

**Statement of Congressman Jamie Raskin**  
**Legislative Hearing on H.R. 6720**  
**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**July 14, 2022**

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**“The time hath found us.” – Thomas Paine**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, for inviting me to testify today on H.R. 6720, a bill to authorize the Thomas Paine Memorial Association to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs, and for other purposes.

I appreciate the Subcommittee’s consideration of H.R. 6720. This centuries-overdue legislation would authorize the establishment of a commemorative work on federal land in or around Washington, D.C. to honor Thomas Paine, one of our nation’s greatest Founding Fathers and, by far, its most unsung. There are no statues of Tom Paine in the federal city, no musicals about him, no images of him to be found on U.S. currency.

H.R. 6720 authorizes the Thomas Paine Memorial Association to raise private funds to cover the cost of the memorial, 100% of which has already been raised or pledged.

Tom Paine was a guiding intellectual, political, and moral force in the American Revolution who galvanized the population with his beautiful writings and speeches. He published his runaway bestseller *Common Sense* six months before the Declaration of Independence was signed, and it sold more than a half-million copies during the Revolution, an unheard-of success in America. His passionate and electrifying pamphlet called for independence from Great Britain and laid the conceptual framework for America’s democratic public philosophy, rejecting monarchy, aristocracy, and theocracy, asserting the rights of men (and women—he was an early feminist) and the right of the people to govern themselves in a democratic republic.

With its plain language and bracing democratic ideas, *Common Sense* instantly captured the imagination of the American people, particularly working people. Readings at taverns, street corners, and other gathering places became a popular pastime. *Common Sense* was the most influential pamphlet of the American Revolution and remains one of the best-selling titles in our history.

Paine’s legacy extends beyond *Common Sense*. His other great works, including *The Crisis*, *Rights of Man*, and *The Age of Reason*, became defining texts of the Enlightenment and inspired countless Americans as they forged a new nation. George Washington even had his commanders read aloud a portion of *The Crisis* to inspire their forces before the historic crossing of the Delaware River that saved the revolutionary war effort.

Paine was a thinker far ahead of his time. A hero to Ben Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and all small-d democrats, he staunchly opposed slavery, became the first to advocate a league of democratic nations, and called for universal education of both men and women and civil rights for all. He also made significant contributions to science and technology, helping to engineer an iron bridge and the steam engine.

Paine's visionary democratic philosophy and his golden pen made him a lot of enemies, and for that reason no appropriate work commemorating him exists in the capital of the nation he fought for and helped to bring into being. I urge you to help right that symbolic wrong and finally honor America's greatest founding democracy patriot. We are just catching up with his visionary gifts now.

I hope that you will join me in recognizing Thomas Paine's profound contributions to this country, and I respectfully request your support for this legislation, which can be a unifying thing in a divided time. As Paine said, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." Thank you again for your time and consideration of H.R. 6720.