

Thank you for the opportunity to speak:

My name is Rocco Pelosi, I've lived in Williamson County since 1995. I'm a native Texan from Galveston, a Vietnam-era veteran, a retired public servant, a property owner, and a registered voter.

My roots in Georgetown go back to 1976 when my sister enrolled in Southwestern and the population here was under 10,000 people. Both my sister and my brother are graduates of Southwestern University.

I'm a graduate of Tulane University in New Orleans. Having lived in the Deep South, I have a special understanding of its history and heritage.

Two weeks ago, we witnessed horrific displays of hatred at the University of Virginia and in Charlottesville that shocked and saddened the nation. Those chants and those events make it clear, now more than ever, that Confederate monuments have become associated with symbols of modern white supremacy.

The historical and cultural significance of the Confederate statues on our Courthouse Square — and the connections that individuals have with them — are severely compromised by what they've come to symbolize — hatred and bigotry. Erected during the period of Jim Crow laws and segregation, these statues represent the subjugation of African Americans. That remains true today

Our county government has a duty to preserve and study history. It also has a duty compelling it to acknowledge that the parts of our history that run counter to our community's core values do **NOT** belong on pedestals in the heart of downtown Georgetown.

I'm not here to ask the Court to erase history or someone's heritage because that's impossible. We cannot choose our heritage nor our history. I'm here to challenge the Court to examine how we choose what we honor in our public square and how we celebrate our history and heritage today and in the future.

I'm here to ask the Court to consider the action necessary to remove and relocate The Confederate Soldiers Monument, which has stood on the Southside of our Courthouse since 1916 to a more appropriate place within the County. While our history has not changed . . . our times have.

Judge Gattis, your constituents from both sides of this issue will continue to appear before you and the Commissioners. When coming to a final decision, it will require the collective political will and political wisdom of the entire Court.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has issued a recent statement on Confederate Memorials. I will close with excerpts from that statement:

“We cannot and should not erase our history. But we also want our public monuments, on public land and supported by public funding, to uphold our public values.

Ultimately, decisions about what to do with offending memorials will be made on a case-by-case basis at the community level.....

We should always remember the past, but we do not necessarily need to revere it. As communities work to determine the appropriate balance, we hope they move forward in a transparent, deliberative, and inclusive way that embraces the complexity here, examines many possible alternatives, and allows for a thoughtful community dialogue that gives all sides a chance to be heard.”

Statement by Rocco L. Pelosi

August 29, 2017

Statement on Confederate Memorials: Confronting Difficult History

Statement from National Trust for Historic Preservation
President and CEO Stephanie Meeks

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In recent months, many communities have been vigorously debating anew the impact, meaning, and propriety of Confederate memorials and symbols in the public space. We have received questions from across the political spectrum about our stance on this.

At the National Trust, we believe that historic preservation requires taking our history seriously. We have an obligation to confront the complex and difficult chapters of our past, and to recognize the many ways that our understanding, and characterization, of our shared American story continues to shape our present and future.

That goes for the Civil War, our nation's bloodiest and most divisive conflict, as well. There are currently hundreds of monuments to the Confederate cause in America. They exist in 31 states, including far-flung places such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Montana. Schools and streets all over America bear Confederate names.

While some of these monuments were erected shortly after the war by grieving Southern families to honor the valor of fallen leaders and loved ones, many more were put in place for a more troubling purpose. Decades after the war, advocates of the Lost Cause erected these monuments all over the country to vindicate the Confederacy at the bar of history, erase the central issues of slavery and emancipation from our understanding of the war, and reaffirm a system of state-sanctioned white supremacy.

Put simply, the erection of these Confederate memorials and enforcement of Jim Crow went hand-in-hand. They were intended as a celebration of white supremacy when they were constructed. As recent rallies in Charlottesville and elsewhere illustrate, they are still being used as symbols and rallying points for such hate today.

These Confederate monuments are historically significant and essential to understanding a critical period of our nation's history. Just as many of them do not reflect, and are in fact abhorrent to, our values as a diverse and inclusive nation. We cannot and should not erase our history. But we also want our public monuments, on public land and supported by public funding, to uphold our public values.

Ultimately, decisions about what to do with offending memorials will be made on a case by case basis at the community level. Some memorials can be moved, others altered, and others retained as seen fit. Whatever is decided, we hope that memorials that remain are appropriately and thoughtfully “re-contextualized” to provide information about the war and its causes, and that changes are done in a way that engage with, rather than silence, the past--no matter how difficult it may be.

We should always remember the past, but we do not necessarily need to revere it. As communities work to determine the appropriate balance, we hope they move forward in a transparent, deliberative, and inclusive way that embraces the complexity here, examines many possible alternatives, and allows for a thoughtful community dialogue that gives all sides a chance to be heard.

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