

Testimony of  
Congressman Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11)  
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
Legislative Hearing  
December 7, 2021

Good morning everybody, and thank you to Chairwoman Porter and Ranking Member Rosendale for holding this hearing. It is a pleasure to be with you today to present the Rosie the Riveter National Historic Site Expansion Act (H.R. 1117), legislation I authored and which is led by my friend and colleague Senator Alex Padilla in the Senate.

I would like to take a moment to welcome and thank Mayor Tom Butt, who you will hear from today, for participating and for his support of these efforts. Mayor Butt has served as mayor of Richmond since 2015 and on the Richmond City Council since 1995, including a year as vice-mayor in 2002. Mayor Butt serves on the board of the Rosie the Riveter Trust, the official nonprofit partner of the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park, and was instrumental in establishing Richmond's partnership position with the park. Mayor Butt's experience as an architect and advocate for historic preservation in the city of Richmond make him exceptionally qualified to speak before the Committee on this bill.

The bipartisan, bicameral Rosie the Riveter National Historic Site Expansion Act would add the Nystrom Elementary School in Richmond, California to the existing Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park, located in the district I represent in the East Bay of California. The bill would also provide the National Park Service with the authority to add other historically relevant sites to the park's boundaries.

Congressional approval of this addition and any other historically relevant sites is required by the law that created the Historical Park. The National Historical Park, which was established by Congress in 2000, protects and provides for the interpretation of sites, structures, areas, oral histories, and artifacts associated with the diverse and heroic story of the World War II home front. The park is unique because the sites are not concentrated in one place, but are spread out across Richmond. These historic resources owned by various public and private entities – not by the park – collectively help tell the story of America's World War II home front efforts. The sites are easily accessible to the public by the San Francisco Bay Trail and Richmond Ferry Terminal.

The Nystrom Elementary School, constructed in 1943, sits just north of the current park boundaries. The school was built to accommodate the large number of laborers and their families that moved to Richmond to work at the Kaiser Shipyards and a total of 55 war industries – quadrupling Richmond's population in three years and overwhelming the available schools and other community services. These workers included the thousands of women who migrated to Richmond from across the nation to serve in war industry jobs and later became known by the popular moniker "Rosie the Riveter." The surge to the area also included minority men and women. The integration of women and minority workers opened the door to equal rights and would later have profound impacts on the civil rights and women's rights movements.

The Nystrom Elementary School, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2017, is a prime example of the assistance provided by the federal government during World War II to meet the need for local public services and the development of Richmond's infrastructure to support home front efforts.

Nystrom was also built as part of a planned development that includes the Maritime Child Development Center, which has already been preserved as part of the park. Due to its proximity to the shipyards and worker housing, Nystrom served the highest population of students within the Richmond School District during World War II. It was also significantly a fully integrated school, which was extremely rare for its time. By expanding the park to include this culturally significant site, visitors will have the opportunity to learn about the Nystrom School and better understand the social changes accelerated by the influx of shipyard workers and their families. Having the Nystrom Elementary school identified as a one of the park's sites will help the Park Service interpret and share this history with visitors.

The communities of Richmond and West Contra Costa played a pivotal role in our nation's efforts in World War II. We owe it to the families who helped write the history of the home front to share their stories.

In addition to Mayor Butt, I would like to thank Betty Reid Soskin, a dear friend, constituent, and resident of Richmond, and an unmatched advocate for preserving our local community's rich history, for her support of these efforts.

Again, I thank the Committee for its consideration of this legislation and for the opportunity to offer testimony. I support the Committee's continued bipartisan work to ensure it better protects the nation's public lands and treasured history for the American people and I welcome your questions.