

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have today vetoed House Bill 237 - State Government - Plaque Commemorating the Bataan Death March.

House Bill 237 requires that a plaque be placed in the State House or on the grounds of the State House to honor the soldiers who were forced to participate in the Bataan Death March in April 1942. The bill requires the Governor to appoint the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to oversee the project, and to appropriate the necessary funds.

House Bill 237 appropriately describes the Bataan Death March as "a horrific episode of World War II." The conditions to which the soldiers and civilians who were forced to march were subjected remain shocking to the conscience. My decision to veto House Bill 237 is not indicative of a lack of understanding of the tragedy of the event or the human suffering that took place. Rather, my concern is for the preservation of the historic State House and the potential proliferation of historical markers in and around our Capitol.

Maryland's State House is the oldest State capitol in continuous legislative use in the United States of America. It is the only State House ever to have served as the nation's capitol, housing the Continental Congress from November 26, 1783 to August 13, 1784. The State House was designated a National Historic Landmark by the Department of Interior in 1968.

In recognition of the historic significance of the State House, additions and alterations to the structure and its grounds should be done thoughtfully and in a manner in keeping with the nature and character of the building. As elected officials, we are trusted with the role of caretakers of Maryland's historical assets, and should fulfill this role with an appreciation for the centuries of history that precede us and the centuries of events yet to come. Decisions to permanently alter the State House should be made sparingly, and held to the highest standard of scrutiny. To do otherwise would risk reducing a proud structure such as the State House to a bulletin board collage of historical postings, accomplished in a patchwork and inconsistent manner.

A sampling of plaques currently on display in the State House is instructive, as is some recent legislative history regarding this capitol. Generally, the plaques currently on display fall into four general categories. Three plaques mark the construction or renovation of portions of the State House. Several plaques commemorate individuals who are integral to the history of the State, such as the memorial to the four Maryland signers of the Declaration of Independence, William Paca, Thomas Stone, Charles Carroll, of Carrollton and Samuel Chase (whose portraits are also on display in the new Senate Chamber), installed upon the 150th anniversary of the signing of that historic document. Other plaques honor events of national and international significance that occurred in the State House. In the old Senate Chamber, a bronze plaque marks the exact spot where, on December 23, 1783, General George Washington stood as he resigned his commission as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. That event preceded, by less than one month, another event that occurred in that room and changed the history of the world, the ratification of the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary War. (Interestingly, no plaque