

DISSENTING VIEWS

H.R. 1100 is an egregious example of land-grabbing legislation. Despite a legislative hearing and two markups, neither the Majority, nor the bill's sponsor have ever made a compelling case for this boundary expansion. To be fair, the National Park Service did make a case for a five acre expansion for a visitor center and parking lot to address safety concerns and to enhance the visitor experience. The additional 110 acres have been proposed to protect a "viewshed." Notwithstanding the inherent problems with creating buffer zones, this bill has the additional complication of attempting to protect a view that is not visible from the actual park unit. From the evidence presented to the Committee, and accepted by the Majority, the land in question is not visible from nearly the entire historic site. Rather the viewshed is on the other side of a ridge which marks the park's boundary. The 110 proposed acres are clearly out of view of the Carl Sandburg home, which this National Park unit is designed to preserve and interpret. We have seen no evidence that this augmentation of the immense federal estate will in any way enhance the visitor experience or even protect the National Historic Site.

A Henderson County Commissioner testified on the bill that when the Sandburg Historic Site was established, it was limited to preserving the home of Carl Sandberg. Now, as he explained, the park has "evolved", and here we are, having found yet another way to increase the federal inventory of land.

This site was designed to recognize the great author Carl Sandberg, not about creating another plan for federal land use controls on private property. The County of Henderson appears to be in much better financial shape than the U.S. Government, with revenues exceeding expenditures. If this land is critical to its future, perhaps it should float a bond issue for open space and buy it.

On April 19, 2007, in subcommittee markup, Congressman Rob Bishop offered a responsible amendment to reduce the authorized boundary expansion from 115 acres to 5 acres, providing sufficient land for the Park Service's needs. This amendment was defeated on a party line 7-8 vote following a shameful extension which delayed the vote's conclusion long enough for the Majority to round up the necessary votes to defeat it. Equally abhorrent was the Chairman's decision to disenfranchise a Republican committee member who was present. After the Majority located a sufficient number of votes to defeat this reasonable amendment, they ended the roll call despite the presence of another Republican Committee member who wanted to vote.

At the full committee markup on May 2, 2007, again the Majority offered no convincing justification for the land acquisition, but offered that National Park Service wants this land. This Com-

mittee rarely hears from the National Park Service about land it does not want, and its desire to own more property hardly constitutes a hurdle. Congressman Bishop again offered his amendment to authorize acquisition of 5 acres to enhance the visitor experience. This was rejected by Majority as was a compromise amendment offered by Congressman Heller that would have authorized the 115 acre boundary expansion if the land was donated, purchased with donated funds, or acquired by exchange. Characteristically, the Majority rejected this reasonable amendment.

We realize that our colleagues in the Majority have grown weary of hearing about the National Park Service's maintenance backlog, but even they should be able to understand that there are more immediate needs in the National Park System than its endless expansion. Now is not the time to continue feeding the National Park Service's appetite for land acquisition and further exacerbate its backlogged responsibilities.

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