IN SUPPORT OF UNDERGROUND PARKING FACILITIES

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, today on the East Front of the Capitol ground is being broken for the new Capitol Visitor Center, a project that will take at least five years and hundreds of millions of dollars to complete. Nearly a century ago, in March 1901, the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia embarked on another project. The Committee was directed by Senate Resolution 139 to “report to the Senate plans for the development and improvement of the entire park system of the District of Columbia * * *.” For the purpose of preparing such plans the committee ** may secure the services of such experts as may be necessary for a proper consideration of the subject.

And secure “such experts” the committee did. The Committee formed what came to be known as the McMillan Commission, named for committee chairman, Senator James McMillan of Michigan. The Commission’s membership was a “who’s who” of late 19th and early 20th-century architecture, landscape design, and art: Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Charles F. McKim, and Augustus St. Gaudens. The commission traveled that summer to Rome, Venice, Vienna, Budapest, Paris, and London, studying the landscapes, architecture, and public spaces of the grandest cities in the world. The McMillan Commission returned and, building on the plan of French Engineer Pierre Charles L’Enfant, fashioned the city of Washington as we now know it.

We are particularly indebted today for the commission’s preservation of the Mall. When the members left for Europe, the Congress had just given the Pennsylvania Railroad a 400-foot wide strip of the Mall for a new station and trackage. It is hard to imagine our city without the uninterrupted stretch of greenery from the Capitol to the Washington Monument, but such a project would have been the result. Fortunately, when in London, Daniel Burnham was able to convince Pennsylvania Railroad president Cassatt that a site on Massachusetts Avenue would provide a much grander entrance to the city. President Cassatt assented and Daniel Burnham gave us Union Station.

But the focus of the Commission’s work was the District’s park system. The Commission noted in its report:

Aside from the pleasure and the positive benefit to health that the people derive from public parks, in a capital city like Washington there is a distinct use of public spaces as the indispensable means of giving dignity to government buildings and of making an extraordinary number of the Capitol grounds . . . (Visitas and axes: sites for monuments and museums; parks and pleasure gardens; fountains and canals; in a word all that goes to make a city a magnificent structure).

Today, as we break ground on a new project, one that will nearly double the size of the Capitol, let us not forget the grand vision of the McMillan Commission from a century ago. Washington is the capital of the most powerful nation on earth, and deserves to look it.

THE F.I.R.E. ACT

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I rise today to bring attention to America’s local fire fighters who put their lives on the line every day protecting the lives and properties of our fellow citizens. When the call comes in, they answer without question or hesitation. Unfortunately, local and volunteer fire departments are in dire need of financial support. The health and safety of fire fighters and the public is jeopardized because many departments cannot afford to purchase protective gear and equipment, provide adequate training, and are short staffed. It is time for Congress to lend them a helping hand.

That is why I have cosponsored a bill in the left this body, the F.I.R.E. Act. This bill, S. 419, authorizes a program granting up to one billion dollars for local fire departments across our great country. The money would be available to volunteer, combination, and paid departments. It would help pay for much needed equipment, training, EMS expenses, apparatus and arson prevention efforts and a variety of education programs.

Wildfires across America and Montana are a growing threat. The F.I.R.E. Act is especially critical for rural states such as Montana as we rely heavily upon our volunteer firefighters.