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RELEASE AUSTIN TICE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington (Mr. KILMER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KILMER. Mr. Speaker, almost 7 years ago, Austin Tice, an American journalist, disappeared in Syria. Since the day he vanished, his parents, family, friends, and supporters have tirelessly worked to ensure that no stone is left unturned and no avenue ignored in a global campaign to see Austin returned home safely.

As we approach the end of the seventh year of Austin's captivity, we request that whomever continues to hold Austin release him immediately so that he can return to his family and his friends.

We also ask for the assistance of the Government of Syria. I ask that they do whatever they can to help facilitate Austin's release.

There are things that transcend politics and diplomacy, bridge cultural divides, and need no translation across different languages. Those are things like love and hope, represented by a mother and a father who wake up each day with the unshakable faith in their son and the belief that today could be the day when they get the chance to hug him again.

We ask for your help, without the assignment of blame or malice to anyone, so that this year is the last that Austin remains so far from home and from family.

RESTORE OUR PARKS

Mr. KILMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Restore Our Parks Act, and I thank Mr. BISHOP for his leadership and partnership on this bill.

I was lucky enough to grow up near one of the crown jewels of our national park system, the Olympic National Park, right in my backyard in the Pacific Northwest. I have seen firsthand how our public lands have captivated both visitors and residents alike and served as key economic drivers for our local communities.

I think there is little doubt that our national parks are some of America's greatest natural and cultural treasures. I am proud that my home State boasts not only Olympic National Park, but also Mount Rainier National Park and North Cascades National Park, true gems of the national park system.

Unfortunately, these crown jewels are getting a bit rusty, and they require our attention to return them to glory. If you have visited one of our parks lately, you will no doubt have noticed that they are facing a good problem.

In 2017, Washington State had a record 8.45 million park visitors, including families, campers, and adventurers, who came to explore our iconic landscapes. While they were there, these visitors spent more than \$500 million, supported more than 6,600 jobs,

and created nearly \$700 million in economic impact.

While this is undeniably great news for Washington's growing outdoor economy, the rise in visitation has also strained our park resources, like roads, interpretive centers, campsites, and trails, that visitors rely on to access and truly experience our parks. If we as a country don't start investing in our parks, I believe we risk loving them to death.

The National Park Service manages more than 400 sites across the country and is facing a nearly \$12 billion backlog in necessary repairs. In Washington State alone, our national parks suffer from nearly \$400 million in deferred repairs needed to restore historical structures, fix eroding trails, fix roads, and update unsafe electrical and drinking water systems.

This significant maintenance backlog threatens the health, accessibility, and safety of our parks, their visitors, and the communities that depend on them. That is why we need to take this opportunity to build on recent successes of investing in our public lands and turn our attention to passing the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act.

Passing this legislation sponsored by my good friend from Utah (Mr. BISHOP) will establish a long-term investment in our parks that will create jobs and boost economies throughout Washington State and across this country. An analysis commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts shows that investing in the maintenance of our national parks could create or support more than 3,800 new jobs in Washington State alone and 100,000 jobs across the country.

Now, these days, Congress can hardly agree on what day it is or what color the sky is; but, with 300 Members of the House of Representatives cosponsoring this bill and 40 Members of the Senate, it is crystal clear that this is an area that we might actually see some progress. My hope is that we can get folks behind this and get this done.

RESTORE OUR PARKS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Utah (Mr. BISHOP) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP of Utah. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. KILMER for leading off on this particular issue and all the work that he has been doing on this particular concept. It is important.

I am very happy that this bill has 300 cosponsors now here in the House. That is the largest number of cosponsors who have ever supported a bill coming from the Natural Resources Committee. I think there are only 10 other bills that have more cosponsors in the House. It passed our committee on a 36-2 vote and is now awaiting the chance of being heard here on the House floor.

There is a companion bill in the Senate, not quite as good as our ours, that

already has one-third of the Senate as cosponsors of that.

This is an idea whose time has actually come. We talk about the maintenance backlog of our national parks and all of our public lands, including fish and wildlife land, BLM land, and also our national forests.

Especially as we now enter August, when there will be the largest participation of Americans going out to visit these parks and public lands, it is important that their experience be a positive one and not be stopped by broken roads, lack of sewers, lack of facilities, or lack of any kind of access that they may need. That is why it is so significant.

We have almost around \$17 billion of maintenance backlog only in our parks. If you add up the maintenance backlog we have on all other public lands, including our national forests, it is \$30 billion that we would need to spend just to get them to standard—not to do any kind of really human moving it forward, but just to get them to where they are workable, livable, and enjoyable.

That kind of backlog did not take place overnight. There are a lot of people who are simply looking at saying: Well, let's just try and use the same old stuff we have been using for a long time. We will appropriate more money.

That doesn't work. We have developed a significant problem that needs a significant new solution. This solution is one that was coming out of, actually, the administration that has the support of over two-thirds of the House and that has the support of one-third of the Senate. This is one of those things which, all of a sudden, this is a cool idea to solve an existing problem that we have ignored for a number of years.

The goal of this is to take excess—and that is the key word—royalties that are coming from energy production on all Federal lands, all kinds of energy production, whether it is traditional, renewable, onshore, or offshore, any kind of royalties coming into the Federal Government from those. If there is an excess, which means we take the commitments we have already to things like GOMESA and LWCF, and after those are funded, then if there is excess, that excess now goes into a fund to start working at these kinds of problems, to solve our problems with public lands. The restoration fund only receives the amounts after all these other programs have received that.

If there is no excess in the royalties—I clearly doubt that will happen, but if there is no excess in the royalties, then there is no money that goes into this program.

Some people have said this is mandatory spending. No, it is not.

Mandatory spending, by definition, means you have to spend the money whether it appears or not; you have to find it from somewhere else. This is one of those programs that said, if there is excess, then the first billion of this money will go to fund our national