

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA
ONE HUNDRED SIXTH LEGISLATURE
SECOND SESSION

LEGISLATIVE BILL 850

Introduced by Pansing Brooks, 28; Bostelman, 23; Brewer, 43; Linehan, 39;
Lowe, 37; Scheer, 19; Williams, 36.

Read first time January 08, 2020

Committee: Government, Military and Veterans Affairs

1 A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to government; to authorize placement of a
2 monument to the First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at the
3 Fort Donelson National Battlefield; to provide a duty for the
4 Secretary of State; to create a committee; to provide for
5 termination; and to declare an emergency.

6 Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

1 Section 1. The Legislature finds that:

2 (1) In February, 1862, the Battle of Fort Donelson was fought in the
3 woods of northwestern Tennessee. On February 13, Brigadier General
4 Ulysses S. Grant's Union army laid siege to Confederate fortifications
5 surrounding the town of Dover, fortifications that guarded the vital
6 Cumberland River route to Nashville. Bottled up in their trenches were
7 thousands of Confederate defenders;

8 (2) Grant's army had failed to break the Confederate lines during
9 brutal fighting on February 13. The next day, February 14, Union gunboats
10 on the Cumberland River were repulsed by Confederate cannon firing from
11 the shore. In the meantime, Union reinforcements reached the battlefield,
12 including the First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. That night,
13 while both armies slept fitfully and snow fell upon the camps,
14 Confederate generals hatched a plan for their army to break out of
15 encirclement and to escape to open countryside. The First Nebraska would
16 help ensure that the Confederate army would not escape, and made an
17 important contribution to the first decisive Union victory of the Civil
18 War;

19 (3) At dawn on February 15, the Confederates assaulted the Union
20 army's right and forced the blue-clad soldiers into headlong retreat. By
21 mid-morning, the Union line had been broken. Just as the Confederates
22 seemed poised on the brink of victory, Brigadier General Lew Wallace
23 ordered up the First Nebraska, several Illinois and Ohio regiments, and
24 two cannon batteries to block the Confederates' decisive attack. When the
25 attack came, reported Private Thomas Keen, the First Nebraska soldiers
26 "kept up a terrible fire on them" for three quarters of an hour and the
27 enemy withdrew in confusion. The Nebraskans' performance in their first
28 battle drew General Wallace's praise: "The (First Nebraska) met the
29 storm, no man flinching, and their fire was terrible. To say they did
30 well is not enough. Their conduct was splendid. They alone repelled the
31 charge.";

1 (4) After the Confederate attack had been turned back, Grant ordered
2 Union troops at the other end of his line to charge enemy trenches from
3 which troops had been withdrawn to join the morning breakout. This charge
4 captured part of the Confederate lines, giving the Union army the upper
5 hand. The next morning, the Confederates surrendered, netting Grant a
6 dramatic victory along with an estimated sixteen to seventeen thousand
7 rebel soldiers as prisoners of war. General Grant earned his moniker
8 "Unconditional Surrender" Grant from this battle;

9 (5) Civil War historian Bruce Catton called the Battle of Fort
10 Donelson "one of the most decisive engagements of the entire war." It was
11 a devastating blow to the Confederate strategic position in the western
12 theater, and Nashville soon became the first rebel state capital to fall
13 to Union forces. Moreover, Grant's success at Fort Donelson brought him
14 to national attention. He would go on to command all Union armies by
15 1864; and

16 (6) Nebraskans can be proud of their regiment's role in this pivotal
17 Civil War battle. The members of the First Nebraska deserve a monument at
18 the battlefield commemorating their actions.

19 Sec. 2. The Secretary of State shall submit to the United States
20 Secretary of the Interior, as administrator of the Fort Donelson National
21 Battlefield pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 428f and 428o, or the superintendent
22 under 16 U.S.C. 428f, as such sections existed on January 1, 2020, for
23 his or her review, a written request to approve and authorize the placing
24 of a monument within the boundaries of the Fort Donelson National
25 Battlefield as such boundaries are set forth in 16 U.S.C. 428p, as such
26 section existed on January 1, 2020, commemorating the First Regiment
27 Nebraska Volunteer Infantry in the Union victory at the Battle of Fort
28 Donelson. If the request is approved and authorized by the Secretary of
29 the Interior or the superintendent, as applicable, the secretary or
30 superintendent and the First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at Fort
31 Donelson Committee, created pursuant to section 3 of this act, acting on

1 behalf of the State of Nebraska, shall enter into an agreement for
2 placement of the monument.

3 Sec. 3. (1) The First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at Fort
4 Donelson Committee is created. The purpose of the committee is to provide
5 for the creation, production, transportation, installation, and unveiling
6 of the monument. The committee shall consist of: An employee of the
7 Nebraska State Historical Society appointed by the Secretary of State;
8 two members of the public who are members of a local Civil War round
9 table organization appointed by the Secretary of State; a professor of
10 history from the University of Nebraska appointed by the Secretary of
11 State; and the Chairperson of the Government, Military and Veterans
12 Affairs Committee of the Legislature or his or her designee.

13 (2) The members of the committee shall elect a chairperson and vice-
14 chairperson from among its appointed members during the first meeting. A
15 member may be reelected to serve as chairperson or vice-chairperson. The
16 committee shall meet at least twice each calendar year. A majority of the
17 members of the committee shall constitute a quorum.

18 (3) The committee may conduct its meetings by telephone conference
19 call or videoconferencing, if practicable.

20 (4) The First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at Fort Donelson
21 Committee shall, in conformance with regulations of the Fort Donelson
22 National Battlefield:

23 (a) Select a designer, sculptor, and mason, as appropriate, to
24 create a monument and approve the design of the monument;

25 (b) Approve the production of the monument;

26 (c) Approve the method of transportation of the monument to the
27 battlefield and its installation;

28 (d) Approve the unveiling ceremony for the monument; and

29 (e) Approve any other action the committee determines is necessary
30 to achieve its purpose.

31 (5) If there is a vacancy on the committee, the Chairperson of the

1 Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee of the Legislature
2 shall fill such vacancy by appointing a member to serve during the
3 unexpired term of the member whose office has become vacant.

4 (6) Members of the committee shall not be paid.

5 (7) The committee shall issue electronically a report to the
6 Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee of the Legislature on
7 the progress of the creation, production, and installation of the
8 monument and any other information the committee deems necessary before
9 December 31 of each year.

10 (8) The committee shall terminate upon the completion of its
11 purpose.

12 Sec. 4. The purpose of the First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer
13 Infantry at Fort Donelson Committee shall be funded by gifts, grants,
14 bequests, donations, and other privately donated funds and administered
15 by a private foundation. No General Funds of the state shall be expended
16 for the purpose of sections 1 to 4 of this act.

17 Sec. 5. Since an emergency exists, this act takes effect when
18 passed and approved according to law.