countless sacrifices that most Americans will never fully understand.

The Military Women's Memorial at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery exists because women's service was too often overlooked, minimized, or erased from our nation's history. It is the one national memorial dedicated to recognizing that service, and its Congressional authorization was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1985. I am a charter member, having first supported the memorial as a young lieutenant in 1997.

And now you are being asked to approve a 250-foot monument at Memorial Circle, just up the street, that would visually dominate this landscape with a height more than twice that of the Lincoln Memorial.

Think about that symbolism.

A memorial built to recognize generations of women who served their country, often in combat and despite discrimination, would be overshadowed by a monument dedicated to a sitting president who has described the arch as a monument to himself.

This isn't simply a disagreement about architecture. It is a question of what we choose to elevate in our nation's capital.

I recognize that you are being asked to evaluate plans, design, and technical requirements. But those decisions have consequences beyond engineering drawings. They shape the national landscape and communicate our national values for generations.

There are also serious questions, starting with whether this project has the necessary congressional authorization. Congress has not specifically authorized this arch or appropriated funding for it, though OMB has already redirected $15m for it. The administration's reliance on a century-old authorization is being challenged in court. I urge you not to treat that unresolved question as a technicality. Further, the project would sit directly in the flight path of Reagan National Airport. and as the wife of a professional pilot, I share the alarm of many people in aviation at the potential for a severe mishap should this high solid obstacle be built as planned. I don’t want to see people die when a plane experiences an in-flight emergency or a helicopter gets lost in the weather and slams into the arch.

I also cannot separate this project from the message it sends to women who have served. The president was found liable by a civil jury for sexually abusing E. Jean Carroll, and the presiding judge subsequently explained why the conduct could accurately be described as rape in the common understanding of that word.

For women veterans, the prospect of placing a monument to this president in the immediate landscape of the memorial honoring our service is deeply offensive.

I am not asking you to agree with my view of the president. I am asking you to recognize your responsibility as stewards of a national landscape that belongs to all Americans.

We deserve better. The country deserves better. And the women currently in uniform and the next generation of women who step up to serve our country deserve to see that their service is valued, not diminished or literally overshadowed by a monument to a man who avoided military service.

Please give the history, dignity, and purpose of Arlington National Cemetery and the Military Women's Memorial the serious consideration they deserve.