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SPEECH OF HON. EMANUEL CLEAVER, II OF MISSOURI IN COMMEMORATION OF THE TREE OF PEACE

Madame Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the planting of the Tree of Peace on the grounds of the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. This ceremony is dignified by the presence of Mr. Ross P. Marine, the Honorary Consul of the Slovak Republic to the Midwest United States and board member of the Czech and Slovak Club of Greater Kansas City. During his eighteen-year tenure as Honorary Consul, Mr. Marine has worked to strengthen the economic, social, and cultural ties between Slovakia and Mid-America, and this spirit of international cooperation is reflected by the Tree of Peace project. Since the dedication of the National WWI Museum and Memorial on Armistice Day in 1926, Kansas City, Missouri has been home to the country's foremost institution committed to preserving the history of the First World War. In the shadows of the Liberty Memorial – the most fitting location our country offers for this project – the Tree of Peace will convey a message of goodwill and contribute to the reflective nature of this consecrated site.

Between July 28th, 1914 and November 11th, 1918, the First World War claimed the lives of nine million combatants and nearly eight million civilians. Another twenty-one million military personnel were wounded during the course of the war. In the United States alone, over 116,000 servicemen were killed, 204,000 were wounded, and 3,350 went missing. Among the American casualties, 441 were from Kansas City. To this day, World War I remains among the most costly and destructive wars in history.

When the National WWI Museum and Memorial opened to the public in 1926, President Calvin Coolidge explained that the memorial had “not been raised to commemorate war and victory, but rather the results of war and victory, which are embodied in peace and liberty.” The Tree of Peace project, initiated by Slovak landscape architect Dr. Marek Sobola, serves a similar purpose.

The Tree of Peace project is an international initiative that began in the Slovak Republic last year to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War's conclusion. Within four years, Dr. Sobola hopes to plant a Tree of Peace on every continent, a mission designed to champion a message of peace and the need to avoid armed conflicts. Each Tree of Peace also stands as a living tribute to all those who fought and perished in World War I, including those who lost their lives on

unknown battlefields and who remain known but to God. So far, eight Trees of Peace have been planted in four participating countries: Austria, Slovakia, Russia, and Poland. With the planting of a Tree of Peace at the National WWI Museum and Memorial on June 21st, the United States will join this international community in hopes of achieving a world free from global conflict. At a National Historic Landmark that has attracted over two million visitors since 2006, the Tree of Peace will establish its roots at one of the most treasured sites in Missouri's Fifth Congressional District and the nation.

The motto of the Tree of Peace project, to “make love the lifeblood of this world,” articulates an ideal that is antithetical to the depravity of warfare. Visitors to the National WWI Museum and Memorial walk across a glass bridge above a field of 9,000 red poppies – each of which represents 1,000 combat deaths suffered during the War. Conversely, the Tree of Peace symbolizes belief in a future where war no longer inflicts senseless death on so many. World War I was described by many contemporaries as “the war to end all wars.” While the international community has repeatedly proven this description false – with graves all across the world bearing testament to the devastating consequences of armed conflict – the Tree of Peace expresses faith that we may, once and for all, see war come to an end.

The Liberty Memorial Tower is flanked by two Assyrian Sphinx sculptures, known as Memory and Future. While Memory shields its eyes from the horrors of war, and Future shields its eyes from the uncertainty of times to come, the Tree of Peace affirms hope in a future that need not cause one to cover one's eyes in fear.

The Tree of Peace project encourages each of us to recommit ourselves to the noble pursuit of perpetual peace – in which bullets, bombs, and bayonets are all set aside; hostility is replaced with civility; and antagonism gives way to amity. The Tree of Peace calls on nations to silence the beating of their war drums, cast away their rattling sabers, and pay no heed to war hawks. Only then will the “just and lasting peace” that is described on the north wall of the memorial become a reality.

Madame Speaker, please join me in celebrating the planting of the Tree of Peace at the National WWI Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. Let us recognize this occasion by reflecting on the values of friendship, harmony, and goodwill.

This Congressional Record statement is presented to Mr. Ross P. Marine, Honorary Consul of the Slovak Republic to the Midwest U.S., and the Czech and Slovak Club of Greater Kansas City by Congressman Emanuel Cleaver, II, U.S. Representative for Missouri's Fifth District, on June 21, 2019 in recognition of the commemoration of The Tree of Peace.

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress
Fifth District, Missouri