Testimony on the “Arch” for National Capitol Planning Commission session, November 5, 2026

I appreciate the opportunity to express my views to the Commission.

My name is Nancy Birdsall. I am a member of Third Act, a group bringing together “elders” (over 60) working to protect our democracy and our climate.

I have been a full-time resident of Washington DC since 1967, with just a few years away for study and for work. Over the years, I have hosted many friends from around this country and around the world, on visits to the Lincoln Memorial, the reflecting pool and the rest of the monument core along the river. I expect to live the rest of my life here in Washington DC and I count myself lucky to be able to do so. I therefore claim a heavier burden of “care” for what my city looks like and for the values its buildings and parks and infrastructure reflect than the average US citizen, and indeed than of our current president.

I do not like this Arch. It is too big, too grandiose, too out of proportion to the Lincoln Memorial it would face and the Arlington Cemetery burial grounds it would, visually and psychologically, ignore and seem to wish away. Among those and other complaints, the “gold” is too gaudy for a city that is the capital of a democratic republic – not the home site of a king.

This is, of course, a matter of individual taste. I cannot claim a greater value for my taste than can President Trump for his taste nor for the taste of any of you commissioners – and yet I do – on the grounds of my long residence in this city, the dozens of times I have visited, with children and grandchildren and out-of-town guests, the memorial center and the hundreds of times (it could be) I have walked, biked or driven over Memorial Bridge.

“Taste”, of course, is a weak reed on which to object to the President Trump’s proposed arch – except that in a democratic republic, the taste of a large majority of affected citizens should not be completely ignored in making a decision that will affect those citizens and their descendants for many generations. (I understand that at prior hearings on the Arch, almost all testimony came from citizens with objections to it.) And I realize that you have heard and know more than enough already about such non-taste issues as the effect this Arch would have on the sightline to the Arlington Cemetery burial grounds and the risk to current flight paths into and out of Reagan Airport.

I fear that all of you will give an “OK” to the Administration’s proposal, despite the many expressions of concern to the Commission in prior hearings and presumably in this hearing. How will I explain this to my children and grandchildren?

Finally, why is this commission hearing being held solely online? Is it to minimize press attention to the concerns that have been expressed about the proposed arch in prior hearings and that will be expressed no doubt in today’s hearing?

Nancy Birdsall