

**STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMAN FILEMON VELA
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
MEMBER DAY HEARING
MAY 6, 2021**

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing today to give Members the opportunity to bring to your attention legislation of importance to our districts. For me, a top priority for the 34th district of Texas is H.R. 268, my bill to add the Fort Brown earthworks to the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park.

As background, in hopes of establishing the Rio Grande River as the southern border of the United States, then General Zachary Taylor ordered the construction of Fort Texas in March 1846. On May 3, 1846, Mexican General Mariano Arista attacked Fort Texas leading to the Battle of Palo Alto, the Battle of Resaca de la Palma, and the Mexican retreat back across the Rio Grande.

While defending the fort, Major Jacob Brown was mortally wounded. To honor Major Brown, the fort became Fort Brown and the area became Brownsville.

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park currently includes Palo Alto Battlefield and parts of Resaca de la Palma Battlefield. Adding this portion of Fort Brown to the national park is critical to the history of the Mexican-American War and to understanding changes to our international boundary. It is a record of our nation's border that extends to the Pacific Ocean.

The Fort Brown earthworks is the only standing architecture in the United States associated with the Mexican-American War. Bringing the earthworks into the Palo Alto park not only helps tell our nation's story, but also protects a tangible reminder of the 19th century Westward Expansion that transformed the United States into a bicoastal, international power.

When I testified on this bill in the 116th Congress before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland was the Chairwoman of the subcommittee. I want to thank her for helping move this bill forward last year and hope for her continued support in her new role. I look forward to working with the new leadership on this committee – Ranking Member Westerman, as well as Subcommittee Chairman Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher.

Mr. Chairman, with your leadership (and your great staff), this Committee passed identical legislation in 2020 by unanimous consent, and we came so close last Congress to passing this bill to protect an important piece of our history, which will help us to tell the story of our nation long into the future. I thank you for your efforts in the past and look forward to working with you in the 117th Congress to get this legislation passed and to President Biden's desk.