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As Difficult As Possible: The National Park Service's Implementation of the Government Shutdown

Witnesses:

The Honorable Jonathan B. Jarvis
Director of National Park Service
The Honorable Greg Bryan
Mayor of Town of Tusayan
Ms. Anna Eberly
Managing Director, Claude Moore Colonial Farm, McLean, Virginia
Mr. Myron Ebell
Director, Center for Energy and Environment, Competitive Enterprise Institute
Ms. Lisa Simon
President, National Tour Association, Lexington, Kentucky
Mr. Denis P. Galvin
Board Member, National Parks Conservation Association

Committee Members Present:

On Wednesday, October 16, the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held a joint oversight hearing entitled *As Difficult As Possible: The National Park Service's (NPS) Implementation of the Government Shutdown*. The hearing examined the actions taken by the NPS following the government shutdown, which began on October 1 due to a lapse in fiscal year (FY) 2014 appropriations. **Douglas Lamborn (R-CO)**, **Walt Long (R-LA)**, **Doc Hastings (R-WA)**, **Natural Resources Committee Chairman**, **Richard W. Long (R-MI)**, **Steven Horsford (D-NV)**, **Robert Wittman (R-Virg)**, **Jared Huffman (D-CA)**, **Paul Gosar (R-AZ)**, **Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH)**, **Tom McClintock (R-CA)**, **Patrick Meehan (R-PA)**, **Matt Costantino (D-PA)**, **Dan Benishek (R-MI)**, **Michael Gresham (D-NM)**, **Doug LaMalfa (R-CA)**, **Alan Lowenthal (D-CA)**, **Ron DeSantis (R-FL)**, **John Tierney (D-MA)**, **Jason Smith (R-MO)**, **Carolyn Maloney (D-NY)**, **Grace Napolitano (D-CA)**, **John Chafee (R-RI)**, **Krist Noem (R-SD)**

Witnesses impacted by the closure of parks were called to testify, as well as the Director of the NPS, Jonathan Jarvis, who appeared before the committees only after a subpoena was issued by Chairman Darrell Issa (R-CA). Before testifying, witnesses were sworn in. **Darrell Issa (R-CA)**, **Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman**, **Doc Hastings (R-WA)**, **Natural Resources Committee Chairman**, **Elijah Cummings (D-MD)**, **Oversight and Government Reform Ranking Member**, **Peter DeFazio (D-OR)**, **Natural Resources Ranking Member**, **Raul Grijalva (D-AZ)**, **Rob Bishop (R-UT)**, **Eleanor Norton (D-DC)**, **Rush Holt (D-NJ)**, **Gerald Connolly (D-VA)**, **Madeleine Bordallo (D-Guam)**, **Nicola Tsongas (D-MA)**, **Troy Gowdy (R-SC)**, **Louis Gohmert, Jr. (R-TX)**, **Eric Swalley (D-OH)**, **John Mica (R-FL)**, **John Duncan (R-TN)**, **Danny Davis (D-IL)**

In the hearing, all government agencies were required to halt activity and furlough all workers unnecessary for the protection of life and property. Therefore, beginning on October 1, approximately 87% of Park Service employees were furloughed and 401 National Parks were closed, barricading entrances to the public at popular tourist attractions including the Lincoln Memorial, World War II Memorial, and even the lawns of the National Mall. The hearing, called by the Republican-controlled committee, called into question the necessity for turning away millions of Americans, especially a group of WWII veterans who were refused access to the World War II Memorial on October 1. Republicans believed that the unnecessary closures were part of a larger ploy to make the shutdown as conspicuous as possible to the American people. Though repeatedly questioned by House Republicans, Director Jarvis upheld that the National Parks were closed in compliance with the Antideficiency Act, which forbids federal use of any funds that have not been authorized by Congress. Without appropriations, the NPS could not afford to pay Park Rangers to prevent vandalism and the deterioration of historic sites, and that they therefore had to be barricaded. Republican committee members, however, felt the National Parks were unnecessarily barricaded, especially public lands that are not regularly patrolled, are leased to private entities, or are open-air monuments without pay gates. Democrats criticized Republicans for blaming the NPS for the closures when Congress was responsible for the shutdown in the first place. Democrats instead focused on the Park Service's budget and lack of funding. In his testimony, Denis Galvin of the National Parks Conservation Association explained that the National Park Service's budget represents only one-fifteenth of one percent of the federal budget. Furthermore, NPS funding has been in steady decline because of budget shortfalls. Ranking Member, Peter DeFazio (D-OR) stated that in 2010 the budget for NPS was \$2.75 billion; in 2013, however, the budget is only \$2.4 billion, which is less than 2008 spending levels. Jarvis explained that maintenance backlog of the parks exceeds \$11 billion to repair water systems, waste systems, and roads. Jarvis emphasized that that National Parks contribute \$76 million each day to the national economy, and that the closures caused by the government shutdown were adversely impacting communities. Governors in at least five states have reopened national parks such as the Grand Canyon and Statue of Liberty in recent days, but

Republicans consider that these actions were too late. As of Wednesday evening, October 16, both the Senate and House have approved a bill to temporarily fund the government through January 15 and extend the country's capacity to borrow through February 7. The bill also authorizes retroactive pay for federal employees and reimburses states for the costs they incurred to keep National Parks open during shutdown.

Opening statements, witness testimonies and an archived webcast of the hearing can be found on the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee web sites.

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