

Senator Roland W. Burris

Before the

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Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks

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STATEMENT OF ROLAND W. BURRIS

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to discuss my legislation, The United States Civil Rights Trail Special Resource Study Act. This bill would direct the Secretary of the Interior to identify the places, resources, and historic themes associated with the struggle to secure equal rights for African-Americans, and consider their addition into the National Trails System. The Study will focus on the years 1954 through 1968.

Now is the time to identify and protect the memory of the people and places that chronicle the Civil Rights Movement's watershed role in the American story. Establishing this trail system will link sites with common signage, maps, and educational materials to improve public awareness and amplify the study of their importance in history.

Action on the bill this year will begin the process of deciding how we set apart the places where men and women fought, and some gave their lives, to provide future generations of African-Americans, and all Americans, more freedom to achieve the American dream. This is our chance to remember and honor that sacrifice.....given so freely.

This legislation joins its bipartisan companion measure, H.R. 685, sponsored by Representatives Clay and Wamp, which passed unanimously in the House of Representatives in September 2009, and I want to especially thank my distinguished

colleague Representative William Lacey Clay for his vision and dedication to this legislation. Also, The National Trust for Historic Preservation considers this bill “of great importance” and a legislative priority for this year. The Trust’s director, Richard Moe, whom you know well, has written a letter in support of my bill. Mr. Chairman, I would request their letter be included in the record.

During the 1950’s and 1960’s this country saw the development of a powerful nonviolent movement for civil rights, under the rule of law, creating one of the most significant social and cultural changes in our nation’s history. Because of the hundreds and thousands of ordinary people with extraordinary vision who participated in the Civil Rights Movement, we witnessed a revolution of values and ideas that changed this nation forever. We must make certain that the next generation, and the current generation, learn and do not forget the story of the Civil Rights Movement and the ideals that it strove to achieve. It is important that we highlight a period of common purpose, that brought us together despite our differences in age, race, and position in life, and that many here today are too young to remember.

I want to thank Chairman Udall and Ranking Member Burr for their commitment to our National Parks system, and secondly for moving this legislation as quickly as possible. I know that, working together, we can add to the witness of history for all Americans to see and understand the remarkable accomplishments of those whose struggle for equal rights still rings true today.