

Congressman Donald Norcross Remarks Submitted to the Record
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Legislative Hearing
December 4, 2019 @ 10:00AM

Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing which includes a discussion of my bill H.R. 2317 – the Peter J. McGuire Labor Day Landmark Act. This bill would designate the Peter J McGuire Memorial and Gravesite located in Pennsauken, NJ – in my Congressional District – as a National Historic Landmark.

Peter J. McGuire first proposed the concept of Labor Day 137 years ago as a day to honor America’s greatest resource – the American worker. Peter McGuire spent most of his life advocating on behalf of workers rights. Joining the workforce at the age of 10 and becoming a piano maker apprentice at the age of 15, he would go on to found the national carpenters union, The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, and would be elected its chief administrative officer in 1881. That same year, McGuire would write the convention call for the national conference of labor unions, establishing the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions which was the forerunner to the American Federation of Labor – an organization he would go on to serve as the first Secretary and as VP. In all his roles, McGuire was an outspoken leader and voice for workers’ rights. Most notably, McGuire led the call for an 8-hour work day to give workers 8 hours for work, 8 hours for sleep and 8 hours for “what they will.”

As part of his advocacy on behalf of the American worker, McGuire envisioned Labor Day as a national holiday in which American workers would be able to celebrate their hard work and achievements with parades and picnics. McGuire suggested that across the world there were many days to honor saints, statesmen, explorers, soldiers and entertainers, but none to honor the laborer on whose back civilization has been created. McGuire first proposed in 1882 to have a Labor Day parade and picnic on the first Monday of September. That year, in New York more than 30,000 marchers participated in the Labor Day events. Thousands again joined in the following year, after which the celebrations expanded to cities across the country. In 1887, Oregon became the first state to recognize Labor Day and in 1894 Congress made Labor Day a federal holiday

Today, some people have unfortunately forgotten what Peter J. McGuire knew back in the 1880s – that honoring the value and dignity of work, paying a fair wage and respecting employees is good for business and good for America. I spent decades wiring buildings, lighting bridges and fighting for better working conditions for New Jersey families –Peter J. McGuire set the stage for all of that. I’m humbled that – as just a kid from Pennsauken – I’m in a position today to properly memorialize my hometown hero in this way. I’d also like to submit for the

Record statements in support from The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America and Robert Shinn, Treasurer of the Camden County Historic Society.

Thank you,

Donald Norcross
Member of Congress