

Written testimony for Sept. 2, 2026 Natural Resources Hearing  
In support of HR 9600, “Common Sense 250 Act of 2026”

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

Thank you to the honorable members of this subcommittee for holding this hearing on HR 9600, the “Common Sense 250 Act of 2026,” whose purpose, as you’ve heard, is “to approve the location of a commemorative work for Thomas Paine, America’s indispensable and unsung Founding Father.” We’re grateful for the bipartisan support for this bill shown by Rep. Jamie Raskin and Rep. Victoria Spartz. Thank you for inviting my testimony.

I represent the Thomas Paine Memorial Association as its secretary. The Thomas Paine Memorial Association is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit created in 2020 for the purpose of educating the public about the legacy of Thomas Paine and specifically to erect a monument to this forgotten Founding Father in Washington, D.C. I’m pleased to introduce the world-renowned sculptor of this memorial who is in the audience: Zenos Frudakis.

The National Capital Memorial Advisory Committee voted unanimously to endorse the plan for a Paine memorial, with a member confiding great surprise to realize there wasn’t one already! Congress overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan bill in December 2022 authorizing the Thomas Paine Memorial Association to erect the memorial. No federal funds will be used in the construction or maintenance of the memorial. We commissioned a site study, discovering a wonderful spot just blocks from the US Capitol, where Americans and the capital’s 27 million annual tourists can go to be inspired and understand the American Revolution — and the man who sparked it. In August 2024, NCMAC again agreed unanimously that the Paine memorial belongs in Area One.

As you know, Area One is reserved for commemorative works of “preeminent historical and lasting significance to the United States.”

Is there anyone who better meets the definition of having preeminent historic and lasting significance to the United States than Thomas Paine?

Without Paine, there would be no United States of America — he named our very country. Arriving from England at the invitation of Benjamin Franklin in 1774, he soon became the voice of the American Revolution. His “Common Sense” pamphlet, published 250 years ago in January, fomented the rebellion as he urged: “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.” His pamphlet paved the way for the Declaration of Independence. The importance of “Common Sense” cannot be exaggerated, selling an estimated half million copies at a time when there were only two and a half million colonists. Paine relinquished the copyright and gave its

proceeds to the Continental Army. Not content with that support, he enlisted as a private, served as an aide-de-camp, and marched with General George Washington during that first harsh, winter campaign. In December 1776, Paine penned the first of his famous “Crisis Papers,” with its opening line known to every school child: “These are the times that try men’s souls.” George Washington ordered it read aloud to soldiers to bolster morale. Paine followed that with a series of “Crisis Papers,” ensuring that colonists stayed dedicated to the cause of freedom. In 1777, Paine served as secretary of the Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs, which, I believe, means he served as a committee staffer. He was a hero to Ben Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and [Ronald Reagan](#)<sup>1</sup>

Is there a more meaningful way for Congress to commemorate our nation’s 250th anniversary than by ensuring this long overdue acknowledgment of the Revolution’s principal champion for independence? — this American hero, patriot, icon and unifier? This memorial will honor our founding heritage and be an enduring monument to patriotism and our nation’s ideals. In moving this bill forward, if I may paraphrase the Crisis Papers, you will have “the love and thanks of man and woman.”

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, Republican National Convention Speech, 1980  
<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/republican-national-convention-acceptance-speech-1980>