



Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bruce Westerman
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1664, H.R. 1931, H.R. 2278, and H.R. 2444
May 27, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Neguse. I would like to begin my remarks by stating again that the time has come for Congress to get back to in-person work. On May 13th, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued updated guidance that recommends “fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear a mask or physically distance in any setting.” Additionally, the Office of the Attending Physician has issued guidance that fully vaccinated members and staff “can resume activities that [they] did prior to the pandemic.” Ineffective remote procedures have hindered congressional operations for too long and should not continue for the duration of the 117th Congress.

That being said, I appreciate the sponsoring members and expert witnesses for being here today, although I wish we were together in person.

The bills before us each highlight a unique aspect of America's history, but do so in a way that primarily relies on State, local, or private partners. The work of conservation is extremely expensive. Better leveraging these partnerships can help the Park Service conserve and commemorate our past without diverting time or attention away from the critical need to reduce their massive deferred maintenance backlog.

Representative Matsui's bill provides grants to Japanese American Museums and to other private, State, and local entities working to preserve the remnants of Japanese internment camp sites. Like I mentioned in a previous hearing on a similar topic, Arkansas holds the Rowher War Relocation Center as well as

the Jerome War Relocation Center. I believe that now is a crucial time where we can preserve these sites to allow future generations to learn from the horrors of our past, to ensure they are hopefully never repeated in the future.

Representative Connolly's bill establishes a National September 11th Memorial Trail, built on the work of the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance, which has worked with and received financial support from federal, State, and local governments, as well as private entities to complete the trail. This year marks the 20th anniversary of 9/11, and we will never forget the men and women who lost their lives that day and the brave first responders who acted so heroically.

Representative Veasey's bill authorizes the National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation to establish a commemorative work on federal land in the District of Columbia to recognize

members of the U.S. Armed Forces who received the Medal of Honor. The memorial will be privately funded and use of taxpayer funding is prohibited. One of our freshman colleagues, Representative Blake Moore of Utah, is the Republican lead on this bill. I applaud Representative Moore's commitment to bipartisanship and look forward to helping him move this bill through committee.

Finally, Representative González-Colón's bill will establish Fort San Gerónimo in Puerto Rico as a national affiliated area. Establishing national affiliated areas is a cost-effective way to preserve important historic and cultural sites without placing them under federal ownership or management. The Fort will continue to be managed by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, although the National Park Service will be able to enter into cooperative agreements for the purposes of providing technical

and financial assistance for the marketing, interpretation, and preservation of the site.

I hope that we in Congress will continue to promote these types of effective public-private partnerships. In Hot Springs National Park in my district in Arkansas, the National Park Service entered into historic leasing agreements with private businesses. These leases breathed new life into historic bathhouses along Bathhouse Row that had fallen into deep disrepair. The bathhouses are now open to the public and house thriving small businesses. We need more of this creative thinking.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses who are here today, and I yield back.