

Statement on H.R. 2333, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to acquire certain property related to Fort Scott National Historic Site in Fort Scott, Kansas

Chairman Tom McClintock (CA-04)/Ranking Member Niki Tsongas (MA-03)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of this subcommittee for your consideration of this legislation regarding Fort Scott National Historic Site in my district.

Fort Scott National Historic Site, located in the historic town of Fort Scott, Kansas, preserves the important story of the frontier fort's role in 19th century America for generations to come. It serves as a physical snapshot of the “pioneer days” of westward migration—from its construction in 1842 until its closure in 1853—and portrays a figurative stepping stone upon the prairie toward a transcontinental nation.

However, the story of the *community* of Fort Scott continues from that point on as it rose up around the shuttered fort of the same name and invokes the conflicts of Bleeding Kansas and the Civil War.

After the Army demobilized Fort Scott in 1853 and private residents purchased the last of its property in 1855, the buildings of the fort became the new town. But Americans of opposing sentiments, pro-slavery forces and abolitionists alike, settled the area throughout the rest of the decade in turmoil. In 1861, the territory of Kansas ultimately became the *free state* of Kansas; but, violent conflict remained and had spread throughout the nation.

During the Civil War, the Union Army militarized the town of Fort Scott to store Union supplies and to deter Confederate invasions into Southeast Kansas. In doing so, the Army constructed several fortifications, including four garrisoned blockhouses, or “lunettes,” small structures with designated names: “Fort Lincoln,” “Fort Insley,” “Fort Henning,” and “Fort Blair,” to house soldiers and armaments while protecting the town’s southern approach.

After the Civil War, these four lunettes, credited with successfully deterring attacks from the Confederate General Sterling Price but considered “surplus property” by the U.S. War Department, were sold at auction to private individuals. Lunette Blair is the *sole remaining Civil War blockhouse* today. It is through the diligent stewardship by the citizens of Fort Scott and a testament of their dedication to preserve the community’s heritage that Lunette Blair still stands after all these years. But now they ask for Congress’ assistance.

Mr. Chairman, this legislation would strike a prohibition in Fort Scott National Historic Site’s 1978 enabling legislation which prohibited the Park Service from acquiring and incorporating the Lunette Blair blockhouse, located up until then on the planned site and considered chronologically out of sync with the 1840s-period frontier fort structures. Fortunately, the blockhouse now sits just right across the street from Fort Scott National Historic Site where it can remain on display without impacting the grounds’ antebellum viewshed, successfully linking the site’s frontier fort structures with the city’s Civil War legacy.

Allowing the Park Service to acquire the blockhouse now, a transfer which is supported by the City of Fort Scott and members of the community—including associates of the former Western Insurance Company, the local Chamber of

Commerce, the Historical Preservation Society of Bourbon County, and the local Molly Foster Berry Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution—is in line with the sites' overall mission to tell the encompassing story of Fort Scott's role in the opening of the West as well as to better demonstrate the community's share in helping to preserve the Union during the Civil War.

Thank you, and I yield back.