

Testimony of Jackie Gingrich Cushman, Chair  
The Adams Memorial Commission

Before the House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Hearing on “H.R. 2306, The Adams Memorial –  
Great American Heroes Act”  
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**Introduction**

Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee for this opportunity to testify before you today. I am Jackie Gingrich Cushman, and I serve as chair of the Adams Memorial Commission. We are grateful for your time and interest in the commission and this legislation, which will enable us to complete the establishment of a memorial to the Adams Family, including Abigail, John, John Quincy, Louisa Catherine, Charles and Henry Adams. We are committed to completing the work given to us by Congress.

I was appointed to the Adams Memorial Commission by President Trump in December 2020. By law, the commission could not begin work until a majority of the commissioners were appointed. This happened in December 2023, when Speaker Johnson appointed Congressmen John Moolenaar, Morgan Griffith, Stephen Lynch and Gerry Connolly, whom we recently lost. On January 22, 2024, the commission held its first meeting, during which I was elected chair. I am grateful that President Trump has given me this opportunity to serve our country.

Today, I am here before you to support “H.R. 2306, The Adams Memorial – Great American Heroes Act.” This legislation, introduced by Congressman Moolenaar, will give us the time, energy and public

support needed to complete this commemorative work as directed by Public Law 116-9 on March 12, 2019. This proposed legislation will reauthorize the commission, provide an additional site to be included in the selection process, and delineate clear guidelines for future appropriations. Before addressing the specifics of the legislation, let me first offer some details regarding the unparalleled impact of John Adams and his remarkable family on the founding and history of our great nation.

## **Background – The Adams Legacy**

John Adams served as our first vice president and second president. He and his wife, Abigail, were crucial to our nation declaring its independence. As residents of Massachusetts, they witnessed firsthand the British overreach into the colonies. Before the revolution, they helped lay the groundwork that provided a fertile field for intellectual argument and encouraged the curiosity and optimism that were needed to create a new nation.

In 1765, over a decade before we declared our independence, John Adams wrote “A Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law,” an essay that was published anonymously in the Boston Gazette. Here's what it said: “But it seems very manifest from the Stamp Act itself, that a design is formed to strip us in a great measure of the means of knowledge by loading the Press, the Colleges, and even an Almanack and a Newspaper with restraints and duties; and to introduce the inequalities and dependencies of the feudal system, by taking from the poorer sort of people all their little subsistence, and conferring it on a set of stamp officers, distributors and their deputies.” Adams understood that the Stamp Act was not about just money; it was about power – who had the power to levy taxes and who had the power to compel the colonists to pay.

In 1774, the British Parliament passed the Coercive Acts, which the colonists called the Intolerable Acts.

In response, the colonists organized the Boston Tea Party.

That fall, delegates from the colonies convened the First Continental Congress to determine their longer-term response. John Adams, who served as a representative from Massachusetts, believed that we would have to declare our independence from Britain; he was in the minority.

Most of the delegates believed the relationship with Britain could be fixed. This moderate faction, led by John Dickinson, a delegate from Pennsylvania, proposed petitioning King George III. The delegates voted in favor of the petition along with a boycott of British goods and a plan to meet again in a year if nothing had changed by then. The king rejected the petition and further clamped down on the colonies.

The Battles of Lexington and Concord occurred during the spring of the following year and the Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia not long afterward.

In April 1776, Adams wrote “Thoughts on Government,” in which he argued for three branches of government. He wrote, “A representation of the people in one assembly being obtained, a question arises whether all the powers of government, legislative, executive, and judicial, shall be left in this body? I think a people cannot be long free, nor ever happy, whose government is in one Assembly.” He was already laying the groundwork for our structure of government.

The delegates were divided into two camps: moderates, led by Dickinson, who wished to continue being British subjects but with greater autonomy, and radicals, led by John Adams, who wanted a complete separation from the British. Although the moderates dominated at the time, Adams maintained that the colonists were obliged to defend themselves against British tyranny.

In a letter to Moses Gill, chairman of the Committee of Supplies, on June 10, 1775, Adams wrote, “Powder and artillery are the most efficacious, sure and infallible conciliatory measures we can adopt.”

That same month, Adams nominated George Washington to serve as commander-in-chief, arguing before Congress that his military experience and character had prepared him for the job. “I hope the People of our Province, will treat the General with all that Confidence and Affection, that Politeness and Respect, which is due to one of the most important Characters in the World,” Adams wrote. “The Liberties of America, depend upon him, in a great Degree.” He knew that Washington had what was needed to lead America to freedom.

Through the Olive Branch Petition, the Continental Congress once again voted to try to make amends. But, in August 1775, the king once again rejected any terms of reconciliation and declared the colonies in open rebellion. This response by the British helped Adams convince the rest of the delegates that the colonies should stand united and form a new nation.

After many months of debate, the motion to declare our independence was announced and Adams immediately seconded it. He was then appointed to a committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. It was Adams who suggested that Thomas Jefferson should write the declaration. Adams recounted his conversation with Jefferson to Timothy Pickering, who went on to serve as secretary of state. “Reason first: You are a Virginian and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason second: I am obnoxious, suspected and unpopular. You are very much otherwise. Reason third: You can write ten times better than I can.” Adams was right.

The declaration was presented in Congress on June 28, 1776, and Adams defended it on the floor for days. Washington was the sword of the revolution, Jefferson the pen and Adams the voice of the revolution. The declaration was finally passed on July 2, 1776.

“No transcription was made, no notes were kept,” wrote David McCullough in his biography “John Adams.” “There would be only Adams’s own recollections, plus those of several others who would remember more the force of Adams himself than any particular thing he said. That it was the powerful most important speech heard in the

Congress since it first convened, and the greatest speech of Adams's life, there is no question."

Jefferson recalled later that Adams delivered his speech "with a power of thought and expression that moved us from our seats."

Richard Stockton, a delegate from New York, wrote that Adams was "the man to whom the country is most indebted for the great measure of Independency. He it was who sustained the debate, and by the force of his reasoning demonstrated not only the justice, but the expediency of the measure."

During the Revolutionary War, John Adams served overseas, securing loans from Dutch financiers to fund the war, and negotiating the Treaty of Paris (1783), thereby securing American independence from Britain, ending the American Revolution with favorable territorial rights.

He was the primary author of the Massachusetts State Constitution, which became the model for the US Constitution. The Massachusetts Constitution includes thoughts and ideas that are the forerunner of our Bill of Rights.

In 1796, Adams was elected to be the second U.S. president. His term was defined by his commitment to peace, the rule of law, and strong central governance. As president, he used his diplomatic skills to keep the young nation out of war with France, which allowed our nation to grow in stability. He prioritized national defense, established the U.S. Navy, and commissioned the USS Constitution. He helped solidify the authority of the central government during its formative years and appointed John Marshall to the Supreme Court, where he shaped constitutional law as chief justice. Adams also ensured the nation's first peaceful transfer of power between political parties after his loss of the presidential election of 1800 to Thomas Jefferson.

Abigail Adams made profound contributions to American history, though she never held public office. Her influence came through her intellect, political insight, and prolific correspondence during the founding era of the United States. Abigail was John Adams's closest

confidant. Over the course of their marriage, they exchanged over 1,000 letters in which she advised him on political issues, policy, and public sentiment. She gave sharp commentary on political leaders, revolutionary ideas, and the responsibilities of government, often anticipating political shifts. Her counsel kept him informed during his long absences from home. While he was away, she managed the family farm with business acumen, established a trading business during wartime, and created an informal intelligence network through correspondence during the revolution, sharing vital information with her husband.

Once he was elected, she was his chief adviser and, during his presidency, she served as his chief of staff. She was an early voice for women's equality and education. She opposed slavery and expressed those sentiments in her writings. Her correspondence with her husband and other prominent figures serves as an important historical record of the founding of our country.

John and Abigail's son, John Quincy Adams, made major contributions to American history before, during, and after his presidency. His career spanned more than six decades, during which he became one of the most accomplished public servants in U.S. history. He was a brilliant diplomat who served as minister to Prussia, Russia, the Netherlands, and Britain, which helped establish the United States as a respected global power. He helped negotiate the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812, and the Adams-Onís Treaty, which secured Florida from Spain and extended the U.S. boundary to the Pacific.

As secretary of state under President James Monroe, he was the primary architect of the Monroe Doctrine, which warned European powers against further colonization in the Western Hemisphere. As the sixth president of the United States, he proposed a bold national program of roads, canals and other infrastructure. He was a strong advocate for federal support of public education and scientific advancement, and he helped to found the Smithsonian Institution. After his presidency, Adams served in the U.S. House of Representatives, the only former president

to have done so. His post-presidency, anti-slavery work laid the groundwork for the abolitionist movement. In 1841, he successfully argued the “Amistad” case before the Supreme Court on behalf of enslaved Africans who had taken control of a Spanish ship, securing their freedom. In 1844, he helped repeal the “Gag Rule,” which prevented the discussion of any anti-slavery petitions in Congress; and proposed legislation calling for the elimination of the 3/5 clause in the U.S. Constitution and for the gradual emancipation of enslaved people. He is known for his lifelong public service and moral leadership.

Charles Adams, son of Louisa Catherine and John Quincy Adams, served in Congress. He was nominated by President Abraham Lincoln and served as the United States Ambassador to the Court of St. James during the Civil War. During his service, Charles persuaded the British not to recognize the Confederate States of America.

The legacy of the Adams family is long and immense. Without Abigail and John Adams, our nation likely would not have declared independence in either the same way or at the same time. Their son, John Quincy, laid the foundation for the debate on slavery that enabled us to emerge united from the Civil War. Without the Adamses’ grandson, Charles, Britain might have recognized the confederacy – and, once again, history could have been changed. They transmitted their love of God, country and family to their children, who passed those same values along to *their* children. A family whose influence spanned from our country’s formation through the Civil War.

## **Legislation**

The commission strongly supports H.R. 2306 as a welcome and necessary step to address the glaring absence of an Adams Memorial on the National Mall. This absence makes the story of our nation woefully incomplete. The legislation is urgently needed to extend the work of the commission itself, whose authorization would otherwise expire at the end of this calendar year. In addition to the commission’s reauthorization, the bill includes two other provisions central to the success of the Adams Memorial.

## Site

The legislation allows for consideration of an additional site near the White House in President's Park – a site befitting such a preeminent Founding Family, and a site that would propel the memorial to success. HR 2306 would allow for consideration of the triangular, 1.5-acre parcel northeast of the Ellipse between the Ellipse and 15th Street, NW. This location is currently occupied by the Ellipse Visitor Pavilion, an unused, unflattering structure of about 4,500 square feet that was built in the early 1990s as an explicitly temporary facility to provide visitor services for the public visiting the White House. Visitor services are now provided by the White House Visitor Center, and the pavilion is closed and derelict.

Instead, this park-like setting, graced with mature trees, would be a perfect place for the modest memorial -- composed of a library in a garden -- that is being contemplated. The site's adjacency to the White House would also help the story of John Adams and the creation of the nation's capital city come alive. On November 1, 1800, John Adams became the first president to live in the White House by moving in while it was still under construction. "I pray Heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house and on all that shall hereafter inhabit it," he wrote to Abigail the next day. "May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof." These words are now carved in the mantelpiece in the State Dining Room.

Coincidentally, it was exactly 235 years ago today, on July 16, 1790, that the Residence Act was passed; it authorized the relocation of the nation's capital from Philadelphia to the District of Columbia, a compromise between the northern and southern states. The relocation represented an important step in the evolution of our fledgling country from a confederation of individual states to a single nation.



The site would extend the north/south axis of memorials dedicated to the Founding Fathers -- the Jefferson Memorial to the south, the Washington Monument at the center, and now the White House to the north. It is also near the statue of the nation's first secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, at the steps of the Treasury Building, and the statues of Revolutionary War heroes in Lafayette Square, north of the White House. While this location is technically within the Reserve, it is in harmony with the Commemorative Works Act, which seeks to preserve the Reserve, because it would improve a location of existing development, and direct its use to the recognition of a unifying Founding Father and his family.

## **Funding**

The legislation provides for a measured approach to funding the Adams Memorial. It would allow for federal appropriations while catalyzing private donations, requiring one-to-one private matching funds and capping the federal share at \$50 million. This pragmatic funding strategy compares very favorably with the philanthropic leverage and level of private cost share in other recent presidential memorials authorized by this committee. The commission has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Adams Memorial Foundation for the foundation to raise private funds for the project. With enactment of this legislation, we expect robust private participation in this important public commemorative work. The commission does not anticipate requesting appropriations prior to construction.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, now is the right time to build a permanent memorial in the nation's capital to commemorate the Adamsses' legacy. With the 250th right around the corner, we have the right moment. And with this legislation, we will have the right tools to get the job done.

Were it not for John Adams and his dogged pursuit of independence, there might not have been a Declaration of Independence to celebrate or a United States Constitution to uphold. Hailed as the “Voice of the Revolution,” he lit the flame of American independence in ways no one else did or could, recruiting Thomas Jefferson to write the declaration and then inspiring the Continental Congress to adopt it unanimously; identifying and advancing George Washington to lead the war effort and the new nation; crafting the model for the Constitution; and leading the nation himself, as our second president and first White House inhabitant.

Nearly 250 years later, the values and exemplary legacy of the Adamses have the power to unite and guide us as a nation. John Adams was uniquely aware of the importance of shared national values, and of how to create stories that bind us together rather than pull us apart. The Adamses exemplified strength of character, belief in God, and the importance of family, education, and public service. John Adams and his family demonstrated that ideas, hard work, and determination can change an entire nation for the better. This memorial will inspire new generations of Americans by reigniting pride in our shared American values and our constitutional republic.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today and for your consideration of this important matter.