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“Last U.S. vet of WWI wants national memorial in D.C.”
By Andrew M. Seaman

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Legislation would redesignate local structure on Mall

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Frank Buckles, 108 years old, figures he has one more contribution to make.

Buckles, the last U.S. veteran of World War I, wants to see a memorial to his fellow soldiers on the National Mall. To make the case, he is scheduled to appear at a Senate hearing today.

He will be there on behalf of a bill that would redesignate the existing District of Columbia World War I memorial — a modest structure not far from the massive World War II memorial that opened in 2004 — to make it a combined D.C. and national memorial.

Buckles of Charles Town, W.Va., is honorary chairman of the World War I Memorial Foundation. The bill is named for him.

“The main thing he has done is lend his name and his voice to this movement to have some kind of representation of the veterans of World War I on our National Mall,” says his daughter, Susannah Flanagan.

David DeJonge, president of



By David DeJonge

“Forgotten memorial”: Frank Buckles at the World War I memorial in Washington in 2008.

the foundation, says Buckles was disheartened to see the condition of the D.C. memorial on his first visit in 2008. It was built in 1931 not far from the Lincoln Memorial to honor local men who died in the war. The temple-like structure has been on the D.C. Preservation League’s list of Most Endangered Places twice since 2003, Executive Director Rebecca Miller says.

“It was just a forgotten memo-

rial,” she says. “It was not on any maps. There is no signage for it. It’s not lit. There was, at one point, a tree growing out of the dome.”

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., is sponsoring the Senate legislation, a companion to a House bill.

“That was the Great War, the ‘war to end all wars,’ ” Thune says, “and lots of Americans who served and sacrificed need to be duly recognized.”

The legislation would allow the foundation to add a sculpture to the site and raise money for its preservation. The National Park Service has allocated \$10 million to restore the memorial.

There is a hitch, though. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., wants her state’s Liberty Memorial at the National World War I Museum in Kansas City to be the official national World War I memorial. She has introduced legislation, too.

“We’re really hoping to have people understand what an important asset this museum and the memorial are for the whole country,” says Denise Rendina, spokeswoman for the museum. The 217-foot-high Liberty Memorial, opened in 1926, was designated a national symbol of the war by Congress in 2000. Brian Alexander, president and CEO, is scheduled to testify today.