

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS CONCERNING S. J. RES. 57, A JOINT RESOLUTION REDESIGNATING THE ROBERT E. LEE MEMORIAL IN ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY AS THE “ARLINGTON HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE”.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior’s views on S. J. Res. 57, a joint resolution redesignating the Robert E. Lee Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery as the “Arlington House National Historic Site”.

The Department supports this legislation with an amendment to the resolution’s title.

S. J. Res. 57 would redesignate Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial as “Arlington House National Historic Site”. In addition, the resolution would repeal the two laws which dedicated Arlington House (previously, the Custis-Lee Mansion) as a memorial to Robert E. Lee: Public Law 84–107, enacted in 1955, and Public Law 92-333, enacted in 1972.

Arlington House was constructed in stages between 1802 and 1818 by enslaved persons and hired craftsmen for George Washington Parke Custis, grandson of Martha Washington, who spent part of his childhood living at Mt. Vernon. Custis built the house as a shrine to George Washington. In 1831, Robert E. Lee married Custis’ daughter, Mary Anna Randolph Custis. Lee, his wife, and their seven children resided at the mansion until 1861, when Lee resigned from the U.S. Army after learning that Virginia had seceded from the Union. The Lees left Arlington in the spring of 1861, when Lee began his service as a leader of the Confederate Army, and never returned.

Following the Civil War, Arlington House, by then surrounded by the military cemetery, was under the administration of the United States Army. The government referred to it as the Custis-Lee Mansion or simply the Lee Mansion to differentiate it from the cemetery. The home became an office for the administration of the cemetery. In 1933, Arlington House was transferred from the War Department to the National Park Service (NPS) to manage as a historic resource and to share its history with the American public.

In addition to telling the story of Robert E. Lee, the NPS has taken several steps to enrich the visitor experience by telling the stories of all the families who called the mansion their home – both free and enslaved. A multi-year restoration of the house and slave quarters, completed in 2020, included artifact conservation, facilities restoration, and installation of new interpretive exhibits. Visitors can learn about the individuals and families who lived in the mansion and in the slave quarters, both in person and virtually, through the NPS website. As the stewards of Arlington House, the NPS is committed to telling stories inclusive of multiple historical

perspectives and grounded in current research. The renaming of the site as a national historic site, as proposed by S. J. Res. 57, is consistent with NPS efforts to tell the full history of Arlington House and the people who built, maintained, and resided on the property.

The Department supports the text of the bill as introduced but suggests that the title of S. J. Res. 57 be amended to reflect the fact that Arlington House is not part of Arlington National Cemetery, but rather is a separate property managed as a unit of the National Park System. We recommend amending the title to read “Redesignating Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial as the ‘Arlington House National Historic Site’.”

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