

August 23, 2006

The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine
Governor
Commonwealth of Virginia
Executive Office Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Kaine,

The Charles City County Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution #2006-15 on August 22, 2006, to support the construction of a memorial in Washington, D.C. to the more than 5,000 persons of African descent who served as soldiers, sailors and patriots in the American Revolution. The National Liberty Memorial, when completed in 2010, will be the last memorial ever constructed on the Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument.

Among the more than 400 Virginia black soldiers and patriots currently identified are 27 men from Charles City County, including Sgt. Isaac Brown, Joseph Wallace and William Timothy. Two of their Charles City descendants, recent high school graduate Yolanda Wade and eighth grader Daysha Christian, testified before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission on June 27, 2006, in support of this memorial. Along with Dr. Marion Lane of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, also a descendant of Sgt. Isaac Brown, they represent tens of thousands of Virginians and citizens in sister states who are descended from those patriots and may not comprehend the depth of their families' contributions to the nation's birth.

Daysha's and Yolanda's compelling testimony and that of National Mall Liberty Fund, D.C. (www.libertyfunddc.org) persuaded the commission that land set aside in 1988 for such a memorial should continue to be preserved despite a moratorium imposed by Congress in 2003 that prohibits the construction of any future memorials in Washington's monumental core. This was an extraordinary accomplishment given the competition for memorials. Because this forgotten Revolutionary war history is so compelling and so central to Virginia, we urge you to support the adoption of Resolution #2006-15 in the state legislature. We are also sending copies of the Resolution to Senator Benjamin Joseph Lambert III and Delegate A. Donald McEachin and urging them to support you in this endeavor.

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The National Liberty Memorial Act, S. 2495, was introduced in the U.S. Senate on April 3, 2006, by Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut and Senator George Allen along with a bipartisan group of co-sponsors: Senators Charles Grassley, Robert Byrd, Barack Obama, Elizabeth Dole and Lincoln Chafee. With the recommendation of the Memorial Advisory Commission, the sponsors are confident that the Senate Committee on Energy will conduct a hearing and report S. 2495 to the floor for passage before the 109th congress adjourns. We have been in communication with Representative Robert Scott, and expect him to introduce a companion bill in the House in similar bipartisan fashion.

Mr. Governor, it takes a powerful story to propel the nearly 30 years of dedication that led up to the Board's adoption of Resolution #2006-15. Other memorials, like great principles such as precious civil rights for all Americans, have consumed decades taking root in the hearts and landscape of the nation. The National Liberty Memorial has its roots in the four-year battle in the mid-1980s of a Washington, D.C. woman, Lena Santos Ferguson, now deceased, to join a chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. Her mother, Ida Gay Santos, was born at Bermuda Hundreds, Virginia in 1898. She was the daughter of a white Maine sea captain, Alphonso Gay, and a black woman from Chesterfield County, Rosa King Gay. Mr. Gay's father, a white Union Army soldier, died of wounds inflicted at Cold Harbor, Virginia in June 1864. He left a photograph that captivated Mrs. Ferguson's nephew, Maurice A. Barboza. From childhood growing up in Plainville, Connecticut, Mr. Barboza had pledged to discover his family roots in that photograph.

In 1985, after Mrs. Ferguson had won her battle and Mr. Barboza, a resident of Alexandria, Virginia, had woven together the family's white and black ancestry, the pair spearheaded the crusade to build the memorial to black patriots. They felt that the relationships between diverse Americans could benefit from an understanding of the role African Americans played in the nation's founding. In 1988, the U.S. Congress declared the deeds of African Americans during that era to be of "preeminent historical and lasting significance to the nation." The Secretary of the Interior then approved the hallowed site at Constitution Gardens on a lake across from a memorial to the 56 Signers of the Declaration of Independence.

All of the elements for success were in place by 1992, including the land, an approved design, and major donors. The project, sadly, went downhill after Mr. Barboza and Mrs. Ferguson relinquished their dream. None of those persons who pledged to build the memorial afterward were up to the long and grueling task. By 2005, Mr. Barboza decided to assemble National Mall Liberty Fund D.C. to renew the project's original spirit and build the memorial. He found backers on Capitol Hill, led by Senator Dodd and Senator Allen. They believe the memorial is still viable and not in any way undermined by the absence of progress during the previous 14 years. The previous group is defunct and entirely out of business.

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Through dedicated persons across the nation, like Judy Ledbetter of Charles City's History Center and our students Yolanda and Daysha, Liberty Fund D.C is reassembling a coalition of citizens and more than 20 national organizations that had supported the memorial with contributions and resolutions of support. Among those on record as supporting the project were the National Governors Conference, Prince Hall Masons, American Jewish Congress, AFSCME, AFL-CIO, National Conference of Mayors, NAACP, National Conference of State Legislatures and the American Bar Association.

Mrs. Ferguson's settlement agreement with the DAR in May 1985 required the group to identify every black soldier who served in the Revolutionary war. Some 2,000 of more than 5,000 estimated black soldiers to have served were published between 1986 and 2001. Perhaps as many as 60 African Americans have joined the DAR and its male counterpart, the Sons of the American Revolution, since, thanks partly to Mrs. Ferguson's tenacity. A list of nearly 400 black soldiers and patriots from Virginia (taken from Mrs. Ferguson's 2001 DAR compilation) is attached together with a letter and impressive bibliography sent to the U.S. Senate by scholars Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard and Gary B. Nash of UCLA.

We are looking forward to working with you, Senator Allen, Representative Scott, Senator Lambert and Delegate McEachin to ensure the prompt passage of the National Liberty Memorial Act. We are also sending this letter to the Virginia Association of Counties and the National Association of Counties with a request that those organizations adopt resolutions of support and vigorously promote this endeavor. We hope that you will testify in support of Resolution #2006-15 before the U.S. Congress as endorsed by the Virginia legislature.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Holmes, Chairman
Charles City County Board of Supervisors

cc: Senator George F. Allen
Representative Robert C. Scott
Senator Benjamin J. Lambert, III
Delegate A. Donald McEachin
Honorable Richard M. Bowman
Virginia Association of Counties
National Association of Counties