



MLK Commission WORK GROUP #1: Virginians on the Monument

Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, Chair

Senate Committee Room, Pocahontas Building
Richmond, Virginia

Wednesday, September 20, 2017
11:00 a.m.

SUMMARY

The Virginians on the Monument Work Group (the Work Group) of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the Commission) met to make its final selection of African American Virginians to recommend for inclusion on the Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument. The recommendation would be made to the Commission at its 1:00 p.m. meeting on the same day.

Chairwoman McClellan told the Work Group that the Monument's artist, Thomas Jay Warren, had agreed to increase the number of individuals represented on the Monument to 10—five to represent the period before Emancipation through 1865 and five to represent the period from 1866 to 1970—subject to the Commission's approval. Work Group members agreed to select 10 individuals, with the understanding that the inclusion of the two additional individuals would require a vote from the Commission.

Prior to the meeting, the Work Group received public feedback at five public hearings held across the state in Blacksburg, Alexandria, Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Danville and also received written feedback submitted by email. Members reviewed this feedback before making their selections. While soliciting public feedback, the Work Group received support for nine individuals who were not listed among the original nominees. Members voted to include these individuals in the full nominee list for consideration for the Monument and for future inclusion on the Commission's website.

To narrow the list of finalists, members each listed their top choices in the pre-Emancipation category. The Work Group voted to choose Mary Elizabeth Bowser and Gabriel, who received near-unanimous support, as two of the final individuals. After deliberation, and with the aim of representing a variety of contributions and regions in the state, members voted to include Dred Scott and William Harvey Carney in their recommendation, with Nat Turner as the final choice should a fifth individual be approved.

The Work Group repeated this process for post-Emancipation nominees, with Rosa Dixon Bowser, James Farmer, Dorothy Irene Height, John Mercer Langston, John Mitchell, Jr., and Lucy Simms emerging as the initial top choices. Due to the pair's limited connections to Virginia, members chose not to finalize the

selection of Dorothy Irene Height and James Farmer and discussed instead the inclusion of Wyatt Tee Walker, whose civil rights contributions have strong ties to Virginia. Members also acknowledged Rev. Dr. Curtis West Harris for his contributions to civil rights in Virginia.

After discussion, members finalized the selection of Rosa Dixon Bowser, John Mercer Langston, Lucy Simms, and Wyatt Tee Walker. Several members expressed support for Rev. John Jasper, whose Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church first met on Brown's Island. A vote was taken to select John Mitchell, Jr. or Rev. John Jasper as the fifth individual to recommend for inclusion on the Monument. John Mitchell, Jr. was selected as the final individual, with the understanding that a plaque near the Monument explaining the significance of Brown's Island as the chosen site could acknowledge Rev. John Jasper and his contributions.

Members confirmed the final list of individuals to recommend to the Commission: Mary Elizabeth Bowser, William Harvey Carney, Gabriel, Dred Scott, and, with approval, Nat Turner for the pre-Emancipation period and Rosa Dixon Bowser, John Mercer Langston, Lucy Simms, Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, and, with approval, John Mitchell, Jr. to represent the post-Emancipation period.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.