

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING S. 298, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE SPRINGFIELD RACE RIOT NATIONAL HISTORIC MONUMENT IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 19, 2019

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 298, a bill to establish the Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument in the State of Illinois, and for other purposes.

The Department recognizes the important contribution to America's story that is represented by the resources related to the Springfield Race Riot of 1908; however, we do not support S. 298 at this time.

Establishing a unit of the National Park System could be one way to increase public awareness of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot, but it may not be the most appropriate or feasible way to do so, especially since there are several ongoing local management and interpretation efforts across the city to tell the story. In addition, at a time when the Department needs to devote resources to reducing the National Park Service's \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog and addressing other critical national park needs, it would be difficult to prioritize a new park unit without having a better understanding of how it would relate to other National Park Service resources and needs.

S. 298 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument after meeting specified requirements. The bill includes authorities for land acquisition and administration that are commonly included in legislation establishing a unit of the National Park System.

The Springfield site contains the foundations of five of the dozens of homes that were destroyed during the 1908 riot that engulfed the city. The riot was a multi-day affair, started by a white mob, directed against African American residents. The riot resulted in the lynching of two black men, assaults on many more, and the destruction of whole neighborhoods. The riot, trials, and aftermath of the events in Springfield drew national attention to racial violence and sparked direct action by many civil rights leaders.

The events in Springfield occurred in Abraham Lincoln's hometown, a few months before the centennial of his birth, and highlighted the lack of progress on race relations in America. In February 1909, leaders sparked by the Springfield riot formed the National Negro Committee, which would later become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP). The Springfield Race Riot site is important for its association with the creation of the NAACP and contributes to our understanding of racial violence in America.

In 2018, Senator Tammy Duckworth and Representative Rodney Davis sent letters to the National Park Service requesting a reconnaissance survey of the site. A reconnaissance survey provides a preliminary assessment – though not a full analysis – of the national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for National Park Service management of an area or site proposed for inclusion in the National Park System. A study team traveled to Springfield in April 2019 to examine the site and meet with archeologists, the NAACP, local officials, and other individuals. The National Park Service is currently in the process of reviewing the information collected during the site visit and finalizing the reconnaissance survey. Once the survey is completed, the Department expects to be in a better position to recommend ways to move forward on recognizing the site, which could potentially include authorizing a full special resource study, assisting local entities with marking and interpreting the site, facilitating research, or pursuing a combination of options.

Finally, should the Committee move forward with this designation legislation, we would recommend amending the site name to be “Springfield Race Riot National Memorial”, which would be an appropriate title for a site that commemorates a historic event but where there is little in the way of extant resources. The title “national memorial” would also be in keeping with the standard nomenclature for units of the National Park System, which is not the case with “national historic monument,” the title used currently in the bill.

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