

Rep. Francisco “Quico” Canseco
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
H.R. 3100 – San Antonio Missions National Historical Park Boundary Expansion Act
Thursday May 17th 2012
1324 Longworth – 2:00 pm

Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva, thank you for holding today’s hearing and including the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park Boundary Expansion Act (H.R. 3100) on the agenda. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

I’m Francisco Canseco, and I represent the 23rd District of Texas. My district stretches from San Antonio to El Paso, and within it I have the privilege of representing the South Side of San Antonio, where the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park is located.

Whether or not you know anything about the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, you have heard about the Alamo. Texans simply wouldn’t allow you not to know about the Alamo. What you may not know about the Alamo is that before it became associated with Texas’ struggle for independence from Mexico it began life as a Spanish mission.

In efforts to settle North America, the English founded Jamestown, Plymouth Rock, and other colonial settlements that schoolchildren learn about in U.S. history classes. The Spanish took a different approach in their efforts to settle their possessions in North America. Instead of sending ships full of families to found new towns, the Spanish sent Franciscan priests to establish missions. At these missions, the Spanish priests would bring local Native Americans to live at the mission, teach them farming, educate them, and ultimately to convert them to Christianity.

Besides the Alamo, which was founded as Mission San Antonio de Valero, four other missions were founded in the San Antonio area and in Bexar County. They are Mission Concepción, Mission Espada, Mission San Juan Capistrano, and Mission San José. These four missions comprise what is today’s San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

The San Antonio Missions National Historical Park is an important asset to the community in San Antonio. It is important that it be protected and enhanced. That is why I’ve introduced the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park Boundary Expansion Act here in the House of Representatives, along with my fellow Members of Congress from Bexar County. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison has introduced similar legislation in the United States Senate. The primary focus of this bill is to adjust the boundary of the park to include lands that the Park Service already owns, will acquire through donation from the San Antonio River Authority, Bexar County, or the City of San Antonio, or will be operated under a cooperative agreement with Bexar County and the City of San Antonio.

While H.R. 3100 also would authorize a study of other lands that may be acquired for inclusion in the park, I understand that the state of our nation's finances means that such a study may not be possible at this time. I want to emphasize that the most important goal of this legislation is adjusting the boundary to bring into the park those lands identified in the legislation which will help protect the park and and enhance the experience of visitors.

The San Antonio Missions are important to the nation in that they help visitors understand the history of our nation, its diverse origins, as well as the history of San Antonio and Texas. Aside from their historical significance, the San Antonio Missions are superbly preserved examples of Spanish Colonial architecture. I would also add that the four missions that comprise the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park are still functioning parish churches, continuing to fulfill the role in the San Antonio community for which they were founded almost 300 years ago.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to be here today, and look forward to working with the committee on this legislation so that we can hopefully get it to a markup, and then hopefully up for a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives.