

H.R. 5068

Women Who Worked on the Home Front World War II 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. 5068, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE WOMEN WHO WORKED ON THE HOME FRONT FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH A COMMEMORATIVE WORK IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND ITS ENVIRONS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

December 4, 2019

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. 5068, a bill to authorize the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs.

The Department recognizes the contribution to the shaping of our Nation's history that is represented by the subject of H.R. 5068, 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. 5608 would authorize the organization named the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation to establish a commemorative work on Federal land in Washington, D.C. and its environs to commemorate the "commitment and service represented by women who worked on the home front during World War II." 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.

"Women Who Worked on the Home Front" refers to the countless American women who stepped up to support their nation during America's involvement in World War

II. Between 1941 and 1945, the female portion of the U.S. workforce increased from 27 percent to nearly 37 percent. More than 10,000 women worked as code breakers during WWII and over 1,100 female volunteers flew nearly every type of military aircraft as part of the Women Airforce Service Pilots program. Women were trained to fly military aircraft so male pilots could leave for combat duty overseas. Other jobs women filled, often for the first time, included keel welder, telegraph operator, steam hammer operator, radio engineer, electrical engineer, crane operator, flash welder, ship fitter, tinsmith, pipe fitter, surveyor, draftsman, and so much more. Of course, the now iconic image of Rosie the Riveter brings to mind the multitudes of women who worked in factories and shipyards during World War II, many of whom produced munitions and war supplies. The National Park Service is proud to have under its stewardship a park unit dedicated to this story, the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond, California.

Ideas for new memorials benefit greatly from the review they receive through the Commission. We note that the proposed commemorative work has not yet 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. 5068 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. 5608 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.

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.