

**Subcommittee Chair Joe Neguse
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
October 14, 2021**

- **Thank you all for joining us today for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on nine public lands bills.**

- **I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues who have sponsored these bills, as well as today's witnesses for their testimony.**

- **Today's hearing is an opportunity to acknowledge how the extensive history of oppressive actions toward people of color is built into the land and spaces we occupy.**

- **It is also an opportunity to find new ways to honor diverse communities and, in small but significant ways, begin to reconcile the centuries of discriminatory practices that have occurred throughout our history.**

- **First, we will consider H.R. 4009, introduced by Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton, which recognizes the long-neglected history of the Georgetown Waterfront's involvement in the slave trade.**

- **H.R. 4009 commemorates the more than 1,400 people who passed through Georgetown before being sold into slavery, while highlighting the plentiful contributions of Georgetown's African American community.**
- **While the horror these individuals endured is irredeemable, it is essential that we acknowledge this history in an effort to move forward.**
- **We will also hear about the Blackwell School in Marfa, Texas.**
- **For more than 50 years, it served as the sole public education institution in the State for children of Mexican descent – with 4,000 students in attendance from 1909 until Marfa schools were integrated in 1965.**
- **Although there were no state laws mandating segregation, many Texas school districts practiced de facto segregation through the mid-twentieth century.**
- **I would like to thank the bill's sponsor, Representative Tony Gonzales, for elevating the important history of the Blackwell School and putting forward this proposal to incorporate its story into the National Park System.**

- **Our public lands, monuments, and memorials tell the stories of our history.**
- **Proposals like those we are reviewing today are helping to ensure that story represent the diversity of America.**
- **Unfortunately, thousands of geographic features, national forests, and other public lands still bear offensive names.**
- **In 2015, an analysis found that more than 1,400 federally recognized places across the country include slurs in their official names.**
- **H.R. 4454, introduced by Representative Al Green, would direct the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names to advise federal agencies with respect to renaming geographic features with offensive place names.**
- **Such names are a contributor to the lack of diversity in public land's visitors and inhibit protected places from serving their intended purposes for the benefit and enjoyment of *all Americans*.**

- **I would like to commend Representative Green for his leadership on this important piece of legislation.**
- **Today, we will also consider proposals from Representatives Kirkpatrick and Escobar that would honor the victims and survivors of two horrific mass shootings.**
- **As a Vice Chair of the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the destruction and grief that communities have faced from acts of gun violence.**
- **We will forever remember the 6 lives lost on January 8, 2011 in Tucson, Arizona, and the 23 lives lost on August 3, 2019 in El Paso, Texas.**
- **The horrific shooting that occurred on January 8th in Tucson was the first time in our nation's history that an assassination attempt was made upon a Member of Congress while meeting with constituents.**
- **Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford suffered severe injuries that continue to affect her to this day, and among those lives lost was the first Congressional staffer to be assassinated in the line of duty.**

- **H.R. 250, introduced by Representative Ann Kirkpatrick, would designate Tucson's January 8th Memorial as a national memorial – paying tribute to the victims while highlighting the resilience of our democracy.**
- **We will also consider H.R. 4380, introduced by Representative Veronica Escobar, which would designate the El Paso Community Healing Garden as a national memorial.**
- **This tragedy represents the largest targeted attack against Latinos in modern American history and serves as glaring reminder that, too often, the safety of our communities has been compromised simply because of the color of one's skin.**
- **I would like to thank my colleagues for their efforts in honoring the victims, survivors, and families of these tragic events.**
- **I look forward to learning more from the bill sponsors and witnesses here today.**
- **With that, I'd like to recognize Ranking Member Fulcher for his opening remarks.**