

**National Coalition to
Save Our Mall**
Preserving Our Monument to Democracy



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The Honorable Craig Thomas
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
SC-364 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510 **VIA FAX 202-228-0539**

Dear Chairman Thomas and Members:

The National Coalition to Save Our Mall deeply appreciates your decision to hold a much-needed Mall oversight hearing. We hope that the dialogue you begin today will inspire cooperation among agencies and the public, and set the stage for some exciting and visionary thinking about the Mall's future.

A century ago, the Mall faced problems similar to those today: overbuilding, need for new memorial sites, commercial and industrial activity on the symbolic open space, and fragmented management among government agencies and private interests. The Senate Parks Committee formed the independent McMillan Commission that unified the Mall, provided a long-range plan, and gave us the beautiful and inspiring Mall we know today.

The Coalition asks Congress to consider an action of comparable vision today by drafting legislation to create a National Mall Conservancy that would develop another Third Century Mall vision and provide a public voice for all the stakeholders—government and citizen.

We also ask Congress to support the Third Century Initiative's volunteer efforts to improve visitor orientation, education, and experience of the Mall by directing the Mall's stakeholder agencies to work with us cooperatively. We are completing a map/historical guide that will be distributed free of charge to Mall visitors. We would like to move forward with additional projects and require the cooperation of the many Mall stakeholders.

For the hearing today, we have a few questions about current projects and the public process:

1. The National Park Service is planning to construct—at concessionaire's expense—two substantial 34' x 34' retail buildings near the Lincoln Memorial. (Two more are planned at the Washington Monument.) One will provide food, but no restrooms, and will be located on a site that could pose pedestrian safety issues—on the traffic island between 23rd street and Henry Bacon Drive. The other will be for retail sales. We question the appropriateness of the buildings' size, location, and purpose. They are not consistent with the Park Service's 1976 Development Plan and we have not seen any other master plan. Is there such a plan? Why is food now being proposed away from pedestrian-friendly locations?
2. Is there a master plan for security at the Mall's memorials and monuments? Is the Park Service working with the other Mall stakeholders on a Mall-wide security plan with unified goals, threat assessment, and construction schedules? How do we weigh the Mall's open symbolism against desires to secure each building and monument? Who makes that decision?
3. What is the role of the public in Mall decision-making? The public has found that we can only comment on projects once NPS has already made its decisions. The NPS interprets the Commemorative Works Act, for instance, to allow the Secretary of Interior to approve a site for memorials even before the first public hearing is held before the National Capital Memorial Commission. What is the solution to assure public input at the earliest stages?
4. The current process for project design and approval seems incestuous. The NPS, for example, proposes a project and then reviews it as Chair of the National Capital Memorials Commission and commissioner on the National Capital Planning Commission. How can Congress open the process to transparency and allow the public to play an important role in Mall development and planning?

Thank you again for taking on the important issues now confronting our premier symbolic public open space, the National Mall.

Sincerely,

Judy Scott Feldman, Ph.D.
Chairman