

Representative Veronica Escobar (TX-16)

House Committee on Natural Resources

Members' Day Hearing

H.R.2752, Castner Range National Monument, & H.R.2208, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama-Coushatta Tribes of Texas Equal and Fair Opportunity Act

Thank you, Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and Members of the Natural Resources Committee for giving me this opportunity to testify on some of my priorities for the committee.

Today, I come before you in support of two very critical bills in the Natural Resources Committee's Jurisdiction: H.R.2752, the Castner Range National Monument Act and H.R.2208, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama-Coushatta Tribes of Texas Equal and Fair Opportunity Act.

I represent the 16th Congressional District of Texas, in El Paso, home to Castner range, a 7,081 acres of West Texas beauty located at Fort Bliss that has historical significance that dates back thousands of years. For years, dedicated members of our community in El Paso have worked tirelessly to make Castner Range a National Monument.

In commemoration of Earth Day on April 22nd, and to honor the work and voices of my constituents, I introduced H.R.2752, the Castner Range National Monument Act. This bill would designate Castner Range as a National Monument to conserve and protect the ecological cultural, historical, natural integrity of the land for present and future generations of El Pasoans and Americans to enjoy.

As this crucial committees continues to work towards a 21st Century conservation movement that is centered on justice, diversity, and equity, I hope you give high consideration to advancing this bill, and conserving Castner Range—the crown jewel of West Texas and a source of great pride for El Pasoans.

With your support, we can meet the moment by increasing equitable access to outdoor spaces and ensuring El Paso families and Americans everywhere can continue to make memories surrounded by the mesmerizing beauty and history of Castner Range.

I would also like to ask the committee to support H.R.2208, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama-Coushatta Tribes of Texas Equal and Fair Opportunity Act. Earlier this year, I introduced this bipartisan bill with Representative Tony Gonzales of the Texas 23rd Congressional District to ensure the Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo and Alabama-Coushatta tribes are covered by the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) by providing Native American communities a critical economic lifeline and opportunity to recover from the coronavirus health and economic crisis.

The Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo and Alabama-Coushatta Tribes of Texas Equal and Fair Opportunity Act would also create parity with the only other federally recognized tribe in Texas, the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas.

With this bill, I hope this committee can join me in protecting our Native American Tribes' sovereignty and ensuring they have the ability to recover from the coronavirus crisis and rebuild their economies.

In August 2020, the CDC released a study showing how Native American communities were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their communities suffered immensely because of long-term disinvestment and a lack of adequate access to healthcare and economic assistance.

This bill is simple, in that it seeks parity for these communities and creates long-overdue opportunities for our tribes. As you will agree, amid this devastating pandemic, more must be done to protect our Native American Tribes and their communities—and now, more than ever.

Thank you all for your time and consideration of these vital pieces of legislation. I welcome any questions you may have, and look forward to working with you on advancing these bills on behalf of our communities.