

STATEMENT OF ALEC S. PETKOFF, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
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THE AMERICAN LEGION

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

H.R. 5452, "VETERANS EAGLE PARKS PASS ACT"

SEPTEMBER 7, 2006

The American Legion fully supports H.R. 5452 that would place the fee for the purchase of a National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass to honorably discharged veterans at ten dollars.

America's military and the National Parks have something of a shared history. In 1916, the Department of the Interior was responsible for 14 national parks and 21 national monuments but had no organization to manage them. Interior Secretaries asked the Army to detail troops to Yellowstone and the California parks for this purpose. There, military engineers and cavalymen developed park roads and buildings, enforced regulations against hunting, grazing, timber cutting, and vandalism, and did their best to serve the visiting public.

In 1933, then President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated an executive transfer order. Under the order, effective August 10, 1933, the Park Service received the War Department's parks and monuments, the fifteen national monuments then held by the Forest Service and the national capital parks, including the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and the White House. The addition of nearly 50 historical areas in the East made the park system and Park Service truly national and deeply involved with historic, as well as, natural preservation.

The national park system has grown to 390 areas in nearly every state and U.S. possession. In addition to managing these parks - as diverse and far-flung as Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and the Statue of Liberty National Monument - the Park Service supports the preservation of natural and historic places and promotes outdoor recreation outside the system through a range of grant and technical assistance programs.

America's National Parks are one of the nation's most precious treasures. They represent the vastness, diversity, beauty and strength of this great land. America asks her young people to serve in her armed forces to guard and defend freedom and its way of life. Their selfless service provides millions of their fellow citizens with the opportunity to pursue their recreational endeavors in peace and safety. Therefore, The American Legion fully supports the recommended reduced fee as a fitting honor for veterans who selflessly risked life and limb, not only in defense of the Constitution, but for the very land in which we dwell.

The American Legion would also recommend that the Veterans Eagle Pass give veterans a 50 percent discount on Federal use fees charged for facilities and services such as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and specialized interpretive services. This is the same discount that is already offered by The National Park Service in the Golden Age Passport.

The American Legion is glad to support H.R. 5452 and all legislation that rightfully honors America's heroes. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my testimony. I appreciate the opportunity to present The American Legion's view on this bill.