

Natural Resources: NPFPL Subcommittee Legislative Hearing
Confederate Monuments and Symbols on Public Lands

- Thank you Chair Grijalva and Chairwoman Haaland for having me here today and for including my bill, H.R. 970, the Robert E. Lee Statue Removal Act, as part of today's legislative hearing.
- I also want to thank my colleagues, Congresswoman Norton and Congressman McEachin for their work on this issue.
- We are all incredibly proud of our national parks and public lands
- They preserve the natural landscapes and represent part of the intricate tapestry of our national history
- And that history can be painful
 - Yet, we are reminded that we have not had a honest accounting of that history; and for too long, we've been blind to the way past injustices continues to shape the present
- The question before us today is straightforward -- Do Confederate flags and monuments have any place in our national parks?
- To answer this question - I simply ask myself what these statues and symbols commemorate:
 - The glorification of the Confederacy, its traitorous leaders, their cause of slavery, and open rebellion against the United States of America.
- In my mind, there is only one side in the Civil War we should be honoring: the United States - and all those Americans in both the North and South who fought against those who tried to divide our country and perpetuate a system of systemic oppression and racial subjugation

- And therefore it is time for these monuments to come down
- These statues and monuments were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Confederate apologists, segregationists and opponents of civil rights
 - They recast Confederate soldiers as heroes fighting for a supposed “Lost Cause” and celebrated their traitorous leaders
 - And the heyday of monument building, between 1890 and 1920, was also a time of extreme racial violence, and against during the 1960s and 1970s - as Southern whites pushed back against what little progress had been made by Black Americans
 - As monuments went up, Black men, women and children were being lynched;
 - The Confederate monuments served as a reminder of the power that White Supremacists could and would exert over Black bodies
- These monuments became beacons of white supremacy and symbols of an effort to intimidate Black Americans into seeing themselves as inferior and less than
- These monuments do nothing to teach us the dark lessons of our history, but are the very center of the white-supremacist racist imagination
- My bill would remove but one of many such works from federal land.
- This statue of Robert E. Lee on Antietam Battlefield - the place where more Americans died in a single day - was commissioned with the explicit intent of honoring the Confederacy and built in *2003—138 years* after the end of the Civil War

- The 24-foot statue of Lee is not historically accurate and - despite an inscription stating otherwise - honors a man who was a brutal slave owner and fought to preserve the institution of slavery.
- There is no reason why any of our nation's public spaces should be defiled by monuments to those who betrayed their country
 - And as a nation we can decide between those figures and causes who deserve to be honored, and those who do not
- Public land should not be home to symbols of hate and bigotry that memorialize leaders who fought for disunion and oppression.
- Statues and monuments ought to celebrate the brave individuals who have fought and died for our country and true American values.
- Removing the monument at Antietam and those across our country is not an insult to any state or region -- it would simply be acknowledgement:
 - That the cause for which they fought, the cause of slavery, was wrong
 - That the imposition of Jim Crow and violent resistance to civil rights for all people was wrong
- While there is much more yet to be done and we have a long way to go, today could be an important step towards truly transforming this country for the better and again taking a step towards forming a more perfect union