

Subcommittee Chair Neguse
NPFPL Leg Hrg
Opening Statement
April 21, 2021

Thank you all for being here today for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands first legislative hearing of the 117th Congress!

I would like to start by thanking the sponsoring Members of Congress, as well as our witnesses, for joining us today to speak to the personal and national significance of these proposals.

As many of you may know, this week is National Park Week, and I cannot think of a more fitting occasion to consider the slate of bills before us today.

With 423 units across the country, national park sites preserve and share the stories of communities that have helped shape our nation.

Often billed as “America’s Storyteller,” the places we decide to protect and the stories we choose to tell through our national parks are a reflection of our values as Americans.

Unfortunately, these protected places have historically focused on preserving a narrow slice of American history – one that fails to represent the diversity of our country’s shared heritage.

While we have made progress with recent designations, there remains much work to be done to ensure that our national parks reflect the diversity of our nation’s history and its people.

In the 116th Congress, under the leadership of then-Chair Deb Haaland, this Subcommittee worked to elevate the stories of historically underrepresented and marginalized communities, and I look forward to carrying on this commitment in my new role as Chair.

Today, we will consider four proposals that seek to enhance and strengthen diversity and representation within the National Park System.

Representative Darin LaHood’s bill shares the story of Frank McWorter, a formerly enslaved pioneer who established the first town founded by an African American man in the United States.

We will also consider a bill from Representative Robin Kelly that would redesignate the Pullman National Monument as the Pullman National Historical Park.

Established in 1867 as the country's first model industrial town, Pullman was the scene of the violent 1894 Pullman labor strike that led to the creation of Labor Day, and has historical connections to the first all African American union in the country – the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

In 1937, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters negotiated a historic labor contract with the Pullman Company that led to better wages and increased protections for workers' rights.

This contract marked the first major labor agreement between an African American union and a corporation and is considered as one of the most important markers since Reconstruction towards African American workforce representation and a model for other Black workers across the country.

We will also hear about Majority Whip Clyburn's efforts to preserve historic sites that contributed to the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

Although the case is often associated with Kansas, the Supreme Court decision compiled cases from five communities across the South, East, and Midwest seeking to desegregate schools.

Inclusion of these historic schools would recognize their contributions to the end of separate-but-equal education in this country and allow the existing Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site to tell a more complete story of the fight for equitable education.

Finally, we will consider a bill that I am proud to lead here, in the House of Representatives – the Amache National Historic Site Act.

My proposal would expand Asian American representation within the National Park System by designating a Japanese incarceration site, known as Amache, as a National Historic Site.

As we continue to confront the painful legacy of systemic racism in this country, it is critical that we honor and share the stories of those who came before us – ensuring that their fight against injustices and for equity are never forgotten.

Thank you again to the sponsoring Members and witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimonies.