



## Veterans for Common Sense (VCS)

900 Second St., N.E.

Suite 216

Washington, DC 20002

*VeteransforCommonSense.org*

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### Board of Directors 2016-18

Anthony Hardie  
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July 12, 2017

Glenn DeMarr, Project Manager  
ATTN: Desert Storm War Memorial EA  
National Park Service, National Capital Region  
1100 Ohio Drive, SW  
Washington, DC 20242

### **SUBJECT: VCS SUPPORTS NATIONAL MALL SITE FOR NATIONAL DESERT STORM WAR MEMORIAL**

Dear Mr. DeMarr,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment to the National Park Service regarding the siting of the National Desert Storm War Memorial.

Veterans for Common Sense (VCS), a national veterans service and advocacy organization founded and led primarily by veterans of the 1991 Gulf War, is in strong support of the National Desert Storm War Memorial (NDSWM). We have been and remain strongly supportive of the creation of the NDSWM and its siting on the National Mall within Area I as defined under the Commemorative Works Act, and we were pleased to provide additional advocacy in support of others' efforts to advance the authorizing legislation.

We understand that the purpose of this first scoping period is to select the site for the Memorial, that the National Desert Storm War Memorial Association (NDSWMA) will be responsible for the design and the construction of the Memorial at the selected site, and that the NPS will be responsible for its long-term maintenance.

VCS is in strong support of siting the NDSWM at the proposed site just to the northeast of the Lincoln Memorial at the "Constitution Avenue Terminus Area" within Area I of the National Mall, and near the terminus of Constitution Avenue and 23rd Street Northwest, Washington, DC.

This preferred site is in close proximity to and would have a thematic nexus with the nation's other 20<sup>th</sup> Century war memorials, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall), the future site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center, the Vietnam Womens' Memorial, Three Servicemen, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial – all of which are just to the west of the World War II Memorial. This siting would heighten visibility, and would be within easy pedestrian and other access to and from other nearby attractions. We hope that the "Minor challenges in terms of resiliency due to floodplain

location are being addressed by the Army Corps of Engineers” noted by the NPS in its presentation materials for today’s scoping meeting.

We also understand that design issues will be open for public comment during the second scoping period to be held this Fall, at which time we may have further comments. We understand current proposals include both recognition of the veterans who, like us, fought in this war, and the historical and geopolitical significance of the 1991 Gulf War, also known as the Persian Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm – the initial war in the broader Gulf War that continues under the law to a date as yet to be determined.

We strongly concur with the design parameter in today’s presentation materials that suggests the NDSWM should, “serve as more than a stand-alone object and provide a place of reflection.” Having fought for the last more than two decades for the veterans of this war, we have deep ties to our fellow Gulf War veterans and a deep understanding of the post-war experience of many of them.

This week, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released an investigative report that states that 44 percent of the approximately 697,000 veterans of the 1991 Gulf War suffer from Gulf War Illness – “a cluster of chronic symptoms that can include fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, respiratory disorders, skin problems, and memory impairment.”<sup>1</sup> This Thursday, July 13, VCS is scheduled to testify before Congress on these Gulf War Illness issues, including a GAO-identified 87 percent rate of denial by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) of Gulf War veterans’ VA disability claims for Gulf War Illness.

For hundreds of thousands of Desert Storm veterans, their 1991 wartime experiences in Operation Desert Storm were only the beginning of their lifelong battle to regain their health and to receive the VA benefits they earned but have been repeatedly denied. Science has now shown that Gulf War Illness resulted from a combination of 1991 Gulf War toxic exposures, as shown in major reports by the VA Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses (RAC)<sup>2</sup> and the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.<sup>3</sup>

Given this overarching experience directly stemming from Gulf War veterans’ Desert Storm service, we look forward with great anticipation to the next NPS scoping meeting where the NDSWM’s design will be discussed. We remain very hopeful that the NDSWMA and NPS will help ensure that this overarching experience of Desert Storm veterans is clearly reflected in the Memorial’s design and visitors’ experience.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, June 2017, *Gulf War Illness: Improvements Needed for VA to Better Understand, Process, and Communicate Decisions on Claims* (GAO-17-811). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office.

<sup>2</sup> Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses. 2014. *Gulf War illness and the health of Gulf War veterans: Research update and recommendations, 2009-2013*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Institute of IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2010. *Gulf War and Health, Volume 8: Update of Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance. Again, thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Hardie', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Hardie  
NATIONAL CHAIR & DIRECTOR

Cc:  
National Desert Storm War Memorial Association  
National Gulf War Resource Center  
Vietnam Veterans of America