

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING H.R. 5613, A BILL TO DESIGNATE THE QUINDARO TOWNSITE IN KANSAS CITY, KANSAS, AS A NATIONAL COMMEMORATIVE SITE, AND S. 2895, A BILL TO DESIGNATE THE QUINDARO TOWNSITE IN KANSAS CITY, KANSAS AS A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

December 12, 2018

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 5613, a bill to designate the Quindaro Townsite in Kansas City, Kansas, as a National Commemorative Site, and S. 2895, a bill to designate the Quindaro Townsite in Kansas City, Kansas, as a National Historic Landmark, and for other purposes.

The Department does not support either H.R. 5613 or S. 2895. We do not see a compelling reason for designating the Quindaro Townsite as a National Commemorative Site, as H.R. 5613 would do, and we believe it would be unwise to legislatively designate the site as a National Historic Landmark, as S. 2895 would do. We appreciate the desire of the bills' sponsors to bring greater recognition to the history of the Quindaro Townsite, but we believe the most appropriate way to do that would be to pursue National Historic Landmark designation through the well-established administrative process.

The Quindaro Townsite, a historic frontier town on the Missouri River, was founded in 1857 to be a free-state port of entry during the Kansas Territory's fight over the question of slavery. Other prominent river towns in the Territory at that time were pro-slavery. The town's residents included Americans of European descent, free African Americans, and members of the Wyandot Tribe. The Quindaro area was the location of an African American refugee settlement that began during the Civil War. It was also the site of the Freedman's University and its successor institution, Western University, the first black university in Kansas. The Quindaro Townsite was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 and is part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

Although H.R. 5613 stipulates that the Quindaro Townsite would not be considered a unit of the National Park System and that designation would not affect the administration of the site by Kansas City or the State of Kansas, designating the Townsite as a National Commemorative Site could create confusion among the general public about the significance of the title and the site's relationship to the National Park Service. The title "National Commemorative Site" has been sparingly employed by Congress. There is no definition by law or custom defining a National Commemorative Site. Passage of H.R. 5613 would increase the likelihood that Congress would designate other sites that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as National Commemorative Sites.

The designation of Quindaro Townsite as a National Historic Landmark by legislation, as proposed by S. 2895, would circumvent an established administrative process. This process provides an opportunity for local input and scholarly review and ensures that all nominated properties meet the established National Historic Landmark criteria. We are concerned that establishing a National Historic Landmark by legislation would encourage advocates for other properties to seek National Historic Landmark status by legislation in order to avoid the requirements of the administrative path. That could lead to National Historic Landmark designation for properties that do not meet the standards that all other properties have had to meet in order to merit that designation.

Finally, both H.R. 5613 and S. 2893 would authorize the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements with public and private entities, and to provide technical and financial assistance to these entities, for the purposes of protecting historic resources, and providing educational and interpretive facilities and programs for the public, at the site. The Department does not see a compelling reason to authorize such assistance for this particular site, especially at a time when we are focusing resources on reducing the \$11.6 billion backlog of deferred maintenance in national parks and addressing other critical park needs.

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