

Testimony of Helene Duhamel, South Dakota State Senator

Before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Federal Lands Subcommittee

July 13, 2023

Thank you to the Chair and Ranking Member of the subcommittee, Chair and Ranking Member of the full committee, and other members of the committee for the opportunity to testify this morning. My name is Helene Duhamel – I am a native of South Dakota, and I currently serve as a State Senator and the Majority Whip. My family goes back six generations in the region – long before South Dakota was even a state. I join you today to speak in support of H.R. 386, the Mount Rushmore Protection Act, introduced by Representative Dusty Johnson.

Deep in the heart of the Black Hills National Forest of South Dakota rises a colossal sculpture, carved from granite, that stands as a tribute to democracy. The Mount Rushmore sculpture and its subjects, Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln, represent the first 150 years of our nation – the struggles of a young America, as well as its triumphs through the determination and ability of its elected leaders.

As Americans and travelers from around the world sought new sights in the 20th century, Doane Robinson, the state historian at the time, believed Mount Rushmore would bring new faces to South Dakota – and it did. During the carving of the sculpture, visitation was approximately 400,000 people annually. Today, an average year for visitors is approximately 3 million. I will admit that people around the world may not be able to point to where South Dakota is on a map, but they'll know the moment you say you are from the Mount Rushmore state.

In 1928, Representative William Williamson told his congressional colleagues this: “the whole project is symbolic and allegorical. Washington symbolizes the founding of our country and the stability of our institutions; Jefferson our idealism, expansion, and love of liberty; Lincoln our altruism and sense of inseparable unity; while Roosevelt typifies the soul of America – its restless energy, rugged morality, and progressive spirit. The memorial, as a whole, will idealize all that is best in our national traditions, principles, and form of government. It will symbolize maturity, stability, noble purpose, and liberty of thought and action.”

The Mount Rushmore Protection Act would prevent Federal funds from being used to alter or remove a name, face, or any other feature from the Memorial. In more than one instance, there have been discussions, whether serious or joking, about adding someone's face to Mount Rushmore. In every instance, these proposals have been rejected. Frankly, there is no more room, or good rock for that matter, to add on to Mount Rushmore. It is a complete work of art,

displayed for the ages. A more serious threat Mount Rushmore faces are the calls to remove faces from the sculpture. The men carved on the mountain were not perfect, and neither is our nation's history, but these were individuals who wrestled with the great issues of their time and led America forward. Changing Mount Rushmore will not change the past.

The bill would also designate the Mountain the sculpture is carved from as "Mount Rushmore." This is the name recognized by the United States Board of Geographic Names since 1930, and it would ensure that any attempts to change the name by the Board must have congressional approval.

The Mount Rushmore National Memorial commemorates our history and progress as a nation. In celebration of the first 150 years of America, it also stood as a gateway to a history that had not yet been written. Mount Rushmore offers opportunities for education, for enjoyment, and for inspiration. It is my hope as someone whose family has called South Dakota their home for generations that these opportunities will still be there for generations to come. I would strongly encourage consideration of the Mount Rushmore Protection Act, and I thank the committee once again for the opportunity to testify.

Thank you.