

# **COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**

*Office of the Governor*

Glenn Youngkin  
Governor

March 31, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

**Re: Proposed Removal of Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery**

Dear Secretary Austin:

The Commonwealth of Virginia has received formal notice of the Department of Army's intent to remove the Confederate monument from Arlington National Cemetery. It is my understanding that you may have directed the Army to do so based on the recommendation of the Department of Defense's Naming Commission on the Confederate States of America.

I respectfully ask that you do not accept such recommendation and permit the monument, the burial site within its base, and the graves which surround it to remain undisturbed.

The sculpture by Moses Ezekiel is not like any other Civil War monument in the country. In fact, without the signage erected by Arlington Cemetery, I am confident that many visitors would not know that the sculpture is reflective of that terrible war fought to end the tyranny of slavery and would come away with the feeling that they have visited a solemn burial ground, not a celebration or glorification of war or the Confederacy.

As you probably know, the sculpture is not of a charging warrior with a sword, or a commanding general on horseback. Inscribed on the monument are the immortal words from Isaiah, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." When it was unveiled in 1914, the Washington Post and others praised the work for its focus not on war but on peace and the future. Simply put, it was a monument to reconciliation. Through the years many Presidents visited and spoke of unity. In recent years Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama sent wreaths on behalf of the citizens of the United States.

Moses Ezekiel was born in Richmond, Virginia. He was the first Jewish student to attend the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington. During the Civil War, in May of 1864, Confederate leaders enlisted VMI male students to march 80 miles north to the town of New Market to engage


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in battle. It was the first and very likely the last time most of these teenagers fought in battle. Ten were killed. Cadet Ezekiel survived the Battle of New Market and shortly began his legendary career as one the world's renowned sculptors. In 1921, his tomb was encased in the base of the monument.

I appreciate your careful consideration to this issue, and would respectfully ask that you visit the sculpture before deciding its fate. I trust you will see this spot in Arlington as a sacred burial ground reflecting the aspiration to unify a Nation divided. Moses Ezekiel's sculpture was not intended to glorify the Confederate side in the Civil War, but to turn the page towards reconciliation of our Nation.

I respectfully suggest that removing the monument will cause more division among Americans.

Sincerely,



Glenn Youngkin

cc: The Honorable Christine Wormuth, Secretary of the U.S. Army  
The Honorable Mark Warner, U.S. Senator  
The Honorable Tim Kaine, U.S. Senator