

STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, ACTING DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES ON S. 742, A BILL TO EXPAND THE BOUNDARY OF THE JIMMY CARTER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, TO REDESIGNATE THE UNIT AS A NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JULY 22, 2009

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 742, a bill to expand the boundary of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site, to redesignate the unit as a National Historical Park, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of S. 742. This legislation would authorize the addition of properties to the Jimmy Carter historic site that would help broaden public understanding of the life and work of President Carter and enhance the visitor experience in Plains, Georgia.

Legislation authorizing the establishment of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District was enacted in 1987 to preserve the key sites and structures associated with President Jimmy Carter during his life, provide for the interpretation of the life and presidency of Jimmy Carter, and present the history of a small rural southern town. The historic site consists of President Carter's boyhood home in the community of Archery, Plains High School, the Plains depot, and the Carter compound, where President and Mrs. Carter reside. The site also includes 100 feet of scenic easements along both sides of Old Plains Highway west of Plains. The preservation district consists of the Plains Historic District, Bond Street, and 650 acres of agricultural lands within which the Secretary is authorized to acquire easements to protect the scenic values of the community around the historic site.

President and Mrs. Carter both grew up in and around Plains. Except for time spent in college, the Navy, the Georgia governor's mansion, and the White House, the Carters have made their home in Plains, where they continue to be very engaged in community affairs. In large part because of the historic site and preservation district, the town of Plains and its environs, a community of about 700 people, looks much the same today as it did during the earlier years of the Carters' lives. We believe the boundary changes proposed in S. 742 are consistent with President and Mrs. Carter's vision for Plains as both a modest hometown of a U.S. president and a community that has preserved the history of life in a small, southern agricultural community in the early to middle years of the 20th century.

S. 742 would include several new areas to the boundary of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. Of critical importance to the National Park Service would be the addition of properties in the vicinity of the Carter residence that, if acquired, would serve an

immediate park need. One of these properties would be appropriate for relocation of the park's maintenance and curatorial facilities. The maintenance division for the park is currently housed in a dilapidated structure built by high school students in the 1950's on the grounds of the former Plains High School. Adjacent to the structure is an unsightly maintenance yard, where trucks, tractors, lawn mowers and other equipment is stored and refuse is temporarily held. The curatorial storage facility is located next to the maintenance building. It was meant to be temporary and is inadequate for processing and storing important historical records and artifacts. Neither the maintenance yard nor the temporary curatorial facility fit with the historic character and qualities of the former school, which is now the park's visitor center, or with the center of Plains generally.

The bill would also add to the park boundary several other properties, including:

- The Billy Carter Service Station Museum at 104 West Church Street, the site of the iconic gas station operated by President Carter's brother during the Carter presidency. The museum is currently owned and operated by the Plains Better Hometown Group, a non-profit organization that assists community development.
- The property at 147 Old Plains Highway, known locally as the "Haunted House." This house is recognized as the oldest home in Sumter County and was the residence of President Carter and his family after he left the Navy.
- The Georgia Welcome Center on State Route 280/27, a state-owned facility that was built to accommodate visitors to Plains; and
- Two corridors of land no wider than 50 feet each between the Georgia Welcome Center and the President Carter boyhood home, which could be used for multi-use trails. The trails, running along each side of the Southwest Georgia Railroad lines that stretch along the same corridor, would connect a new campground proposed for the current Georgia Welcome Center property, the city of Plains and the boyhood farm.

The National Park Service anticipates that there would be no acquisition costs for the Georgia Welcome Center, the Haunted House, or the Service Station museum. We do not yet have cost estimates for the acquisition of the other properties, or for the maintenance and operation of any of these properties, but plan to estimate these costs in the near future. All funds for such activities would be subject to National Park Service priorities and the availability of appropriations.

S. 742 would also change the designation of the historic site to the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park. This proposed designation is appropriate for a unit of the National Park System that has multiple, non-contiguous sites, as does the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. With the addition of the properties authorized for acquisition under this bill, the designation of "national historical park" would be even more apt than it is today.

Finally, the bill includes references for a map that would depict the revised boundary of

the park. We will provide this boundary map to the committee in the near future.

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