

Testimony of the Indiana State Representative Gregory W. Porter
Before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
February 15, 2018
In Support of H.R. 4851, the Kennedy-King Establishment Act of 2018

Good Afternoon.

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands, thank you very much for inviting me to testify today in support of H.R. 4851, the Kennedy-King Establishment Act of 2018.

My name is Gregory Porter and I'm proud to represent the 96th House District in the Indiana General Assembly. My Indianapolis district includes the current local park named in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Landmark for Peace Memorial, which includes a memorial sculpture of Robert F. Kennedy and Dr. King. This area, surrounding the memorial sculpture, is the site we want to preserve by establishing the Kennedy-King National Historic Site.

In addition to my work in the Indiana General Assembly, I also serve as the President of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. I am particularly honored to serve as the Chairman of the Board of the Kennedy King Memorial Initiative, a non-profit community organization that builds on the historical events of April 4, 1968 to raise awareness and inspire action to eliminate division and injustice. Our organization is committed to promoting the non-violent legacy of Dr. King and Robert Kennedy through civil engagement and courageous conversations.

The Kennedy King Memorial Initiative reached out to our congressman, Rep. André Carson, to stress the importance of recognizing and preserving this special place. We are very pleased with Congressman Carson's leadership, as well as support from the entire Indiana delegation – House and Senate – for the establishment of a national Kennedy-King Historic Site.

The site where Robert Kennedy broke the news to Indianapolis of Dr. King's assassination is sacred to our community and our nation. It needs to be preserved not just for Indianapolis, but for Indiana, and for Americans all across our country.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of Kennedy's historic speech, I hope each member of this committee can understand the power of those words -- the way they were delivered, the way they were received, and their powerful impact today. What is still unimaginable to me is that less than two months after this speech in Indianapolis, which helped prevent another wave of violence, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles. Robert Kennedy's message of hope and non-violence made a big difference in 1968, and it can still make a difference today as our country continues to suffer from bitter divisions.

The historic site in Indianapolis has a long tradition as a community gathering place, which is why it was selected as the location for presidential candidate Kennedy's campaign speech in 1968. Today, this location is a part of a

beautiful urban park maintained by the City of Indianapolis. It attracts neighborhood residents and other visitors for ongoing sports, recreational and cultural activities.

In addition to preserving this national treasure, the establishment of the Kennedy-King Historic Site will widen awareness of the historic events and their impact on the region and the nation.

Local leaders strongly support this effort because we know that becoming a permanent part of the National Park Service system will increase the number of visitors to the Kennedy-King site and enhance the cultural tourism and economic development. We have been fortunate to see similar impacts in other parts of Indianapolis, including areas surrounding the federally funded Indianapolis Cultural Trail, which has connected diverse communities and increased the health and well-being of our region.

Once part of the National Parks System, we envision a number of improvements to the site, including a visitors center in an existing building adjacent to the site, interpretive materials, interactive exhibits and other programming that can educate new generations about peace, non-violence and the improvement of American society for everyone.

Establishing the Kennedy-King Historic site will be meaningful to many people who are still alive today and whose lives were changed by Robert Kennedy's historic speech. With this memory in mind, our community strongly believes that Americans of all ages would benefit from an improved understanding of the social and political history of the 1960s—and in particular civil rights, racial equality, peace and non-violence, which are the great legacy of Dr. King and Robert F. Kennedy.

A significant number of people in the crowd who heard the speech went on to pursue lives of public service through elected office and community service. This includes great Hoosiers community leaders like Mr. Abie Robinson, Amos Brown, and Mrs. Simon, plus elected officials of both parties like Congressman Lewis, Congresswoman Julia Carson and State Senator Theresa Lubbers.

The compelling story of what occurred in the park that night continues to inspire people today and the establishment of a National Historic Site will help further highlight an incredible moment in American history. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering your questions.