

Murphy Unveils Bill to Protect Veterans' Memorials

Bill

would impose tough new federal penalties on thieves taking memorials out of Connecticut

NEW

BRITAIN-Congressman Chris Murphy unveiled the Protect Veterans' Memorials Act, a bill to make transporting stolen Veterans' memorials, monuments or plaques of any value across state lines a federal crime. The bill comes amid a rash of recent memorial plaque thefts in Connecticut, and will impose harsh federal penalties on those who commit these crimes.

Murphy

held a press conference at the WWII Veterans Memorial in Kulper Park in New Britain, the scene of one such crime.

"The

most recent theft of these memorials for scrap metal is sickening," said Murphy. "With this bill, we're going to be absolutely clear: to those who would deface or steal our communities' memorials that honor the service and sacrifice of America's Veterans, we are putting you on notice."

The

recent thefts have hit local communities hard in Ansonia, Derby and Shelton. Third District Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, co-sponsor of the bill said, "I believe that we have a moral obligation to the brave men and women that have served our country. Their sacrifices have helped keep our families safe, and these memorials are a testament to their valor. I was shocked and angered by the recent rash of thefts of war memorials throughout Connecticut. That is why I am proud to support the Protect Veterans' Memorials Act with Congressman Murphy, which will help to put an end to these disgraceful thefts."

The

Protect Veterans' Memorials Act will amend Section 2314 of title 18 of the Federal Code which makes it a federal felony to transport stolen goods of more than \$5,000, subject to a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and a fine of double the amount of the item stolen or \$250,000-whichever is larger. The Protect Veterans' Memorials Act also removes the \$5,000 threshold value of the stolen item, making Veterans' monuments of any value subject to the federal theft statute.

Murphy

added, "We hope that the severity of these new penalties will serve as a stern warning against would-be thieves taking these memorials out of Connecticut, and

help local law enforcement catch perpetrators in the state and bring them to justice."

Background:

New Britain

Two of six plaques bearing Veterans' names were pried from the monument in Kulper Park last year. Police are searching for the missing plaques and those responsible for what Lt. James Wardwell called "a truly despicable crime." Police have alerted scrap yards in the area to look out for the plaques, which are made of either bronze or brass. If they are bronze, police estimate the scrap value at about \$1.50 a pound. The precise weight of both plaques - one about 1 foot square and the other about 9 square feet - is not known.

Ansonia

Two large bronze plaques with a list of Valley servicemen were reported missing on Dec. 1. The plaque was stolen from the War Memorial on Woodbridge Avenue and Vesselli Court. It was one of six bronze or copper plaques stolen from various memorials in the Valley since late November. The Ansonia memorial was started in 1942 as a simple flag with stars sewn on it. One star represented each person serving in the war. Two gold stars represented two Valley men killed in action - Armando Vesselli and Joseph Malloy. Each year, the city hosts a Memorial Day ceremony at the site. The high school band and chorus perform. Veterans from Ansonia and Seymour speak, and dozens of people eat a large meal in a neighbor's driveway.

Derby

In Derby, thieves took three large bronze plaques that honored Medal of Honor recipient Private First Class Frank P. Witek. Witek, a Derby native, died during a fierce battle on Guam in World War II. Witek's Medal of Honor citation reads: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 1st Battalion, Ninth Marines, Third Marine Division, during the Battle of Finegayan at Guam, Marianas, on 3 August 1944."

Shelton

A
historical plaque honoring Commodore Isaac Hull, a commander during the War of
1812, was reported missing on Nov. 22, 2011.

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