

Committee on Resources

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Rep. Lynn Woolsey **July 15, 2004**

Testimony for the House Resources' Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation & Public Lands

Chairman Radanovich and Ranking Member Christensen, thank you for inviting me to discuss my legislation, H.R. 4469, the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation Restoration and Preservation Act.

As you may know, I have been working for the past two years with the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation in an effort to preserve the historic Angel Island Immigration Station, located on Angel Island in my district, the Sixth District of California, just over the Golden Gate Bridge, north of San Francisco.

As Katherine Toy, the former Executive Director of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation will share with you later today, this site has important historical significance to the thousands of immigrants who entered the western United States through the immigration station located on Angel Island. Many generations of American families have a special connection to this historic location.

Because of this, the station has been nationally recognized for its role in American history. In 1997, it was designated as a National Historical Landmark. In 2000, it was placed on "America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list," becoming an official project of Save America's Treasures, a joint program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the White House Millennium Council.

The site is currently used as a teaching tool for students and a museum for visitors. Hundreds of school children and researchers make the trip out to the site each year to learn about its rich history.

I have been to this site and seen first hand the telling poetry carved into the walls depicting the sadness and hope of the people held there. In addition, I have observed the desperate condition of the buildings and have seen the importance of providing additional funding to preserve this American treasure for future generations.

Mr. Chairman, I have worked with the Foundation to find additional sources of funding for the restoration project. The current estimate to preserve this site is over \$30 million. With \$16 million already raised through grants, state funding and private donations, \$15 million is still needed. With no more grants to pursue and the state of California contributing close to half of the funding, it is important we find a way for the federal government to become part of this preservation effort.

Attempts to gain federal funding through the regular appropriations process for this site in the past two Congresses, have been unsuccessful because the immigration station is located in a California State Park. In the 107th Congress the FY2003 Treasury-Postal Appropriations bill mandated a report by the General Services Administration (GSA) to outline the role of the GSA, the National Park Service and the National Archives in aiding with the protection of this site. In FY2004, I explored many options through discussions with both Majority and Minority Appropriations Committee staff to ensure that all possible funding accounts were considered. Introducing an authorization bill is the only option left.

That's why as a last resort to get funding for this site I introduced the Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act with over forty-five bipartisan cosponsors. Among them are some of your subcommittee members. I would like to take this moment to thank Congressmembers Souder, Grijalva and Bordallo for joining me in this effort.

My legislation will simply allow the Angel Island Immigration Station to retain its status as a state-owned facility, while allowing the preservation project to receive federal dollars. Passing this legislation would put us one step closer to protecting this site forever. While I understand that the National Park Service opposes this legislation because they believe the project would compete for funding with its projects, I have to disagree. My bill does not specify funds must come out of the National Park Service budget, instead it

allows funding out of a more general category of the Interior Appropriations bill opening up more options. The National Park Service has also acted as a conduit for funding restoration efforts on Angel Island in the past, so any future support would not be unprecedented.

In addition, I believe that this landmark deserves to be a high priority because of what the site symbolizes to Asian Americans. Many of you are familiar with the symbolic meaning of Ellis Island to European Americans. The same feelings of history and pride can be equated to the Americans of Asian heritage on the west coast. With over one million people being processed through this site, millions of descendants nationwide are just as eager to see their roots in this country honored in the same way. In addition, Angel Island Immigration station houses one of the most unique literary displays of the culture of Asian America with its walls holding layers of poetry reflecting the record of hardship endured, and the indignity suffered by the early Chinese trying to establish roots in America. If these walls crumble, we could lose this documentation forever.

In addition, I understand some people have concerns this bill would set a precedent. But I also disagree with that argument. Similar legislation has been introduced and supported in this Congress. H.R. 1446, the California Missions Preservation Act also authorizes funding for a state owned and operated historical preservation project. I am a strong supporter of this bill and it is also very important. However, the Mission's bill has strong support from only California members. My legislation boasts support from Members across the country including: Hawaii, Illinois, Washington, Indiana, Guam, Oregon, New York, Georgia, as well as over 30 Members from California, showing the immigration station's national historical significance, especially in areas with high concentrations of Asian Americans who can link relatives to this site.

Thank you again for holding a hearing on this important legislation today. I am dedicated to this project and will keep working passionately to help others understand the story of the Angel Island Immigration Station.