

A NATIONAL MONUMENT HONORING
OUR AMERICAN HEROES ON THE
IOWA-ILLINOIS MEMORIAL BRIDGE



**BRIDGING THE
SACRIFICES OF
OUR HEROES**





COALITION OF POLISH AMERICANS

PROMOTING THE INTERESTS OF POLISH AMERICANS

www.coalitionpa.org

PROPOSAL

Veterans Memorial Bridge National Monument

Dear Ms. Pence,

Thank you and your team for the opportunity to submit the "Bridging the Sacrifices of Our Heroes" proposal on behalf of the Coalition of Polish Americans.

Our organization is leading the effort to designate the Iowa-Illinois Memorial Bridge: The Veterans Memorial Bridge National Monument. We are submitting this proposal to request your help in presenting this idea to President Trump. Our President has demonstrated that he holds American heroes and this country's heritage in high esteem and understands the importance of expressing these values through visible symbols such as monuments.

By introducing the ideas of saving from imminent destruction two valuable historical objects – the Crenshaw House and Iowa-Illinois Memorial Bridge – the Coalition of Polish Americans wishes to express foundational elements of Polish heritage: freedom, tolerance by honoring those who fought for them.

There exists a connection between the Crenshaw House and the Memorial Bridge. Modjeska Monteith Simkins, an important African American leader of public health reform, social reform and Civil Rights Movement activist was named by her parents after Helena Modjeska, the mother of Ralph Modjeski, a pre-eminent bridge designer, the designer of the Memorial Bridge.

Losing these landmarks, one honoring those who gave the ultimate sacrifice of defending the United States and the other being witness to an important aspect of American history, benefits no one.

The interesting projects are not the ones that erase history, but those that figure out how to use and integrate them in a new way that gives the public access to it.

It is our hope that designating these two sites as National Monuments will generate good will and support for President Trump in the entire country and especially in our community, whose vote for Donald J. Trump in the swing states in the 2016 elections was critically important.

Sincerely,

Christopher Waz
Vice President
Coalition of Polish Americans

PROJECT OVERVIEW

WHO:

The Coalition of Polish Americans is a nationwide non-partisan organization formed to represent Polish Americans in the political and cultural life of the United States. In the 2020 election year we have witnessed deeply disturbing destruction of many important memorials of American history. Many of our members experienced the brutal destruction of Polish national heritage under the communist rule. Polish Americans have played an important role American military history, symbolized by heroes such as Thaddeus Kosciuszko, Casimir Pulaski, Francis “Gabby” Gabreski, Matt Urban, Alex Drabik and countless others. Polish Americans in general and the Coalition of Polish Americans in particular, are strong supporters of all initiatives that protect and safeguard visible memorials of American history, especially the ones honoring our military heroes.

WHY:

We believe that if President Trump declares The Iowa-Illinois Memorial Bridge as The Veterans Memorial Bridge National Monument it will save from imminent destruction an important and powerful historical landmark and its profound connection to the memory of American Veterans of World Wars I and II. Such a National Monument will help to cultivate a public understanding of the sacrifices made by Americans serving in World War I and II, in a manner reminiscent of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC by Maya Lin. By repurposing a historic bridge and veterans’ memorial over the Mississippi River that is now slated by Gov. Pritzker to be carelessly demolished, we can appropriately commemorate those who answered the call to serve.

HOW:

The view from the Iowa-Illinois Memorial Bridge is a sight to behold. It is the oldest existing suspension bridge over the Mississippi River and may be the only structure in the world where the two twin bridges, literally next to each other, span a mighty body of water. An entry on the bridge at the website **HistoricBridges.org** neatly sums this up by stating,

“simply having two identical suspension bridges side by side is a unique feature. As such, an interesting place to view the bridges is in between the anchorages of the two bridges. This is a unique view that cannot be found anywhere else.”

This one-of-a-kind juxtaposition of two huge bridges with the memorial of heroes of two World Wars creates a symbol unmatched in power and singularity.

Modeled after the National Veterans Walk project in the United Kingdom, the roadbeds of each of the bridges would be lined from end to end with engraved granite plaques honoring the ordinary folks who heeded the call to fight evil. These permanent tributes would be available for purchase and bear the name of any American person or group who participated in each of these conflicts. The span built after World War I would be lined with plaques of those who served in that war, while its twin which was completed after the Second World War would highlight those who fought in World War II.

Together with the seemingly endless rows of plaques lining the bridge, the setting (over the Mississippi River – the mother of all-American waterways) creates a unique contemplative space to pay tribute to these heroes in the heart of our country.



DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES:

The transformation of the Iowa-Illinois Memorial Bridge into The Veteran's Memorial Bridge Monument is an opportunity to bring a unique attraction to the Quad Cities area - the first national monument and memorial situated OVER the Mississippi River. Two successful initiatives similar to this proposal call attention to the potential that this project has:

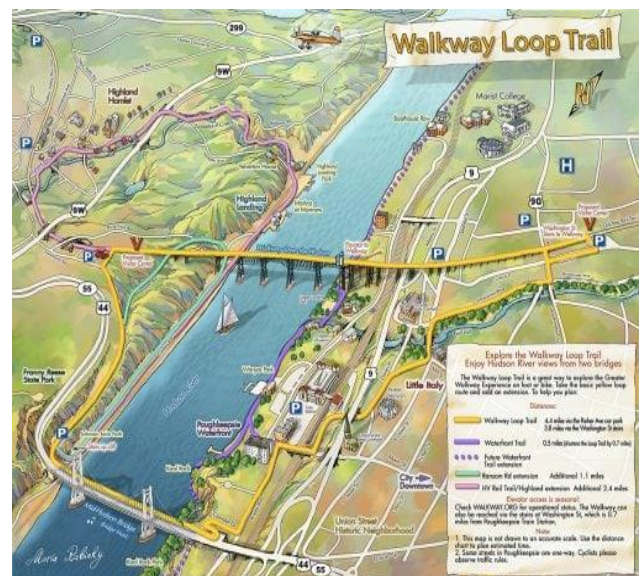
1. The High Line in New York City

"Exactly 20 years ago, I read an article about how the High Line was going to be demolished, and I just assumed someone must be working to preserve it." says Robert Hammond, reminiscing about 1999 when The High Line was an abandoned railway viaduct with an uncertain future. Ten years, two New York City mayors and innumerable community board meetings later, Hammond and his business partner Joshua David celebrated the opening of the first phase of the High Line, the 1.45-mile-long elevated greenway and community park in Manhattan. This year saw the opening of the Spur over 10th Avenue. "The work is never really done; the High Line continues to evolve." says Hammond.

The High Line's success has led to the creation of the High Line Network, a group of other infrastructure reuse projects across the country from Atlanta to Miami, Los Angeles and beyond. "The great thing about the Network is the opportunity to travel and find similar projects in other cities, to see them as they're developed and learn from them," Hammond says.

2. The Walkway Over the Hudson

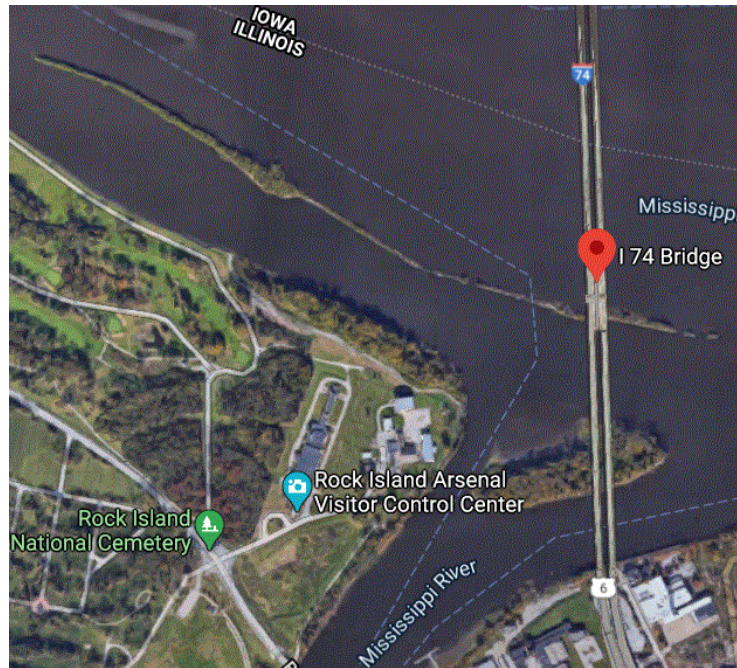
The effort to preserve the Iowa-Illinois Memorial Bridge has a successful precedent. The Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge designed by Modjeski was similarly slated for demolition. Today this structure has been reborn as the most visited State Park in all of New York State. According to a 2017 update of a 2011 study, Walkway Over the Hudson (as the transformed Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge is now called) has provided a \$24 million boost to the economy of the Mid-Hudson region. The Poughkeepsie Journal reports that **"In the 10 years since it was opened, the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park has hosted more than five million visitors and become a global destination that showcases the natural beauty for which the region is known."**



Developmental opportunities include:

1. Integrating existing military sites that border the bridge into the national monument

Rock Island on the Mississippi River is immediately west of the bridge. **There are two military cemeteries on the island, one of them a national cemetery.** Most of the island is occupied by various military installations. Either early in the process of establishing a national monument later, these sites could be incorporated – significantly enlarging and enhancing it.



2. Memorial Day fireworks

Not very distant Louisville, KY hosts the largest fireworks display in the nation. They are fired from a bridge and barges on the Ohio River. The Memorial Bridge would make a perfect place for Memorial Day fireworks and its location is even better than Louisville for such an event. It would also create an economic incentive to the state and local communities.

3. Further development to the bridge infrastructure

There is very large artificial island in the body of the bridge, right in the middle of the mighty Mississippi River. It could easily be developed into a museum or a venue for various events. It would also make for a very desirable rental space for various occasions. The huge pylons of the bridge offer infrastructure for adding covered spaces or rooms such as an already existing one shown in the picture below.



AUDIENCE:

The audience is four-fold:

1. Historical preservation enthusiasts
2. Veterans of the Armed Forces
3. State and local commercial interests
4. Those who have a vested interest, but not for the afore-mentioned reasons.

MESSAGING:

- Expose how the scheduled destruction of this memorial, dedicated to US veterans betrays a dramatic disregard for the sacrifice of our heroes. Given the passage of the Veterans' Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act of 2003 by the 108th Congress, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker's failure to protect this veteran's monument is not only reprehensible, it is also criminal. The law as passed clearly states:
 - (a) Whoever, in a circumstance described in subsection (b), willfully injures or destroys, or attempts to injure or destroy, any structure, plaque, statue, or other monument on public property commemorating the service of any person or persons in the armed forces of the United States shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 10 years, or both.
- Illinois is hurting because of the negligence of Mayor Lightfoot and Governor Pritzker. Illinoisans desperately need something they can make their own. As of right now we believe we could bring together a coalition of organizations to work with President Trump to help heal the "Land of Lincoln."

MARKETING & FUNDRAISING:

- To be developed, but we would need to apply for grants and federal funding and would want to make sure that we have a strong digital presence so that we could reach a broad base of people.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

AMVETS

VFW

