

**Written Statement of Raya Kenney, Founder, National Memorial to the Women Who Worked on
the Home Front Foundation
Natural Resources Committee/Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
December 4, 2019**

Chair Haaland, Representative Young, thank you so much for inviting me to testify before the National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands subcommittee today. It is an honor and privilege to be here.

My name is Raya Kenney, and I am the founder of the National Memorial to the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation. Our goal is to get a monument built to the women who worked on the home front during WWII. A big thank you goes to Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton and her staff who have worked tirelessly to get this project to where it is today and to Chair Haaland who is an original co-sponsor of this important piece of legislation.

This project started 7 years ago when I was in 5th grade. I was assigned a project to build a model monument to someone or something that hadn't been recognized in Washington, DC. Having just watched *A League of Their Own*, a film about the women baseball players of WWII, I had a newly found passion of the women who worked during the war, filling in the jobs the men off fighting could no longer occupy.

As I delved into my research, I learned there were over 18 million civilian women who worked on the home front. Typically, when people think about these women, they envision the "We can do it!" poster with Rosie the Riveter proudly flexing her arm. However, the women who worked were far more than just factory workers: They were coders, pilots, lumberjacks, taxi drivers, engineers, and mail carriers, among many other jobs. I was surprised to learn that no monument existed to commemorate their dedication and contributions to the war effort.

Therefore, I chose to build my model monument to them, the 18 million women who I, before watching *A League of Their Own*, had never heard of.

I sent out letters and emails to garner support for the idea. I have received a lot of help along the way. The first big step occurred in 2016 when the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument invited me to the National Park Service's 100th anniversary celebration to display my model monument. Everyone in attendance was incredibly supportive and administrators for the National Park Service said my design is what they look for in memorials and encouraged me to keep trying to get it built, suggesting I reach out to my representative, Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton. As evidenced by my presence here today,

Representative Holmes Norton was incredibly supportive and agreed to draft and introduce the legislation for this bill. First, I would need a “sponsor group” in order to introduce the legislation, and so was formed a 501(c)(3), establishing my non-profit organization.

As stipulated by the National Capital Planning Commission’s “Steps for Establishing A Memorial in the Nation’s Capital,” all funding for this project would be privately raised through the foundation using crowdsourcing and corporate donations; no government funding would be used. We would look to garner support from women’s groups and organizations as well as companies that first employed the women during the war.

The proposed memorial design is shaped like a V to symbolize victory; a common formation during WWII at baseball games, school assemblies, and other public functions. Twenty pillars are used to form the V shape; the pillars represent the women themselves signifying their roles as the pillars of strength that kept our country going. Brought to full size, the pillars would be constructed of black granite with the names of the jobs women filled etched on each side of each pillar. Of course, I would be excited about working with historians and the Library of Congress to make sure we include every job that a woman held for the first time, as to not exclude any group or individual. The monument is designed in a way as to not interfere with the view of any surrounding monuments or nature. It would allow for an interactive experience where people can sit and reflect on the women’s important contributions, enjoy the day, and relax. I am, of course, open to suggestions from professionals and am looking forward to hearing their ideas to further the design.

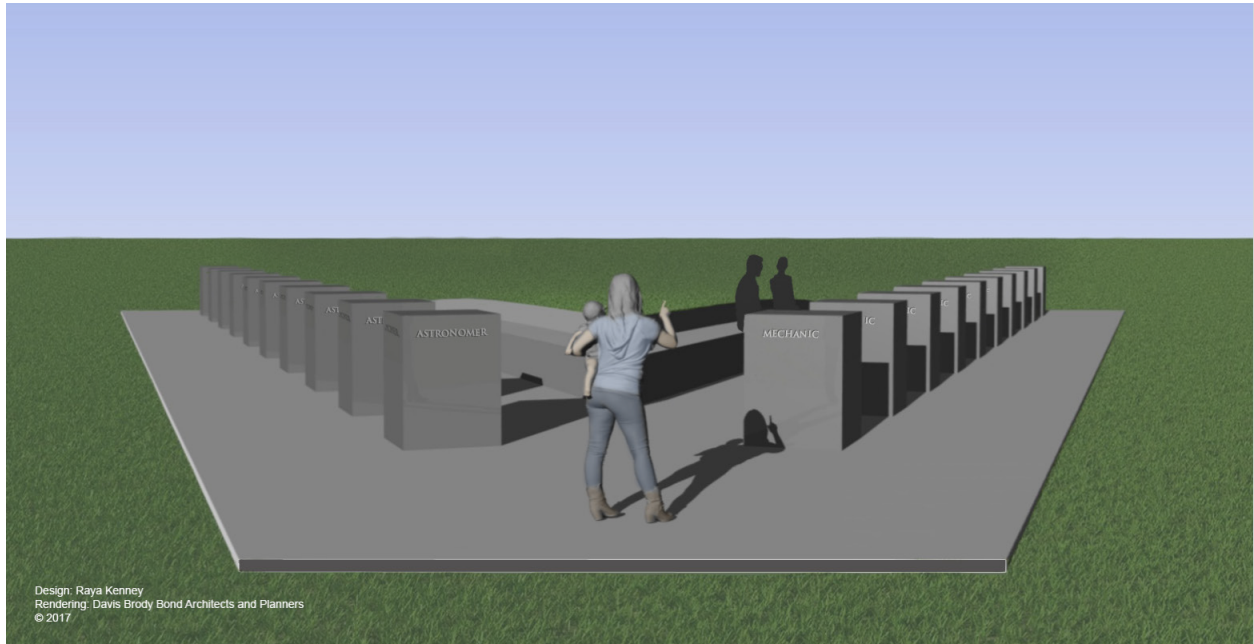
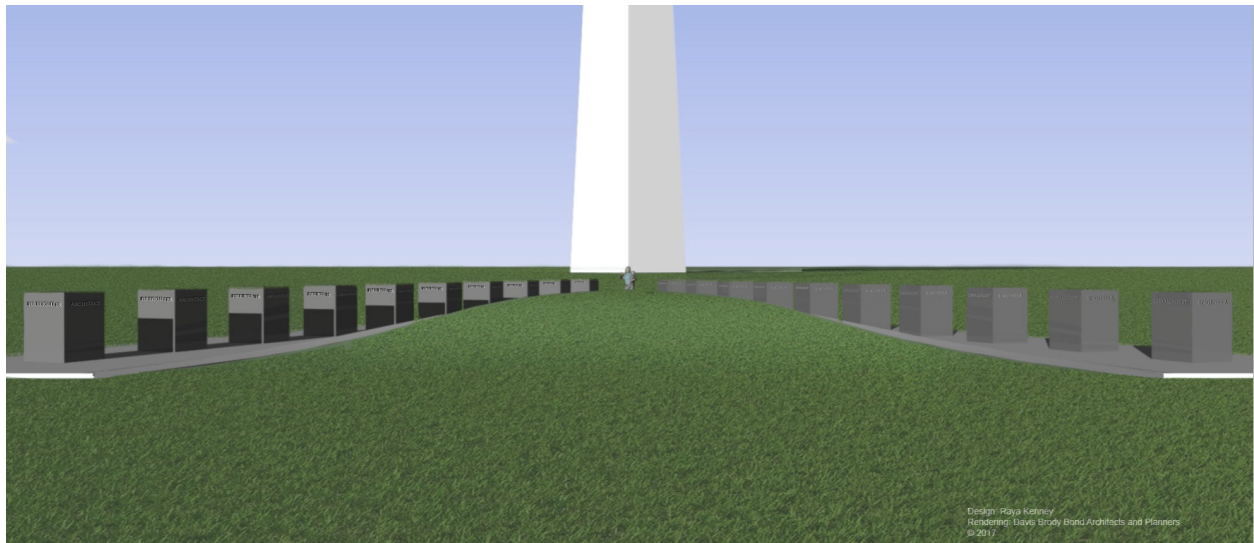
Being able to meet with women who have worked on the home front has been incredibly eye-opening as well. For example, Phyllis Gould, a 97-year-old Rosie who worked as a welder at Kaiser shipyards corresponds with me through letters and telephone calls and has said when discussing recognition of her barrier-breaking role, “I want it to be something permanent because [...] these women [...] worked and they did every job that was vacated by a guy going into the service.” All the women who would be honored by this memorial were civilians, even the ones working for the military, and were not included under the GI Bill. Phyllis says she hopes to see some recognition in her lifetime.

This is not a quick or easy process, but it's an important one. I love watching the WWII vets come to my home town of Washington, DC on the tour buses to view their memorial; they are so proud and I often see people stop and clap for them. The women who worked on the home front were so instrumental in the war and they too deserve recognition. The National Memorial to the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation will help with that endeavor while increasing our understanding and appreciation of the contribution that these women made during the war, as well as paving the way for future generations.

Thank you for supporting this ongoing work, and for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. A big thank you goes to Covington and Burling LLP for their pro bono legal assistance and advocacy support. Another big thank you goes to the Davis Brody Bond for their kind pro bono assistance in rendering the design and offering guidance. Thank you again to Representative Norton and to all the cosponsors of this proposed bill: Representatives Jim Banks (R-IN), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Andre Carson (D-IN), Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA), Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), Deb Haaland (D-NM), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Darren Soto (D-FL), Tom Suozzi (D-NY), Susan Wild (D-PA). Thank you so much for everyone's incredible support. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time. I respectfully request that you'll consider authorizing this memorial to these incredible women. Thank you.

Design

The memorial was designed by the Foundation's founder, Raya Kenney. It is designed to be ADA compliant, accessible to all, and complimentary to the natural landscape wherever the location.



To learn more about our project, please visit our website at <https://www.whfnmf.org/>.