

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. 4129, A BILL TO CONTRIBUTE FUNDS AND ARTIFACTS TO THE THEODORE ROOSEVELT PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY IN MEDORA, NORTH DAKOTA.

MAY 15, 2024

Chairman King and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 4129, a bill to contribute funds and artifacts to the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in Medora, North Dakota.

The Department appreciates the intent of S. 4129 to assist private efforts to establish a world destination presidential library to honor the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt, but has concerns with the bill as introduced. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsors to address those concerns.

S. 4129 would direct the Secretary of the Interior to provide a grant to the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation (Foundation) for the establishment of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, to be located in Medora, North Dakota. Grant funds would be used to preserve materials relating to the life of President Roosevelt and to make them available to the public, as well as to provide interpretation and education on the meaning of the life of Theodore Roosevelt. The grant would be subject to a non-Federal matching requirement but otherwise there would be no limit on the amount of funding that could be appropriated for the grant, nor any fiscal year limitation.

The bill would also direct the Secretary to enter into agreements to preserve and exhibit Federal curatorial collections relating to the life and legacy of Theodore Roosevelt at the Presidential Library. The agreements would provide for the loan, transfer, or conveyance from any federal agency to the Foundation of historic, educational, artistic, natural, and other museum artifacts and objects, particularly objects that are not on display to the public.

Theodore Roosevelt served as the Nation's 26th President from 1901 to 1909. Widely considered the "conservationist president," Roosevelt established the U.S. Forest Service, signed into law the creation of five national parks, and signed the 1906 Antiquities Act, under which he proclaimed 18 new U.S. national monuments. From the moment Roosevelt visited North Dakota on a hunting trip as a young man, he fell in love with the Badlands and returned to the area again and again over the course of his life. It was there that his many personal experiences with the land gave rise to the groundbreaking conservation initiatives of his presidency. Roosevelt is now remembered with a national park in his beloved North Dakota, a park that bears his name and honors his legacy.

The Foundation is a nonprofit organization formed in 2014 to plan, build, and oversee operations of the future Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in Medora, North Dakota. The library will

be located near Theodore Roosevelt National Park. While the National Park Service (NPS) looks forward to exploring ways to collaborate with the library, the NPS does not currently have a formal partnership with the Foundation. The Department applauds the mission of the Foundation to build a world class presidential library based on the principles that represent Roosevelt's legacy in the modern world: Conservation, Leadership, and Citizenship. However, the Department has concerns with authorizing a Federal grant for this private entity that would likely draw funding from NPS priorities, including park operations and maintenance.

We recommend that the Foundation explore existing grant programs that can meet its needs. One NPS grant program that the Foundation may be able to successfully leverage is Save America's Treasures. This program funds conservation work on nationally significant collections including artifacts, museum collections, documents, sculptures, and other works of art.

In addition, the Department has concerns about the bill's language requiring the Secretary to enter into agreements to preserve and exhibit Federal curatorial collections relating to the life and legacy of Theodore Roosevelt at the Presidential Library. NPS museums collect objects specific to the mission of the individual parks and interpret those collections in their original context. The collections are site-specific; that is, they pertain to that particular NPS site. These nationally significant collections are essential resources for interpretation, research, and management.

The NPS supports loaning objects that are currently not on display if the loans are consistent with existing law and policy and the borrowing institution meets the conditions as the Secretary deems necessary for the preservation and exhibition of those collections. In keeping with the NPS public trust responsibilities, its museum collections belong to the American public and can never be sold, unlike public and private institutions which sometimes sell or trade artwork to address financial challenges or use funds generated from art sales to reinvest in the museum. We would appreciate the opportunity to work with the bill's sponsor on amendments that would provide the Secretary with flexibility to determine the appropriateness of loaning particular artifacts on a case-by-case basis.

Most presidential libraries and museums, including their collections, belong to the American people and are operated by the National Archives and Records Administration. A presidential library is typically built with private funds donated to non-profit organizations which are formed for the specific goal of building a presidential library and to support its programs. The presidential library is then donated to the Federal government. From its inception, the intention has always been that the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library will remain privately owned. We respect this intent and look forward to exploring ways to collaborate with the Foundation and the future library on mutually identified goals.

The Department defers to other Federal agencies that may have museum collections relating to the life of Theodore Roosevelt for their views on S. 4129.

Chairman King, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.