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Hastings Floor Statement on Bill to Create New \$50 Million Park in the Virgin Islands

"We can't afford the price tag for a new park on St. Croix, just as many Americans will never be able to afford to visit there."

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Doc Hastings (WA-04) delivered the following floor statement on H.R. 3726, the Castle Nugent Historic Site Act, which creates a new \$50 million park in St. Croix in the Virgin Islands:



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"Madame Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and ask unanimous consent to revise and extend my remarks.

Madame Speaker, I cannot support this legislation and urge my colleagues to oppose it for two reasons.

First, this Congress enacted a law that authorized and directed the National Park Service to conduct a feasibility study on whether this site should be preserved, and if so, in what manner. We don't have this report.

Hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars have been spent on this study, and yet this House is charging ahead, making a decision without having that study in our hands. This is wasteful and irresponsible.

It's been said that the report is done, but Congress hasn't gotten a copy of it yet.

We're told its recommendations will support the approach taken in this bill, but yet it's not been delivered or released.

Even if the final report were to recommend establishing a historic site, we would benefit from the information they've gathered to better craft such legislation. This bill is putting the cart before the horse.

The Park Service itself has testified on this Castle Nugent bill before us today that "we would ask that the committee defer action on this legislation until the special resource study is completed, which is consistent with the Department's general policy on legislation establishing a new unit of the National Park System when a study is pending."

Madame Speaker, if the \$500,000 study that Congress passed a law to initiate is nearly complete, then we should wait to consider this bill until we have this information.

There hasn't been a single compelling reason given as to the need to act right now before the study is in hand.

The second reason for opposition to this bill is its cost.

With ten percent unemployment, millions of Americans without jobs, record budget deficits and public debt skyrocketing, now is not the time to spend up to \$50 million of the taxpayers' money to buy nearly 3000 acres of beachfront property on a Caribbean island. And on top of that, it'll cost nearly \$1 million a year to maintain.

We can't afford the price tag for a new park on St. Croix, just as many Americans will never be able to afford to visit there.

I had my staff actually look up the cost of getting to St. Croix over the President's Day weekend next month.

From my hometown of Pasco, Washington, it would take two plane changes, over 12 hours and around \$1000 to visit the island that will be home to this new park.

For a resident of the wild and wonderful State of West Virginia flying out of the Charleston airport, the time to get there is a little less, but the price is still around a thousand dollars.

On top of the cost of buying this beachfront Caribbean property and the yearly cost of maintaining it, we need to be honest about the backlog we have in caring for the land already owned by the federal government.

There is \$9 billion worth of needed repairs and maintenance on existing park lands. If we aren't caring for what we already have, then Congress shouldn't be making the problem worse.

Our existing treasures should be our focus to ensure families that load up the minivan or SUV to take a summer vacation to a national park have a safe, enjoyable and accessible

visit. I guarantee you that no family from any state will ever load up the minivan and drive to this park in the Caribbean ocean.

This Congress must get serious about controlling spending. The American people are concerned, worried and angered by the spending that's gone on in Washington, DC. In the first year of the Obama Administration, the largest spending deficit in our nation's history has been set.

Whether it's the \$787 billion stimulus bill that has failed to create the jobs that the President promised,...or the government takeover of health care that costs well over a trillion dollars...the spending is out of control.

For Congress to buckle down, it needs to not only put the brakes on the mega-spending bills, but also start taking a hard look at the smaller bills.

Just take a look at some of the bills advanced this year by the Natural Resources Committee.

They've passed a bill to create a \$700 million welfare program for wild horses.

They approved another bill to increase spending for neotropical birds by millions of dollars.

And today there's a Committee hearing on a bill to send millions of more dollars overseas to assist apes.

There is a lot of talk that the President may propose a spending freeze in his State of the Union speech tonight.

The news media and blogs have been talking about it for several days.

And, yet, this House is poised to vote on creating a new \$50 million park in the middle of the Caribbean ocean just hours before the State of the Union.

The Democrats that control this House will send quite a message on spending and their real priorities if it approves this bill before the President even makes it up here to give his speech.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill and reserve the balance of my time.”

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