

Opening Statement of
Ranking Republican Louie Gohmert
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests,
and Public Lands

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4345, H.R. 4840, H.R. 5458, H.R.
5459, H.R. 5472, H.R. 5852, H.R. 7098, and H.R. 7489.

July 13, 2020

Chair Haaland, I'd like to begin my remarks today by expressing my disappointment at the lopsided nature of today's hearing and at my friends in the majority's apparent disregard for this committee's bipartisan historic courtesy afforded to minority bills for legislative hearings of this nature.

When Republicans controlled this committee, we, with very few exceptions, honored a three bills to one ratio. Today we meet to discuss eight bills, seven with a Democrat lead sponsor, and only one with a Republican. While all the bills before us today certainly warrant thoughtful consideration from this subcommittee, I would like to strongly urge my colleagues across the aisle to do better in the future and please consider including more of the many serious Republican proposals that fall within this subcommittee's jurisdiction.

Balance and decorum objections aside, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the bills before us today, and to hear from the respective witnesses that will be offering testimony. I'd like to briefly share my thoughts of a few of these proposals now.

I would first like to first highlight H.R. 7489, the Long Bridge Act, offered by our Natural Resources Committee colleague from Virginia, Mr. Wittman. This bill authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to convey, and authorize temporary use of, necessary federal property for the construction of a new commuter rail and pedestrian bridge spanning the Potomac. Current law allows a right of way for railroads on most federal lands, but not for railroads on National Park Service lands; therefore, legislation is needed to authorize a small amount of National Park System land to be conveyed to Virginia to construct a railroad. Long Bridge, the most heavily traveled railroad bridge connecting Washington, D.C. to Virginia and other southern States, is one of the most significant chokepoints for the East Coast's rail transportation system. The existing bridge, which is at 98 percent capacity during peak hours, is used by CSX freight trains, Amtrak long distance and State-supported trains, and Virginia Railway Express commuter trains. The Long Bridge Project will double the capacity of the Potomac River rail crossing by adding a second two-track bridge adjacent to the existing bridge. I commend Representative Wittman for his hard work on the Long Bridge project and this bipartisan legislation.

We will also be discussing several bills to add additional acreage to existing National Park System units. H.R. 7098 offered by Chairman Grijalva adds roughly 1,150 acres to Saguaro National Park in Arizona and authorizes a study to identify lands that would be a part of any future boundary adjustments for the park.

H.R. 4840, offered by Representative O'Halleran expands the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument in Arizona by roughly 406 acres and authorizes several interagency land transfers for the San Carlos Irrigation Project.

These two bills go about expanding park units the right way, through an open deliberative process in Congress.

I would also like to note that Casa Grande Ruins National Monument is an example of the proper use of the Antiquities Act. Casa Grande Ruin Reservation was created in 1892 by order of President Benjamin Harrison and was the first prehistoric and cultural site to be established in the United States. In 1918 President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed it to be Casa Grande National Monument and it consisted of just 480 acres.

Finally, I would like to share my concerns regarding H.R. 4345 offered by Representative Luria of Virginia. This bill would expand Fort Monroe National Monument, which was established in 2011 by President Obama using the Antiquities Act. The bill would force the Secretary of the Interior to accept,

by donation, 44 acres of land adjacent to Fort Monroe, which is currently owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The National Park Service has previously expressed concern about accepting the 44 acres because some of the land and buildings to be donated need remediation from hazardous contaminants. This bill would abruptly end ongoing negotiations between the National Park Service and Virginia and place the full cost of any contamination clean-up on the federal government. I do not support this approach. Furthermore, this is yet another example of why it is better to work through the legislative process to resolve issues ahead of time instead of establishing park units by Executive branch decree.

I thank all of our witnesses for being here today and I look forward to their valuable testimony and I yield back.