

NOV 20 2018

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

Enclosed you will find my responses to the written questions submitted following the November 15, 2018, hearing on my nomination to be the Director of the National Park Service.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raymond Vela", written in a cursive style.

Raymond David Vela

Enclosure

**U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**  
**November 15, 2018 Hearing: *Pending Nominations***  
**Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Raymond David Vela**

**Questions from Chairman Lisa Murkowski**

**Question 1:** As you are aware, the Park Service Centennial Act was enacted into law nearly two years ago. The law required regulations to be promulgated as soon as practicable after enactment to implement Title VII of the Act regarding the Visitor Experience Improvements Authority, which provides for the use of commercial services contracts.

- Will you commit, if confirmed, to getting those regulations promulgated within 90 days of your confirmation? As you know, this program sunsets after seven years from enactment, so we only have about five years to go.

**Response:** I understand that the National Park Service is in the process of finalizing the proposed rule to implement the Act and intends to issue a proposed rule concurrent with the first commercial visitor services contract solicitation in January 2019. This parallel approach will provide the NPS the opportunity to use the experience gained through an actual contracting process under this authority to better inform the content of the regulation.

- The Centennial Act also amends the 1998 Concessions law, to give the Secretary the authority to propose amendments to the applicable terms of an existing concessions contract to provide new and additional services where he or she deems necessary. If confirmed, can you outline how you might use this authority to provide new or additional services at park units?

**Response:** As visitor expectations and tourism trends have changed, parks and concessioners have identified opportunities to provide new services to visitors under existing contracts. Examples include bicycle rentals, campsite set-up services, wifi, and night tours. If confirmed, I plan to use the Centennial Act's concession authority to respond to those ideas and expand the services that we are able to provide our visitors.

**Question 2:** As you are aware, this Committee recently reported S. 3172, the bipartisan Restore Our Parks legislation. This legislation, if enacted, would address about half of the nearly \$12 billion in deferred maintenance we have at our national parks.

- What steps would you take, as Director, to ensure that the deferred maintenance backlog never again creeps up to nearly \$12 billion?

**Response:** To ensure that the deferred maintenance backlog does not grow, if confirmed, I will look to the strategic use of all available resources to maintain parks' infrastructure. I will ensure that we have an investment strategy to ensure funding of the highest priority needs and that there are clear expectations to maintain park assets through a proactive and strengthened cyclic maintenance program. Throughout my time in the NPS, I have seen the value and effectiveness of partnerships and philanthropy. Should I be confirmed, I look forward to looking for appropriate ways to utilize the public in management and maintenance efforts.

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- Can you explain how, as Director, you would encourage the NPS to utilize cyclic maintenance and other accounts to prevent ongoing increases in deferred maintenance over time?

**Response:** If confirmed, I will ensure that we build a viable cyclic maintenance program in order to meet the asset life cycle maintenance requirements of the agency. I will communicate directly to the park managers how critical their active involvement is in ensuring priority assets receive timely investment of funds and staff time. As a superintendent and regional director, I saw how critical it was to make efficient use of cyclic and other facility funds at the park level. In addition, I witnessed how that investment of time, funding and the attention of leadership can ensure our assets can meet their design life, perform efficiently and provided a solid return on investment of taxpayer funds.

- Are there administrative steps, such as including real time tracking of assets, or electronic filing of work orders, that you can implement that would work to eliminate deferred maintenance in individual assets or park units that you feel would be helpful to the NPS?

**Response:** I have seen the large burden on parks due to the high data collection requirements to support the NPS asset management systems. We should make improvements to our system that include real time tracking of assets and the filing and closing work orders with greater efficiency. If confirmed, I will expect our Washington and regional offices to be responsive to the needs of the field by focusing on streamlining business processes to reduce the park workload.

**Question 3:** Can you please outline your position on mining operations within units of the National Park Service? How would you apply this position specifically to National Preserves in Alaska which are governed under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)? If confirmed, how will you work to ensure a fair permitting process and to provide access to valid existing claims in Alaska parks and preserves?

**Response:** If confirmed, I will work to ensure compliance in a fair and timely manner for valid existing claims in National Park System units in Alaska with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). I commit to upholding ANILCA 1110(b) which grants claimants the right of adequate and feasible access to their lands. I would ensure that the National Park Service follows Title 36 CFR Part 9 (Subpart A) which applies to mining activities on federal patented and unpatented mining claims in Alaska and throughout the National Park System.

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**Questions from Ranking Member Maria Cantwell**

**Question 1:** Franklin Roosevelt said that “there is nothing so American as our national parks.... The fundamental idea behind the parks is that the country belongs to the people....” Equally fundamental to the American people are freedom of speech and “the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances,” which are guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution. Nowhere in this country are those rights more effectively exercised than on the National Mall.

In August, the Park Service proposed a very disturbing rule to restrict the public’s First Amendment right to demonstrate on the National Mall, at the Memorial Parks, and in the President’s Park around the White House. The proposal would close a large part of the White House sidewalk, limit spontaneous demonstrations, and even charge fees for demonstrations. If adopted, the proposed rule would infringe rights protected by the First Amendment and violate court orders protecting those rights on park lands in the Nation’s Capital.

- What role, if any, did you play any role in developing this proposal?
- Will you commit to review this proposal and either amend it to preserve and protect the public’s First Amendment rights or withdraw it completely?

**Response:** I agree that the First Amendment is a bedrock American value. As I stated at my hearing, I did not play any role in the development of this proposal. If confirmed, I commit to learning more about this proposal and objectively reviewing its rationale and the comments received.

**Question 2:** In 2017, the National Park Service received over 330 million visitors, just slightly lower than the all-time record visitation level from the previous year. Yet despite the heavy visitation, the Trump Administration’s budget proposed to cut National Park Service staffing by 1,835 FTE’s, which would represent a 10% reduction in staffing levels. The Administration had made a similar proposal to reduce NPS staffing levels the year before.

- In your view, is the National Park Service overstaffed?
- What is your view on the staffing cuts that the Administration has proposed in each of its first two budget submissions?

**Response:** Throughout my nearly 30 years in the National Park Service, I have seen firsthand the competency and efficiency of our workforce. If confirmed, we will continue to maximize all appropriate hiring authorities in order to address the increase in park visitation, protect park resources, and promote a safe and enjoyable visitor experience.

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**Questions from Senator Ron Wyden**

**Question 1:** National Park properties provide Americans with many opportunities to exercise their freedoms. Americans have a fundamental right to peacefully assemble and exercise their First Amendment right to free speech on National Park property. Without any justification to address security, the Parks Service has proposed closing most of the White House sidewalk to demonstrators, place strict restrictions on signs, banners, and structures, enacting limitations on the right to engage in spontaneous demonstrations, sanction long delays in granting demonstration permits, and even charge large fees for the right to demonstrate.

Congress funds the National Park Service to manage public lands for the benefit of all Americans including demonstrators, tourists and hikers. If appointed Director of the National Parks Service, will you commit to protect the First Amendment rights of free speech and assembly on all National Parks property?

**Response:** I agree that the First Amendment is a bedrock American value. As I stated at my hearing, I did not play any role in the development of this proposal. If confirmed, I commit to learning more about this proposal, objectively reviewing its rationale and comments received.

**Question 2:** Mr. Vela, Oregon's Crater Lake National Park is a treasured destination for many visitors. However, the park is plagued by a critical infrastructure problem found in many of the country's 60 national parks. At Crater Lake, maintenance to repair vital roads, steep trails and bathrooms is lacking and delayed. Guests are also concerned about hikes in admission fees, which may result in pricing-out would-be visitors. It seems like almost every year the Park Service must direct a significant amount of funds to repair these basic amenities, while construction on the Visitor Center, which is also important to sustaining the Park's future, is postponed.

Being mindful of the importance of keeping entrance fees affordable, will you commit to work with me to address the maintenance backlog at Crater Lake National Park?

**Response:** Yes, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you to address the maintenance backlog at Crater Lake National Park and throughout the entire National Park System.

**Question 3:** As we discussed at the hearing, to get my support you will need to detail specific steps you will take, if confirmed, to prioritize efforts to limit unethical behavior in the National Park Service. Please describe the steps that you would take to do so.

**Response:** Throughout my career I have held myself and all those I have managed to the highest ethical standards. Should I be confirmed, that commitment will not waver or change. I will lead by example. Every National Park Service employee should see a clear commitment to ethical behavior from the top down. I will not be afraid to confront wrongdoing. As you know, workplace harassment is an issue the National Park Service continues to address. Many of these

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instances occurred because people turned a blind eye to what was happening. You have my commitment that I will not be afraid to confront anyone on my team when a wrong is committed and will hold them accountable for their actions. In addition, I will foster an open and approachable atmosphere so all employees feel safe to report any misconduct.

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**Questions from Senator Bernard Sanders**

**Question 1:** Will you commit to opposing any proposed or existing regulations that impede the right of the public to peaceably assemble on public lands, yes or no?

**Response:** The First Amendment is a bedrock American value, and if confirmed, I commit to ensuring that the NPS's regulations reflect those values.

**Question 2:** Will you commit to publicly opposing any attempts by the Secretary of the Interior to shrink National Parks' lands, yes or no?

**Response:** The Secretary has made it clear that he does not support the large scale sale or transfer of federal land and I strongly support that position.

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**Questions from Senator Mike Lee**

**Question 1:** Earlier this year, the National Park Service finalized an off-road vehicle management plan for the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in southern Utah, despite staunch opposition from local officials and residents. The NPS is also working on visitation management plans for Zion and Arches national parks that are causing serious concerns among state and local leaders and the local business community. In all of these cases, I've heard from state and local leaders who feel that the NPS has ignored their concerns. What are your views on incorporating local input in park management decisions? Will you commit to listening to and working with Utah's local leaders and communities to resolve their concerns regarding park management?

**Response:** I believe strongly in the importance of engaging local leaders and communities in park management decisions and forging productive working relationships with neighboring communities to parks. I will commit, if confirmed, to listening to and working with local leaders in Utah and elsewhere on issues of mutual concern.

**Question 2:** Setting aside legislative proposals to address the NPS maintenance backlog, what can the park service can do on its own to tackle the problem, even if it's just in small ways? For example, are there opportunities to increase public-private partnerships or promote more volunteerism in parks to enhance the self-sustainability of the park system?

**Response:** The maintenance backlog is an issue that needs "all hands on deck." If confirmed, I will communicate directly to park managers the vital role they play in our efforts to address the long-standing deferred maintenance needs of our parks. Every superintendent needs to devote time to developing the highest priority deferred maintenance projects and submitting these projects for our annual funding calls. Regional and Washington leaders need to assist parks in scoping and providing cost estimating and project management services.

I am a strong supporter of public-private partnerships, and of park volunteers. Both are vital to the success of our efforts in reducing the deferred maintenance backlog and in enhancing the national park experience generally. If confirmed, I look forward to promoting efforts in both areas.

**Question 3:** In your role as superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, have you identified any regulatory barriers that you feel unnecessarily hinder your ability to effectively manage the park and that you'd like to change if you're confirmed?

**Response:** In my nearly five years as Superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, we have struggled with the regulations related to the federal acquisition process. They have impacted our ability to achieve timely outcomes in our efforts to effectively manage construction projects and services within the park. Acquiring goods and services to implement and enhance park operations are critical to the success of the National Park Service.



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**Question from Senator Debbie Stabenow**

**Question:** The National Heritage Area program is widely regarded by Members of Congress, business, and non-profit partners as a model for public-private partnerships. Heritage Areas help the National Park Service preserve and promote special places that tell stories of American history that can't be told anywhere else. In Michigan, in the MotorCities National Heritage Area, that is the story of how we put the world on wheels.

National Heritage Areas ensure that more Americans feel a strong pride of place by helping communities more capably tell their part of our national narrative. Heritage Areas revitalize local economies, generating \$12 billion in economic activity and \$1.2 billion in tax revenue, and sustaining 48,000 jobs nationwide. In Michigan, MotorCities National Heritage Area generates more than \$410 million a year in economic impact and supports 4,500 jobs. This is clearly a program that works.

If confirmed to serve as the director of the National Park Service, will you prioritize the agency's support for and engagement with the National Heritage Area program and resist efforts to defund or eliminate it?

**Response:** National Heritage Areas are designated by Congress to support a community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. If confirmed, I commit to work with you on these programs and follow the law.

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**Question from Senator Joe Manchin III**

**Question:** The National Park Service oversees the National Heritage Area Program. National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. There are currently 49 – two of which are located in West Virginia, and a third one that is operating without the official NHA designation. That area is the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area. My bill S.401 – The Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area Act will officially establish this NHA and allow it to compete for annual funds from the Park Service. I was pleased to introduce this bipartisan, bicameral bill this Congress and I look forward to its passage. These are not land management programs – they are cultural and heritage programs that generate revenue that goes directly into their local areas. As an example of the positive economic impacts of a national heritage area designation, the National Coal Heritage Area in southern West Virginia generates \$207 million in economic impact, supports 2,744 jobs and generates \$16.8 million in tax revenue. The Trump Administration believes this program is better funded locally. The problem with that is there are 49 National Heritage Areas spread all over the country and local resources vary and West Virginia’s resources to support these types of efforts are very limited. What is your experience with National Heritage Areas?

**Response:** National Heritage Areas are designated by Congress to support a community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. They foster community stewardship of our nation’s heritage. As a regional director of the southeast region, I worked with National Heritage Areas that were already in existence as well as new NHAs that were recently designated. If confirmed, I will continue to partner with, provide technical assistance, and distribute matching federal funds from Congress to NHA entities.

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**Questions from Senator Mazie K. Hirono**

**Question 1:** As part of my responsibility as a member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and to ensure the fitness of nominees for an appointed position, I am asking nominees to answer the following two questions:

- a. Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors, or committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

**Response:** No.

- b. Have you ever faced discipline, or entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

**Response:** No.

**Question 2:** As you may know, the dock providing visitor access to the USS Arizona Memorial in Hawaii has been closed to the public since May of this year. I understand that this damage is the result of King Tides, which as you may know, broke records last year. While initially the NPS thought that the dock could be repaired in time for the anniversary celebration on December 7<sup>th</sup>, just recently NPS announced that the dock will not reopen to visitors until March of 2019.

While I understand that the dock damage was unexpected, it is one of the most visited attractions in Hawaii and making the memorial inaccessible to survivors and their families for any amount of time, let alone 10 months, is disappointing. As of 2015 there were estimated to be just over 2,000 survivors remaining. I cannot fathom the frustration felt by those making the long journey to Hawaii to visit the memorial only to be told upon arrival that they cannot access it due to unexpected repairs.

As director, how will NPS plan for future extreme weather events, such as record-breaking King Tides and climate change, that impact infrastructure and how do you intend to address unexpected maintenance issues such as at the USS Arizona with the appropriate sense of urgency? Can I get a commitment from NPS that should the current timeline for repairs change, that I be provided updates on this project?

**Response:** I understand that the NPS and Navy team at the USS *Arizona* Memorial have continued to provide a powerful experience for visitors to Pearl Harbor during the unexpected closure. While any closure to the USS *Arizona* Memorial itself is unfortunate, the NPS, with strong support from the Navy, has been able to compress what would normally be a three-year dock project into 10 months. In addition, the repairs being implemented will be more resilient to future weather events. Should I be confirmed, I will work closely with you and provide updates should conditions change.

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**Question 3:** Investigations and surveys over the past few years have exposed an alarming amount of workplace harassment at the NPS.

I know that your past work experience includes serving as Associate Director of Workforce, Relevancy and Inclusion here in DC. How will your experience and leadership ensure that the culture is changed within the National Park Service?

**Response:** As I stated at my hearing, I believe that we have a responsibility and an obligation to make sure that all of our employees have a workplace that treats them with the dignity and respect that they deserve. If confirmed, I look forward to further carrying out some of the developments the National Park Service has put in place to combat this culture and developing additional assets to help us address this issue. I want to make sure we have accountability throughout the entire chain of command, and accountability starts at the top, with the director. Most importantly, I commit to remain vigilant. We have made great progress, but the job is not done.

**Question 4:** The volcanic eruption in Hawaii caused a large amount of physical damage to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, which serves as an important tourist attraction and therefore is an important economic engine for Hawaii Island.

How will the NPS address the damage sustained at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park to ensure that the park can fully reopen and resume normal operations? If confirmed, can you please provide me a timeline documenting future planned actions?

**Response:** I understand that Hawaii Volcanoes National Park has completed multiple damage assessments of roads, buildings, utilities and trails to catalog visible damage, and has developed cursory estimates of repair and replacement costs. The park continues to reopen facilities and areas of the park as conditions allow and many areas are now open. Should I be confirmed, I will be sure to work closely with you and provide updates as the recovery process moves forward.

**Question 5:** To what extent has NPS been involved with the effort to reorganize the DOI into 12 unified regions? How will this reorganization affect the NPS budget?

According to reports, while all of the other regions have regional facilitators located within the region, the regional facilitator for the Pacific Islands Region will be located in Washington DC. How will having a facilitator nearly 5,000 miles away from National Parks in Hawaii impact NPS operations?

**Response:** As one of Interior's Senior Executives I was invited to participate in the initial conversations where the unified regional boundary concept was first discussed and the dialogue with career executives from across the agency began. Since then, the boundaries were finalized and in August, they became effective and implementation efforts were launched. The

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Department has kept employees informed through all-employee communications on the reorganization, recently announcing the selection of Interior regional facilitators to launch planning in the 12 regions.

The National Park Service is taking part with other Interior bureaus and offices in the implementation planning. With greater Interior coordination, I anticipate that the National Park Service will be able to create more value with its budget. I understand that bureaus, including the NPS, will continue to report to their bureau directors. With regard to the regional facilitator for the Pacific Islands, I would expect no impact on park operations.

**Question 6:** The National Parks Subcommittee held a hearing last year on engaging the next generation of park stewards. The hearing made clear that there is a definite need for NPS to not only better connect with local communities, but also diversify their workforce. In Hawaii for example, a conservation corps called KUPU is working with NPS to develop next generation leaders through partnerships at many of our park units. I know that in the past you have made comments about the importance of building the next generation and diverse workforce at NPS. As director, can you tell me how you plan to develop new and diverse leaders for NPS's workforce needs and engage new visitors and the local communities? What role do partners like KUPU and other Corps in our communities play?

**Response:** Should I be confirmed, I will be the first Latino Director of the NPS. I will work to expand awareness of the NPS as an employer of choice, create more effective tools for recruitment, and improve retention through networking and opportunities for career advancement. We must build up the next generation of conservation stewards and I am committed to recruiting the best, brightest and most diverse our nation has to offer. While I am not familiar with the local Hawaii organizations you mentioned, I have a great deal of respect and appreciation for partner groups and the role they play in the success of the National Park Service.

**Question 7:** The results of the 2018 Employee View Point Survey for the Department of Interior had a number of concerning results. Some examples include that more employees disagreed that they have sufficient resources to do their jobs than agreed, that the majority of respondents feel that pay raises are not based on job performance, and that more respondents disagreed that senior leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment to the workforce than agreed.

As director of NPS, would you make it a priority to improve these results and if so, how would you go about doing so?

**Response:** As a nearly 30 year employee of the National Park Service, I hold myself personally responsible for ensuring that we no longer tolerate a workplace culture that negatively impacts our employees. Low morale and high stress levels have left our workforce feeling demoralized and disenfranchised. Therefore, if confirmed, I would effectively own, promote, and make it a priority to improve the results of the 2018 Employee Viewpoint Survey as well as improve the

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conditions and culture of our workplace. This will require a long-term effort. I look forward to ongoing discussions with you and your colleagues about ways we can improve on these fronts.

**Question 8:** I have been very concerned about the negative impact resulting from chronic lower than necessary staffing levels of the NPS workforce in recent years. My concerns are twofold. What impact are these low staffing levels having on the NPS workforce's ability to meet its important mission and what impact are the low staffing levels having on employee morale? As director, do you acknowledge the challenges associated with low staffing levels? And, if so, how do you plan to address the issue of understaffing?

As a follow up, NPS employs numerous seasonal employees on an annual basis. These seasonal employees could historically take advantage of noncompetitive rehire provided that they work in any one park for less than 1,039 hours per service year. Recently, the OPM's change in regulations have resulted in many seasonal employees losing their noncompetitive rehire eligibility because it now states that seasonal employees are only eligible if they work less than 1,039 hours across all units of the National Park Service, not just a single park. Are you familiar with the OPM audit that resulted in this change? What will you do to restore the right to noncompetitively rehire these seasonal employees that NPS has come to rely upon so heavily? Also, do you think it is worthwhile for NPS to look into providing benefits to seasonal employees?

**Response:** If confirmed, I intend to work closely with our leadership to examine opportunities to increase efficiencies in the hiring and deployment of employees. We must take a hard look at our workforce and ensure that we are aligned to respond to the challenges the NPS faces today.

Regarding the change that resulted in many seasonal employees losing their noncompetitive rehire eligibility, I am familiar with the OPM audit that resulted in the change. Seasonal employees form the backbone of the NPS; we cannot meet our mission without them. The NPS is working with OPM and other agencies to explore opportunities to make changes in seasonal hiring authorities. I look forward to ongoing discussions with you, your colleagues and OPM on this issue should I be confirmed.

**Question 9:** The LWCF has been an important conservation tool both in parks all across the nation, including Hawaii and Wyoming, and I think we both understand how critical it is to keep the LWCF authorized and funded. Will you commit to working with me and the other bi-partisan cosponsors of the Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act to make sure that we secure this program's future and its ability to continue protecting critical lands for future generations? Additionally, as NPS Director, will you support the use of LWCF to complete our national parks through purchases of inholdings and strategic adjacent parcels?

**Response:** As I stated at my hearing, as Superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, I saw firsthand how the Land and Water Conservation Fund can be used, coupled with philanthropic support, to acquire important inholdings within the boundaries of a park. The Secretary supports

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the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other members of Congress on this important program.

**Question 10:** In previous years, NPS has provided a list of ranked LWCF priorities to Congress as a standard procedure. This list is helpful to members of Congress as we decide how much money will be necessary to address the needs of park units. Last year, however, Congress was not provided a full and complete list of ranked projects. If you are confirmed, will you provide a full list of ranked priorities to Congress?

**Response:** As previously stated, I understand the value of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. It is my understanding, after consulting with the budget office, that these lists have been sent to the appropriations committees of Congress each year. If confirmed as Director, I commit to working closely with Congress on these and other issues.

**Question 11:** Among its many duties, the National Park Service (NPS)—the organization you have been nominated to lead—is tasked with managing the National Mall and the areas surrounding the White House on behalf of the American people. These areas are among the country’s most historic and important lands when it comes to political protests. From the suffragette protests 100 years ago to the 1963 March on Washington to the recent protests against the Trump administration’s family separation policy, the National Mall and the areas surrounding the White House have been the sites of some of the most significant protests in our nation’s history. Indeed, the NPS itself has acknowledged the importance of these areas, stating “it is at National Mall and Memorial Parks that the constitutional rights of speech and peaceful assembly find their fullest expression.”

Yet, in August 2018, NPS proposed a rule that would greatly restrict the ability of the American people to exercise their First Amendment rights on the National Mall and the areas surrounding the White House. Among other things, the proposed rule would allow NPS to charge for public demonstrations on the National Mall, impose more restrictive requirements on spontaneous demonstrations on the National Mall, and close roughly 80 percent of the White House sidewalk to public demonstrations. Such regulations would undermine the rights of all Americans to peacefully protest their government.

Do you believe that the role of Director of NPS includes ensuring that the NPS does not unduly impede the ability of Americans to peacefully exercise their First Amendment rights? Do you agree that the proposed rule would undermine the ability of Americans to exercise their First Amendment rights? Finally, do you commit to withdraw NPS’s proposed rule should you be confirmed as Director of NPS?

**Response:** I agree that the First Amendment is a bedrock American value. As I stated at my hearing, I did not play any role in the development of this proposal. If confirmed, I commit to learning more about this proposal, objectively reviewing its rationale and comments received.

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**Question from Senator Angus S. King, Jr.**

**Question:** We had a situation at Acadia National Park several years ago where a long term concessioner was outbid in a way that raised a lot of concerns about the transparency, fairness and enforcement of the NPS concession contract process, such as the winning bidder not being held to the commitments they made in their winning bid, and the contract evaluation process not specifically considering past performance of the incumbent in determining the winning bidder. Can you specifically describe how you plan to improve the transparency and fairness of the National Park Service concession process?

**Response:** National Park Service concessioners play an extremely important role in aiding the visitor experience. I believe that accountability and transparency are key concepts that should be incorporated throughout the National Park Service, including within our concessions program. If confirmed, I commit to learning more about this issue, and working with the program and stakeholders to promote adherence to these important interests and concepts.



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**Questions from Senator Tammy Duckworth**

**Question 1:** Our National Parks should tell America’s story. However, less than a quarter of the National Park system reflects the histories of our Nation’s diverse communities and cultures. Fortunately, Congress authorized the President to establish new National Parks and Monuments to help commemorate and preserve our country’s history. Accordingly, I recommend the President designate the 1908 Race Riots site as a National Monument to begin ensuring our National Park system represents the history of all Americans.

During the Race Riots, a mob of white residents murdered at least six African-Americans, burned black homes and businesses and attacked hundreds of citizens. Vitriol and hate reigned, as person after person was killed for no reason other than the color of their skin. For having the nerve to be black. For having the gall to look differently than those doing the lynching. Among those killed was William Donegan, an 84-year-old cobbler who was hung from a tree, then stabbed, because he had dared marry a white woman three decades prior.

In the aftermath, shocked citizens across the country formed a grassroots organization dedicated to promoting equality and eradicating prejudice, known today as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). And so out of intolerance a movement was borne — asking us to do better and fight harder for a more just, more equal society.

This movement deserves to be honored and commemorated. That is why I am urging you to work with me in designating the historic site of the 1908 Race Riots as a National Monument and requesting your commitment that if confirmed to lead the National Park Service (NPS), you will visit this important historic landmark in Illinois.

**Response:** If confirmed, I would look forward to learning more about this site and working with you and your colleagues on this important issue.

**Question 2:** Designating the 1908 Race Riot site would be an important step towards making the NPS system more representative of every American story. However, there are many more sites that deserve designation, such as the Centennial Baptist Church in Helena Arkansas and the Kennedy-King Park in Indiana. If confirmed to be NPS Director, what specific actions would you take to better memorialize the stories of black, brown and tribal communities?

**Response:** Over the course of my entire career in the National Park Service, I have promoted the need to “tell the stories that have not been told” and that contribute to our national story and narrative. As the former regional director of the Southeast Region, I played a leading role in the 450th Commemoration of the Founding of St. Augustine, Florida (the oldest continuously inhabited European established settlement within the borders of the continental United States). In addition, I commissioned publications on the 150 Anniversary of the Civil War to include: “Hispanics in the Civil War – From Battlefield to the Homefront, “Native Americans in the Civil War”, and “Asians in the Civil War.” If confirmed, I will do everything possible to better memorialize the stories of black, brown and tribal communities as part of our nation’s story.

**U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**  
**November 15, 2018 Hearing: *Pending Nominations***  
**Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Raymond David Vela**

**Question 3:** It is a national disgrace when an American with a disability, especially a disabled Veteran, is denied access to a National Park or Monument. I was outraged when a constituent informed me that the lone elevator at the Lincoln Memorial had been out of service for months. After I inquired about this unacceptable situation, the elevator was fixed two months earlier than previously scheduled. However, it should not require the personal intervention of a Senator who happens to be a disabled combat Veteran to ensure accessibility at the Lincoln Memorial.

Given your work to improve accessibility while stationed at Grand Teton National Park, I am hopeful that you will prioritize this important issue. If confirmed to be NPS Director, what specific actions will you take to ensure that all Americans are able to access our National Parks – particularly our Nation’s war heroes?

**Response:** If confirmed, I will see that NPS continues its commitment to making facilities, programs, services, and employment accessible for visitors and employees with disabilities. That commitment has been reinforced by Secretarial Order 3366 that emphasizes support for veterans and others with disabilities and the need to collaborate with the disability community to expand access to recreation opportunities. By further engaging existing disabled, youth, and veterans partner organizations, and identifying new ones, we can better understand the needs of these communities, address barriers, and improve facilities and customer service.

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**Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Raymond David Vela**

**Questions from Senator Catherine Cortez Masto**

**Question 1:** The millions of people who visit national parks every year must rely on our nation's transportation infrastructure to not only access the parks, but move around within them. As we work to create transportation systems that create less emissions and improve efficiency, it will be important to keep in mind how the federal government addressing these challenges in our national park system. I have been an advocate in the Senate for expanding smart communities through innovation in communications and transportation, including in rural areas, that can improve safety, efficiency and quality of life. If confirmed, how will you address the need to upgrade transportation infrastructure within our park system that integrates modern technology, such as electric vehicle charging stations, while maintaining the natural beauty of our parks?

**Response:** As a superintendent and regional director, I have witnessed first-hand the benefits of efficient and dependable transportation in many national park settings. If confirmed, I will ensure we continue to focus on this vital piece of a visitor experience. Today, 100 transit systems operate in 64 of the 418 National Park System units in a variety of contexts and business arrangements, and over 30 percent of transit vehicles operating in parks utilize alternative fuels. I look to continue and build upon this strong foundation we have established.

As NPS looks to the future, I believe we should pursue transportation innovation to create a world class visitor experience. We can do this by implementing modern visitor information systems, procuring advanced transit vehicles and technologies, and preparing for emerging transportation technologies and shared mobility trends.

**Question 2:** On August 7, 2018, the National Park Service issued a proposed rulemaking that would revise NPS' protest permitting process regarding demonstrations at the National mall, Memorial Parks, and President's Park in DC, requiring a fee for people to demonstrate and protest. This proposal is opposed by the National Parks Conservation Association, Human Rights Campaign, NAACP, the Project on Government Oversight, and many other diverse groups. I sent a letter to NPS and Secretary Zinke on October 25, along with 15 of my colleagues, expressing our concern that such an action would restrict people's Constitutional right to Freedom of Speech and Peaceful Assembly.

The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech ... or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Do you think charging people for peacefully assembling and petitioning their government for a redress of grievances upholds the spirit of the Constitution?

**Response:** I agree that the First Amendment is a bedrock American value. As I stated at my hearing, I did not play any role in the development of this proposal. If confirmed, I commit to learning more about this proposal, objectively reviewing its rationale and comments received.

**U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**  
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**Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Raymond David Vela**

**Question 3:** NPS is a key agency in maintaining our nation's history and cultural archive. However, in its last Budget Request, this Administration has proposed substantial reductions and staff and funding for our national parks (7 percent cut to National Parks, while reducing the workforce by 1,800 people), that would otherwise cause harm to NPS' mission in this area.

A. How are the parks impacted by budget and staffing reductions?

**Response:** The Budget Request provides \$2.4 billion for the day-to-day management of the natural resource and public amenities of the National Park System. Within this account, funding is prioritized for the protection of resources, including repair and rehabilitation projects, which address the deferred maintenance backlog, and cyclic maintenance projects which ensure maintenance is conducted in a timely fashion to avoid increasing the deferred maintenance backlog. The request also proposes cost savings through more aggressive use of shared services and use of multiagency procurement vehicles.

B. Do you support the President's Budget, which requested a large cut to the National Park Service?

**Response:** The President's Budget maintains core functions for the National Park Service and provides funding to support the Administration's priorities of conserving our land and water, expanding outdoor access, protecting our people and the border, and addressing the deferred maintenance backlog.

**Question 4:** According to a study published on September 24, 2018 in *Environmental Research Letters*, which analyzes climate data from all 417 national parks across the 50 states and the territories, our national parks are warming about twice as fast as the rest of the nation, and without a serious effort to mitigate global warming, some of them could be unrecognizable within the next century.

A. As climate change occurs, and no preventative measures are taken by this Administration, are we not putting our parks, the millions of people that rely on our parks for employment, and the billions of dollars lost in our outdoor economy at a disadvantage?

B. Regarding President Trump's October 14, 2018 comments on 60 Minutes saying that scientists have a political agenda when it comes to climate change, do you believe the scientists within NPS have a political agenda?

C. What should NPS' role be in combatting climate change?

D. How will our parks be affected by climate change in the future?

E. Should NPS take a proactive role in protecting our parks from climate change?

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**Response:** Climate change is real, and its impact is being seen in our national parks. As land managers, we must use the tools at our disposal to meet our mandate, and to address the impacts of our changing climate. I support the work of National Park Service scientists, and believe that decisions are best made when informed by sound science.

**Question 5:** On December 20, 2016, NPS issued Director's Order #100, titled "Resource Stewardship for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," which notes that climate change, biodiversity loss, invasive species, land use changes, and pollution as challenges that require comprehensive, science-based management responses to ensure the parks' natural and cultural resources are preserved for the enjoyment of future generations. The Trump Administration rescinded this order on August 16, 2017. Key actions mandated by Director's Order 100 and how they protect park resources include increasing preemptive measures to protect natural resources and to base decisions on science and long-term public interest.

- A. Do you agree with making proactive decisions that help preserve the longevity and quality of our public spaces?
  
- B. Did you agree with the principles in Director's Order #100 to proactively manage national parks to anticipate future challenges with climate change?
  
- C. As Director, would you consider putting it back in place?
  
- D. How should the management of parks change to account for shorter or harsher changing seasons?

**Response:** As a regional director and superintendent, I know that proactive management is important. I believe the National Park Service should be proactive in its efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the National Park Service has the tools necessary to achieve its mission. We must be mindful of our mandate, and seek ways to adapt.

**U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**  
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**Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Raymond David Vela**

**Questions from Senator Rob Portman**

**Question 1:** Mr. Vela, if confirmed, will you commit to working with my colleagues and me on tackling the \$12 billion maintenance backlog at our parks, including working with us on the Restore Our Parks Act?

**Response:** Yes.

Another project I wanted to bring to your attention is occurring at the Dayton Aviation National Historic Park, which tells the story of the Wright brothers' discovery of flight as well as the life of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, one of America's greatest African American poets.

I was very pleased that Congress – at the recommendation of the Department of the Interior - allocated LWCF funding to acquire the two Wright Company factory buildings – where the first airplanes were constructed - in the FY18 spending bill. I was a strong advocate of including these buildings as part of the Dayton Aviation site.

I understand that the first step in acquiring the buildings is completing an appraisal. I have been told that the appraisal has not yet been initiated.

**Question 2:** If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring that the appraisal and acquisition of the factory buildings is done in a timely manner?

**Response:** If confirmed, I commit to looking into this issue and getting back to you on the status.