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Public Testimony of Brent Leggs,
President and CEO, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Before the National Capital Planning Commission
Regarding the Monumental Arch Proposal

Thursday, November 5, 2026

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the National Capital Planning Commission. I am Brent Leggs—President and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about our opposition to the Monumental Arch.

As the National Trust and others have repeatedly pointed out, the location of the proposed Arch—directly in between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery—was conceived of by the McMillan Commission and other planning bodies as a symbol of national reconciliation after the Civil War, with every detail carefully designed to convey restraint, dignity, and balance.

The current proposal would irreversibly damage one of the most important civic landscapes in America, diminish the meaning of Arlington National Cemetery and the Lincoln Memorial, and block the historic line of sight between them.

The proposed Arch is colossal in size and incompatible with the setting of Arlington National Cemetery, where over 400,000 veterans and family members are buried. The site is defined by its quiet dignity, pastoral landscape, and solemn atmosphere of remembrance and honor. The Arch would permanently intrude on the historic viewshed and disrupt traditional norms governing the establishment of new presidential monuments.

We urge you to carefully consider the appeals of the nation's veterans and preservationists, who in large numbers have expressed concern throughout the review process.

Of course, it's not just veterans and preservation groups who share these objections. In an era when public opinion is split on almost every subject, it is remarkable to see the American people overwhelmingly united in their opposition to this Arch.

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Still, this project has not been reviewed with the scrutiny it requires. Historically, the commission has served as a deliberative and respected body that reviews major commemorative projects, often requiring repeated submissions, public hearings, design revisions, and additional environmental and preservation analysis before granting final approval.

Disappointingly, rather than working to refine this proposal, the commission has inappropriately advanced the Arch plans—from announcement to preliminary approvals—within months, despite its unprecedented height, location, and unresolved legal questions under multiple federal statutes. Widespread objections from consulting parties, preservation organizations, state historic preservation officials, veterans' groups, municipalities, and members of the public have also been brushed aside. Furthermore, the Arch's proposed military use is questionable and should be reviewed in full by this commission.

Thankfully in the past, the nation's great monuments and memorials were not rushed into existence.

They were carefully planned, skillfully executed, and built from enduring materials and construction methods intended to last for centuries as national symbols of American achievement and resilience.

Recently, the government has announced that they may start construction on the Arch immediately after the commission votes to approve it. This must not happen because there are numerous, unresolved issues.

Serious questions remain regarding the Arch's compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Commemorative Works Act, the Height of Buildings Act, Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, and other legal requirements governing the design, placement, and approval of memorials and structures within the monumental core.

These laws reflect Congress's recognition that our nation's capital is a unique civic landscape that deserves exceptional care and scrutiny. Before any irreversible action is taken, these issues should be analyzed and resolved through a transparent public process consistent with both the letter and spirit of those laws.

In conclusion, the National Trust respectfully requests that you pause your consideration of this project. If the project remains a priority for the administration, we recommend selecting an alternative location for the Arch that more appropriately honors our nation's commemorative goals and our shared obligation to protect America's historic places.

The National Trust stands ready to work with you on advancing ethical stewardship strategies. Thank you once again for the opportunity to share our feedback on this proposal.