



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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February 1, 2016

Member
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20210

RE: NAACP OPPOSITION TO AMENDMENT 3023 AND 3126, THE “BLOCKING NEW PARKS” AMENDMENTS TO S. 2012, THE *ENERGY POLICY MODERNIZATION ACT*

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the NAACP, our nation’s oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization, I am writing to express our organization’s strong opposition to Senate Amendments 3023 and 3126, Senator Lee’s “blocking new parks” amendments. This regressive proposal would essentially block the President – any President – from protecting our nation’s rich natural, historic, and cultural heritage. These amendments are a direct assault on our National Parks, National Monuments and public lands’ conservation heritage, as well as our ability to preserve our nation’s important historical landmarks for the enjoyment and education of future generations.

Over the past few years, under the authority of the *Antiquities Act*, President Obama responded to desires of local communities by designating a number of national monuments including the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument, the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument, and the Pullman National Monument. These national monuments represent significant milestones in our nation’s history and have helped expand the history protected by our national park system to better reflect the diverse cultural and historical events and figures which have led us to the place we are today in American history. The NAACP had joined with representatives of the local communities and others in supporting these designations. Given the importance that these additions to our system of national parks it is particularly troubling to see this amendment being considered during both Black History Month and the National Park Service’s Centennial year.

An analysis by the Center for American Progress found that currently less than a quarter of National Parks and Monuments have a primary focus on women, communities of color, or other traditionally underrepresented groups. Thankfully, Presidents have been more effective than Congress at designating inclusive national monuments and parks that tell the stories of underrepresented communities. Thirty three percent of all designations by presidents are inclusive, compared with only 22 percent of all designations by Congress. Especially during the 100th anniversary year of the National Park Service, Congress should work to make our park system more inclusive as we head into the second century of the parks instead of attempting to undermine one of the most historically important tools recognizing the diversity of our shared American history.

Furthermore, by commemorating our history through national parks and national monuments, we are encouraging all children to physically explore the history of the United States. By increasing the number of monuments dedicated to the history of racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S., we are not only sending the message to our children that the stories of people of color are also important, but the result is additional encouragement to racial and ethnic minority children to pursue increased activity.

Under the existing terms of the *Antiquities Act*, following a monument designation, site-specific management plans are put into place with input from local jurisdictions and agencies, community groups and the public. Thus the local community and the relevant state continue to have input on the use of the land. In fact, studies have repeatedly shown that national monuments support local economic growth. For examples, following the March 2013 protection of Rio Grande del Norte, visitation to the area increased by 40% and Taos, New Mexico has seen a nearly \$100,000 increase in revenue. Furthermore, nearly half of America's national parks began as national monuments including the Grand Canyon, Acadia, Muir Woods, and Olympic National Parks.

Sadly, the changes proposed in amendment 3023 and 3126 are entirely contrary to the intent and purpose of this celebrated and effective conservation tool. The *Antiquities Act* was created by Congress specifically to allow the President to act to protect irreplaceable national treasures at times when Congress is unwilling or unable to act swiftly enough to do so. These amendments would allow Congress or a single state legislature to block protections for important historic, cultural or natural treasures that are important to all Americans, taking away local communities' ability to petition the government for swift action to the places that most matter to them. This would only serve to disenfranchise communities whose contributions to our history are already under recognized by our national park system and who most need this tool available to them.

Again, I strongly urge the Senate to protect the *Antiquities Act* and move to ensure its continued success by opposing and voting against Senator Lee's efforts to block new parks via amendments 3023 and 3126. Thank you in advance for your attention to the NAACP position. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 463-2940.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary O. Shelton', written in a cursive style.

Hilary O. Shelton
Director, NAACP Washington Bureau &
Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy