

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

First I'd like to thank the Committee for its consideration of H.R. 716, a land conveyance of the Pearson Air Museum and surrounding land from the National Park Service to the city of Vancouver, Washington.

Here's what this bill is not. This is not an ideological driven bill attacking the Park Service, federal ownership of land, the administration, or the preservation of history. In fact, it is the opposite. This is a bill designed to maintain the quality and level of management that has made this site a nationally renowned example of public-private partnership and community access for almost 20 years.

The Fort Vancouver National Historic Reserve was established in the *Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996*. Bordered by freeways, an airport, and a busy rail line, this reserve includes the 7 acre complex described in the bill on which the Pearson Air Museum is located. For all intents and purposes, the caretaker and manager of this museum has been the nonprofit Fort Vancouver National Trust. It has raised virtually all of the funds – privately – for the museum's upkeep, which totals nearly \$10 million. Until last month, the museum was filled with privately-owned planes that highlighted the rich history of aviation in Southwest Washington. It has also housed countless education programs, and as one of our region's most popular venues, it has hosted more than 100 community events each year.

This shining example of a well-maintained community treasure contrasts *sharply* with the shell of museum building that sits on the Ft. Vancouver land today. In the last year since I became involved in this unfortunate situation, our community has watched their access to this venue quickly disappear. Over a period of a few months, the National Park Service unilaterally began denying local community events: a charity concert to benefit military veterans, an annual all-church picnic, and a youth soccer fair among them. I struggle to describe the Park Service's approach as anything other than anti-public.

Over the last year, my staff and I organized and attended countless meetings with staff from every level of the Park Service -- from Director Jon Jarvis to the local level. Despite these talks, last month the Park Service decided to terminate a 30-year cooperative management agreement. When I say sudden, the Park Service sent a letter to the Trust – once its partner – demanding the immediate hand over of the museum's alarm code and keys.

This is a situation Congress never intended. When the Park Service ended the agreement, the museum transformed into something unrecognizable by the community. It has been well-documented on cover after cover of my district's biggest newspaper. At the owners' requests,

the contents were removed, and educational classes were either moved or cancelled. For weeks the *aviation* museum sat empty, and now it houses an old sailboat and a covered wagon.

Perhaps most concerning is that it now appears the Park Service always intended to take sole control of the museum. An internal Park Service document unearthed by the Vancouver Columbian newspaper through FOIA suggests the Park Service was planning a takeover as early as 2009. In the document I have given to committee staff and will submit to the record, the Park Service refers to eventual “ownership” and “management” of the museum and its assets. I look forward to Mr. Frost’s clarification of these comments.

For my last point, I’d like to illustrate for the Committee the benefit of maintaining the successful local partnership in managing the Pearson Air Museum. Compare the difference in the photos:

The first is Ft. Vancouver’s East Barracks, which has for years been managed by the Park Service. They are boarded shut and perform no function other than an eye sore for Fort Vancouver.

Compare that to the Pearson Museum – when it was still under Trust management.

Mr. Chairman, my legislation is supported by the City of Vancouver and virtually every citizen, civic, and community organization in our region. The Save Pearson Air Museum Facebook page has more than 1,300 likes. Dozens have gathered in protest of the current situation, and my office has been flooded with pleas by my constituents to pass this legislation. I urge the committee to support this bill and ask that you help us preserve the treasures of Fort Vancouver.

Thank you. I yield back.