

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland  
NPFPL Legislative Hearing  
Opening Statement  
October 29, 2019**

- **Thank you all for attending the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on five public lands bills.**
- **I would like to extend my gratitude to the bill sponsors joining us to testify today, and to the witnesses, many of whom have made the trip to D.C. to speak to the personal and national significance of these proposals.**
- **I am happy to say that this Subcommittee continues to follow through on our commitment to recognizing and honoring diverse and underrepresented communities with the bills that are before us today.**
- **These proposals cover centuries of American history – telling and preserving the stories of communities that have helped shape our national story and identity.**
- **Representative Danny Davis's bill shares the story of an overwhelmingly generous young Jewish-American man who, despite never finishing high school himself, went on to provide educational opportunities for over six hundred thousand African-Americans during the Jim Crow era.**

- His shared vision resulted in the construction of over 5,000 schools, shops and teacher homes in primarily rural communities in 15 states, from Maryland to Texas.
- Pulitzer Prize Winner Eugene Robinson, Tony Award winning playwright George Wolfe, poet Maya Angelou and Representative John Lewis are just a few of the countless Americans that benefitted from this philanthropist.
- We will also hear how ongoing construction in Illinois unearthed the remains of violent and deadly racial hate crimes that occurred over a century ago. These crimes tore through an Illinois community, uprooted thousands of African-Americans, and resulted in the loss of innocent lives.
- Ultimately, these hate crimes led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, America's oldest and largest civil rights organization, and Representative Rodney Davis's bill considers adding this site to the National Park System.
- In California, San Diego's oldest Mexican-American neighborhood was physically divided upon the United States entering into World War II,

**and further divided in the 1960s with the construction of an interchange. Tired of broken promises, the neighborhood united; ultimately persevering to create a park that preserves the Chicano culture.**

- Today, the neighborhood is thriving; home to music and dance festivals and an emerging arts district.**
- Representative Vargas's bill will begin the process of studying the Chicano Park area for affiliation with the National Park Service.**
- We will consider Representative Vela's proposal, which would expand the boundary of the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park and provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the Mexican-American War.**
- In the mid-1800s, the United States pursued Manifest Destiny as America pushed south into Texas. Fortification of the newly designated southern boarder ensued.**
- In 1846, a fierce battle erupted at Fort Texas, in current day Brownsville, Texas. U.S. Troops twice defeated Mexican troops, pushing them back across the Rio Grande.**

- **Fort Texas remained an active military facility until after World War II. Following years of uncertainty, Fort Texas, the last remaining structure from the Mexican-American War, is at risk of being left unprotected and forgotten without this bill.**
- **Finally, we will review Representative Bost's proposal to consider National Park Service management of Monk Mound – the largest prehistoric earthen structure in the New World.**
- **Between the ninth and fourteenth centuries Mississippian Culture spread throughout the Mississippi Valley, forming the largest Pre-Columbian settlement north of Mexico. This cultural, religious and economic center included over 120 mounds, including Monk Mound**
- **In 1982, Monk Mound and the surrounding thirteen hundred acres were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.**
- **It is our Subcommittee's responsibility to review and advance legislation that appropriately honors and commemorates those who came before us; ensuring that their stories of injustice and sacrifice are preserved for future generations.**

- **At the same time, this Subcommittee does not take creating new National Park Service units lightly. We recognize the importance that each new unit must possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources, be a suitable and feasible addition to the system, and require direct National Park Service management.**
- **I would like to thank the sponsoring Members and witnesses again for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimonies.**