

TESTIMONY OF BETTY EGBOM
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CARLSBAD, NM JULY 8, 2005

Being a native of Carlsbad, New Mexico, the Carlsbad Caverns has always been near and dear to my heart and border security has been something I have been aware of all my life not just since 9-11.

The National Parks, including the Carlsbad Caverns, have a mission of preserving American history in parks and communities; create a place to discover the natural wonders in parks and how we use science to conserve them, and to be a place for all of us to be teachers and learners of all ages. This information is taken directly from the National Park Service web site.

The national parklands are not free. They represent major financial investments by the federal government. The older parks were established on public or donated lands, but they still required and continue to need expensive development for visitor access and accommodation; staffing for general administration, protection, and interpretation; and maintenance of facilities and other improvements.

The tourism industry is very important to the community of Carlsbad and the state of New Mexico. Carlsbad has supported the promotion and success of the Carlsbad Caverns throughout the parks history. In 1925, the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce donated and installed a staircase from the natural entrance to the Bat Cave eliminating the use of a guano bucket to enter the cave. A few years ago the Caverns had budget shortfalls that threaten the temporary closure of the Caverns. The City of Carlsbad and the Chamber of Commerce raised money to keep the Caverns open and operating until funds were restored.

The Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce today spends in excess of \$250,000 on tourism marketing, trade shows and visitor guides promoting the Caverns and the surrounding attractions. The Carlsbad Caverns is the crown jewel of all the attractions in the area so that is what we promote the most.

The budget for the Carlsbad Caverns has been level the last three years at \$5,231,000 with none of that money available for marketing the park. Although the community continues to increase its marketing resources of the park each year, visitation is down from 472,674 in 2002 to 416,815 in 2004. I feel this is a direct reflection of the lack of national advertising of all the parks in the United States.

For the most part, the Carlsbad Caverns and most of the other national parks are destination trips. They are not surrounded by huge cities like the Disneyland's and other big entertainment venues. Yet the parks are competing with those vacation spots.

The current visitor's center at the Carlsbad Caverns was built in 1959. A new visitor's center is planned but 50 years later the center has become dated and not very appealing to attract visitors. Once again limited budgets have only allowed for maintenance to keep things repaired, not updated or marketed. Can you image Disney Land without updating and marketing? I don't mean to imply that the parks should be like a Disney Land but they do have to be marketed to the public to attract more visitors and have the facilities to educate all ages on the value of our natural wonders. The Carlsbad Caverns is a world famous geological site and a premier World Heritage Site surrounded by the beautiful Chihuahua Desert.

Why would you limit the parks with no allocation for marketing and yet now they are expected to use the limited budgets for border security? I have had the privilege of a behind the scenes tour of the Caverns. I have met some of the security staff and seen a demonstration of their security techniques. They have a large area to patrol and protect right there on the park.

I recently had the opportunity to tour the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Artesia, New Mexico, where all Border Patrol Personnel are currently being trained. I was impressed with the quality and detailed training. To me it appears this is the staff most qualified to protect our borders and they are well trained to do so.

Although I understand since 9-11, we all have a responsibility to be vigilant and responsive to breaches in our border security. Is putting this additional burden on the parks really the responsible thing to do?

Let's leave border security with the Border Patrol and allow the parks focus on marketing to share the national parks with more people.