

HON. SALLY JEWELL'S REMARKS AT THE AMERICAN VETERANS DISABLED FOR LIFE MEMORIAL DEDICATION

One of the great privileges of being Secretary of the Interior is the honor of overseeing our National Park System, 401 special places that tell the story of America. Among these are more than 50 national parks with monuments and battlefields that serve as memorials to the men and women who fought for our freedom across the country and around the world.

Collectively, these sites underscore the cost of war: the burdens and sacrifices that few make on behalf of the many.

At Pearl Harbor, oil still leaks to the surface from the U.S.S. Arizona after more than 70 years, a reminder of over 900 men entombed in the sunken battleship below.

A few blocks from here, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a living memorial where visitors have left more than 400,000 poems, flowers, photographs and other items in remembrance of the 58,300 men and women whose names are inscribed on the wall.

Today, we add a new memorial to the National Park System to honor those who carry with them the visible and invisible scars of war. A memorial dedicated to disabled veterans – our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members – who bear the physical and emotional cost of defending our country.

Like so many of our national parks, the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial is the result of a partnership between the American people and their government, with the inspiration and funding coming from private citizens and organizations. I applaud all who contributed their time, talent and treasure to make this day possible.

The National Mall is one of the most visited places in the National Park System, with 24 million visitors a year. Many of those visitors will

now cross Independence Avenue to visit this memorial.

When they arrive, a volunteer coordinator with the National Park Service named James Pierce might be the one who greets them. He's in the audience today – and I enjoy running into him on the National Mall from time to time.

James walks with a brace on his leg, the result of an injury he sustained in a suicide bombing when he was serving in Afghanistan.

Like many wounded veterans, James has chosen to continue to serve his country as a public servant. He now has the solemn honor to be one of the caretakers of this powerful memorial.

His story is one that is echoed throughout the walls of this beautiful space: stories of bravery; stories of injuries sustained; stories of hope and healing; stories about the rediscovery of purpose.

The National Park Service is America's story teller. On behalf of the men and women at the Department of the Interior, we are proud to welcome this memorial – and this story – to the National Park Service family.