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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

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ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

JEN DAULBY, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

June 18, 2020

Ms. Cheryl L. Johnson
Clerk of the United States House of Representatives
H-154 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Ms. Johnson,

In her June 18, 2020, letter to you, the Speaker of the House observed that tomorrow is Juneteenth, which commemorates an important milestone in our nation's progress toward righting the grievous wrong of slavery.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., described the Emancipation Proclamation as "a great beacon light of hope," and a "joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity." When he spoke those words, standing at the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. King spoke movingly of the challenges that still faced the nation – and the need for us to rise to meet them together. Yet today, 155 years after the events in Galveston, Texas, and nearly 60 years after Dr. King's famous speech, we still have vital work to do to ensure justice and true equality for African Americans.

The Speaker believes that in the spirit of the work before us and recognizing that who we choose to honor and celebrate in the Capitol should "reflect our highest ideals as Americans," four portraits of former Speakers who served in the Confederacy should be immediately removed from prominent display in the Capitol. I agree.

The House Fine Arts Board ("Board"), which I chair, has statutory "authority over all works of fine art, historical objects, and similar property that are the property of the Congress and are for display or other use in the House of Representatives wing of the Capitol," among other locations.¹ As Chairperson of the Board, I take very seriously my duty and responsibility to ensure that the artwork in the United States Capitol, as the Speaker put it, reflects our highest ideals as Americans.

Displaying portraits of men who chose to lead and participate in armed rebellion against the United States in a cause predicated on defending the abhorrent and racist practice of slavery not only fails that test, it is anathema to who we are as a Congress and a country. The Capitol building belongs to the American people and cannot serve as a place of honor for the hatred and racism that tears at the fabric of our nation, the very poison that these portraits embody.

¹ 2 U.S.C. § 2121(a).

Accordingly, I agree with the Speaker that the four portraits should be immediately removed from display in the Capitol. As Chairperson of the Board, I request that you take appropriate steps to ensure their prompt removal.² I appreciate your assistance with this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Zoe Lofgren', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson

Cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker

² 2 U.S.C. § 2121(b).