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**Testimony of  
David N. Duncan, President  
American Battlefield Trust**

**Subcommittee on Federal Lands,  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
March 26, 2026**

***American Battlefield Protection Program Amendments Act of 2026  
(H.R. 7618)***

## Testimony of David N. Duncan, American Battlefield Trust (continued)

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Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to the Federal Lands Subcommittee. My name is David Duncan, and I am the president of the American Battlefield Trust. I testify today in strong support of the *American Battlefield Protection Program Amendments Act of 2026* (H.R. 7618).

The American Battlefield Trust is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving America's remaining Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War battlefields. Thanks to the generosity of our 500,000 members and supporters from all 50 states, the American Battlefield Trust has protected more than 61,000 acres of critically important battlefield land in 25 states.

H.R. 7618 is bipartisan legislation that would reauthorize the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program and two smaller grant programs for interpretation, planning, and restoration of America's battlefields, all of which are administered by the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP). The legislation would maintain the current authorized annual funding of \$20 million through FY2036. Since its inception in FY1999, this public-private partnership program has been the primary mechanism for saving historic battlefields outside National Park Service boundaries.

### **Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program**

The origins of the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant (BLAG) Program trace back to a 1993 Congressional commission, the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, that identified the 383 most historically significant Civil War battlefields in America. The Commission recommended the establishment of a federal matching-grant program to preserve these battlefields before they were lost to development and suburban sprawl. Due to the program's remarkable success, a similar study was released in 2007 identifying the most historically significant Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefields. BLAG was expanded by Congress as part of the FY2015 National Defense Reauthorization Act to include these two conflicts.

The program, funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, requires a 1-to-1 federal-to-non-federal match, although on most occasions the federal dollars are leveraged well beyond the 1-to-1 requirement. It can only be used to acquire land outside existing National Park Service boundaries, therefore, it does not add to or contribute to National Park Service maintenance costs. The program, currently authorized at \$20 million through FY2028, has been fully funded since FY2016, thanks in large part to its wide bipartisan support in Congress.

### **Preservation Successes**

Since its creation more than two decades ago, the BLAG has been utilized in 20 states to preserve more than 38,000 acres of hallowed ground from the three wars. Its matching-grants formula, which encourages private sector and state investment in battlefield preservation, is the key to its success. In fact, it is often referenced as a model for cooperative conservation partnerships between the federal government and the private sector. Battlefield land can only be acquired from willing sellers on the fair market.

Without the program, utilized by nonprofit groups such as the American Battlefield Trust, the Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation, the Capitol Region Land Conservancy, Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, and the Battle of Franklin Trust, large swaths of early American history would have been lost.

Among the battlefields that have benefited from ABPP, where land has been preserved outside established NPS park boundaries are Antietam, Maryland; Bentonville, North Carolina; Brandywine and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Glorieta Pass, New Mexico; Mansfield, Louisiana; Petersburg and Yorktown, Virginia; Princeton, New Jersey; and Vicksburg, Mississippi. Additionally, ABPP has been instrumental in preserving battlefield land at Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park, Prairie Grove, Arkansas; Kettle Creek Battlefield, Washington, Georgia; Battle of Franklin, Franklin, Tennessee; Culpeper Battlefields State Park, Culpeper, Virginia, and numerous other sites.

A great example of the program's importance is the preservation and restoration of Robert E. Lee's headquarters in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The structure, just outside the park boundary, survived the battle remained under private ownership. It had been extensively modified and converted into a gift shop as part of a motel complex. When the property became available for sale, the American Battlefield Trust and its members utilized the American Battlefield Protection Program to purchase the property and restore it to its wartime appearance. It is now a crown jewel of the Gettysburg battlefield experience; we are proud to open it to the public, complementing and enhancing NPS' educational and interpretative offerings.

### **Opportunities**

The Trust has seen an increase in both battlefield preservation opportunities, along with the potential for increased public access and interpretation, as well as increasing cost of acquiring land. In many instances, we are seeing competition for acquisition of unimproved farmland notably increase, driving up costs. This phenomenon is even more acute in urban areas, where land prices have skyrocketed as we compete with residential housing, commercial development, datacenters, and related infrastructure.

In addition to reauthorizing the program, the legislation would make targeted improvements to two additional grant programs managed by ABPP: the Battlefield Interpretation Grant Program and the Battlefield Restoration Grant Programs. The bill creates efficiencies by consolidating the two programs into a single \$2 million grant program, simplifying administration and providing the National Park Service with greater flexibility in awarding grants. Further, the bill reduces the non-federal match of the combined Restoration and Interpretation Grants program to 25 percent, lowering the barrier for participation by local and regional battlefield nonprofit groups.

Lastly, the bill directs NPS to investigate the feasibility of expanding eligibility for BLAG grants to battlefields associated with the French and Indian War and the Mexican-American War, building on 2020 historic preservation studies previously funded by ABPP and conducted by Michigan State University.

Reauthorizing and improving the program will ensure private nonprofits like the American Battlefield Trust can continue utilizing this critical conservation tool to protect America's endangered battlefields for years to come.

### **Outdoor Classrooms and Military Training Grounds**

America's battlefields are irreplaceable parts of our shared national heritage. When preserved, these battlefields serve as outdoor classrooms to educate current and future generations about the defining moments in our country's history. They are living memorials, not just to the soldiers who fought and died there, but to all who have proudly worn our nation's uniform.

Preserved battlefields are also economic drivers for communities, generating heritage tourism dollars that are extremely important to state and local economies. Battlefield visitors, who typically travel in groups and as families, tend to stay longer and spend more than other types of tourists. Tourism industry surveys indicate that travelers to battlefield parks are seeking authentic experiences and enjoy combining their stays with visits to local eateries, businesses and other nearby historic sites.

Additionally, battlefields serve as training grounds for our men and women in uniform in the form of customized battlefield tours known as “staff rides.” Preserved battlefields are frequently used by the modern military to place officers and enlisted ranks alike in the shoes of combat commanders, asking them to make difficult choices, in the face of daunting obstacles, over the same terrain. The American Battlefield Trust is proud to work with America’s military to host staff rides on battlefields we own and have preserved.

### **Conclusion**

America’s battlefields are key to understanding who we are as a nation, and where we come from. They are open spaces and outdoor classrooms that commemorate the sacrifices of those who fought and died on these fields. The grant programs administered by the American Battlefield Protection Program are irreplaceable tools for preserving and interpreting our country’s hallowed grounds. By reauthorizing ABPP at level funding of \$20 million through FY2036, you will ensure that this cooperative public-private partnership program will continue to be available for use by nonprofit organizations to save these national treasures.

This year, the nation will observe the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the founding of the United States. Americans are expected to visit battlefields and historic sites in record numbers to learn more about events that led to our nation’s independence. Enactment of this legislation will create an enduring legacy that will outlive the anniversary.

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, I sincerely hope you and your subcommittee will consider reporting this bill favorably out of the Federal Lands Subcommittee. We look forward to working closely with you as we continue our important work to preserve America’s battlefield lands. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.