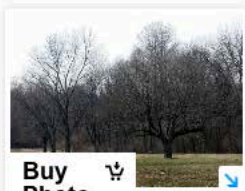


# Redesign monument plan to preserve cemetery's trees

10:03 p.m. EDT September 17, 2016



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When I heard that the Veterans Administration plans to build above-ground monuments to hold the remains of 25,000 veterans in Indianapolis, I thought that was good, and good for Indianapolis. As a veteran from the Vietnam era, disabled at age 20 — who has made a career out of helping veterans at risk — I welcome any act that helps the public remember what military

service means to our society.

But when I heard that these monuments will be built on a 15-acre parcel at Crown Hill Cemetery and it will destroy 300-year-old burr oaks, old-growth Northern red oaks and tulip poplars, I felt physically ill. This is a senseless slaughter.

Whoever serves in the military is fighting to preserve everything great about our country, including its natural heritage. These Indianapolis trees have witnessed our country's founding, and the birth of Indiana. They are living spirits. Destroying the natural environment on our own soil in an effort to memorialize our service people is the ultimate failure of imagination, of which we should all be ashamed.

I've read the environmental assessment for this project. It describes this "forested parcel with many old-growth trees in excellent condition." And it goes on to state that the forest will be converted into manicured cemetery landscape. Crown Hill and the VA have made no promises about retaining any of these old-growth trees. And so, what's planned is an unnecessary violence to the standing giants who have kept their watch over our city for 12 generations.

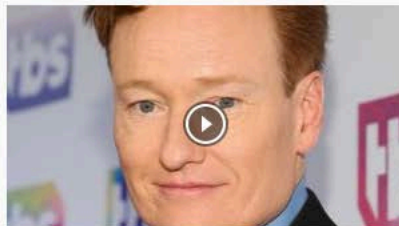
War itself is destructive enough. Surely we can avoid destroying our natural resources in an effort to honor those who have served.

We can call upon Sens. Joe Donnelly and Dan Coats and Rep. Andre Carson to work with the Veterans Administration to reconsider this plan. What if the VA donated the land back to a local land trust? What if the memorial were radically redesigned to be a pure experience of nature with the veterans' remains housed elsewhere? What if the trees themselves simply stood in honor of service given?

Our children and grandchildren have a right to marvel at these grand trees as they marvel at the service of veterans — but not one at the expense of the other.

**Jeffrey R. Piper**

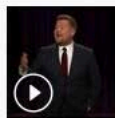
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