

**Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (MO-5) Member's Day Testimony for the Record**

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

*Thursday, February 16, 2017*

Good morning Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz and members of the subcommittee. As you know, April 6<sup>th</sup> is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States entry into World War I. America's entry into the Great War created profound change throughout the country – as 4.7 million men and women served our nation in uniform and over 116,000 Americans gave their lives in defense of liberty.

It is the responsibility of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, established by an act of Congress in 2013, to plan, develop, and execute programs, projects, and activities to commemorate the centennial of World War I; to educate American citizens about the causes and consequences of the war; and to honor the heroism and sacrifice of those Americans who served. Efforts are already underway, including: the establishment of State WWI Centennial Commissions in nearly every State; implementation of a National Education Plan; and education materials that are shared bi-monthly with 500,000 teachers thru partnerships with Library of Congress, History Channel, Smithsonian Institution, National Archives, National History Day, and many others. In addition, the Commission is leading the charge to build a National WWI Memorial in DC at Pershing Park, with privately raised funds.

Along with my friend and colleague, Congressman Poe, I was pleased to help lead the bipartisan, bicameral effort to create the WWI Commission, because of the many Missouri ties to that Great War. After WWI ended, local Kansas Citizens joined together to raise over \$2 million to create a lasting monument to those who served in the war. In 1921, more than 100,000 people gathered to see General Pershing and the supreme Allied commanders from France, Great

Britain, Belgium and Italy, dedicate the site of the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. It was the first time that these great leaders gathered since the war. Kansas City is now the home of the National World War I Museum and Memorial. Additionally, General John J. Pershing – the commander of the American Expeditionary Force in Europe during the war – was born in Missouri, as was Captain Harry Truman, who later became our 33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States.

### **Fiscal Year 2017 and 2018 Funding**

I would like to request the Committee’s support in providing funding in Fiscal Year 2017 and 2018 for the U.S. WWI Centennial Commission to carry out the duties and obligations that we in Congress gave them. The Commemorative events around the country will begin to take place this year – starting with the kickoff event on April 6<sup>th</sup> and continuing in communities around our nation for the next 18 months. Time is running out to fund the centennial programs and activities.

### **Legislative History**

- The Commission was created under Public Law 112-272 on January 14, 2013. This was during sequestration and the authors were counseled to include a prohibition on federal funds, otherwise the bill would not advance. We acceded to that request in order to get the Commission up and running in time for the Centennial.
- Then, in 2014 Congress recognized the need to allow federal funding to support the centennial efforts of the Commission when it passed the NDAA of 2015. The NDAA included a provision to **limit the prohibition on federal funding to memorials or commemorative works.** *‘SEC. 9. LIMITATION ON OBLIGATION OF FEDERAL FUNDS. ‘No Federal funds may be obligated or expended for the designation,*

*establishment, or enhancement of a memorial or commemorative work by the World War I Centennial Commission.’’.*

- The NDAA amendment language was crafted to be deliberately broad, in order to allow for discretionary appropriations by Congress or to potentially receive funding from related agencies or entities with similar missions if they had any remaining funds at the end of the fiscal year.
- Funding for the Commission was included in the President’s FY17 Budget Request – for \$6 million – under the Legislative Branch Budget, Other Legislative Branch Boards and Commissions.
- Congress has previously authorized the Defense Department and other agencies, such as the American Battle Monuments Commission, to support commemorative efforts for the WWII 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, as well as Korean and Vietnam War anniversaries. WWI should receive similar attention and support.
- Additionally, Reps. McCollum and Simpson graciously participated in a colloquy on the floor with me about the issue last year and expressed support for the Commission.

## **Conclusion**

I ask that the Committee support either 1) the inclusion of discretionary funding for the Commission for FY17 or FY18, or 2) provide language that allows federal agencies to support the Commission if they have leftover funding in FY17 and FY18. The Commission is raising private funds for the construction of the memorial at Pershing Park, and has raised enough private funds to cover the April 6<sup>th</sup> kickoff event. However, it will shortly run out of funds for operations and other programs by this summer.

To refrain from funding the World War I Centennial Commission would be a disservice to the 4 million-plus Americans who served in World War I and the 116,708 soldiers who bravely gave their lives in support of our allies during the Great War. I ask for your support in making sure their service is appropriately honored. Thank you.