

# H.R. 3349

## Republic of Texas Legation Memorial Act

**STATEMENT OF DAVID VELA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS ON H.R. 3349, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS TO ESTABLISH THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS LEGATION MEMORIAL AS A COMMEMORATIVE WORK IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**December 4, 2019**

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Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 3349, to authorize the Daughters of the Republic of Texas to establish the Republic of Texas Legation Memorial as a commemorative work in the District of Columbia, and for other purposes.

The Department recognizes the contribution to the shaping of our Nation's history that is represented by the subject of H.R. 3349, but we recommend that the Committee defer action on this legislation until the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (Commission) has an opportunity to review the proposal.

H.R. 3349 would authorize the organization named the Daughters of the Republic of Texas to establish a commemorative work in honor of the Texas Legation (Legation), a diplomatic mission that represented the independent Republic of Texas in Washington, D.C. from 1836 to 1845. The bill requires compliance with the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. Chapter 89) (CWA) and prohibits Federal funds from being used to establish the memorial.

The Legation's initial goal was to seek United States recognition of Texas as independent from Mexico, and it then became the pursuit of annexation of Texas to the United States. Texas President Sam Houston proposed annexation in 1836; however, Congress did not agree to annexation for another nine years, primarily because of controversy over the addition of a slave-holding state. During that time period, the

Legation worked with the U.S. Government on foreign policy, Texas boundary refinement, immigration, and Native American issues. In February 1845, Congress finally passed a Joint Resolution to annex the Republic of Texas to the United States. In November 1845, Texas voters approved annexation by a landslide and the Legation mission in Washington, D.C., closed.

Ideas for new memorials benefit greatly from the review they receive through the Commission. We note that the proposed commemorative work has not been reviewed by the Commission. Established by the CWA, the Commission is staffed and chaired by the National Park Service and is composed of key government agency representatives who have a critical role or expertise in the location and design of monuments and memorials on Federal lands in DC. A key role of the Commission is to provide advice to the Senate and House Committees with jurisdiction over the National Park System on pending legislation that would authorize new commemorative works. The Commission plans to make recommendations to Congress on H.R. 3349 immediately following its next meeting, which is expected to be scheduled for February 2020.

While we believe it is premature for Congress to authorize this memorial, we support that H.R. 3349 requires the proposed memorial to be established in accordance with the CWA. This provision ensures that the memorial, if authorized, will be subject to the framework for planning and review that Congress established for all proposed commemorative works in areas administered by the National Park Service and the General Services Administration in the District of Columbia and its environs. This planning and review ensures there will be a thoughtful and deliberative process that will yield the most appropriate results.

In addition to subjecting the proposed memorial to the processes of the CWA, we note that the proposed memorial is also consistent with the act's subject matter requirements; specifically with Section 8903(c), which states that "a commemorative work commemorating an event, individual, or group of individuals... may not be authorized until after the 25th anniversary of the event, death of the individual, or death of the last surviving member of the Group." The time period of the Legation's service, 1836 to 1845, assures that we are well past the 25th anniversary of the death of any of the individuals who were part of the Legation.

We strongly support the bill's prohibition on Federal funds being used to establish the memorial, which assures that the cost of establishing this memorial will not be borne by the National Park Service. However, the Committee should be aware that once constructed, the National Park Service would need to use funding for the maintenance

of the memorial that could otherwise be used to help reduce the \$11.9 billion backlog of deferred maintenance in national parks and address other critical park needs.

Finally, the bill contains a provision we strongly support including in all legislation authorizing memorials under the CWA--the requirement that unspent funds for the construction of the memorial be provided to the National Park Foundation for deposit in an interest-bearing account, as stated in 40 U.S.C. Section 8906(b)(3).

Chairwoman Haaland, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.