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Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Legislative Hearing
H.R. 3373

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Testimony of Gregory A. O'Dell
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Good morning Chairman McClintock, Congresswoman Tsongas and members of the Subcommittee. I am Gregory A. O'Dell, president and chief executive officer of the Washington Convention and Sports Authority, also known as Events DC.

I am honored to testify today before the Federal Lands Subcommittee on H.R. 3373, legislation introduced by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to amend the District of Columbia Stadium Act. I would like to begin by thanking Congresswoman Norton for her leadership on behalf our city and for introducing H.R. 3373 that looks to extend the current RFK lease term by 50 years.

For the record, Events DC is the official convention, sports, and entertainment authority of the District of Columbia. Created as an independent agency governed by a twelve-member Board of Directors, Events DC has a statutory mission to generate economic and community benefits for the residents and businesses of our city. We accomplish this by promoting Washington, DC, as a premier location for meetings and conventions, entertainment, cultural and sporting events; by supporting and promoting youth sports activities; and by actively marketing the District as a destination of choice for leisure travelers from around the nation and across the globe.

Events DC owns or operates some of the city's most iconic venues, including the Walter E. Washington Convention and the historic Carnegie Library at Mount Vernon Square; the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium campus, which includes RFK Stadium and its adjoining Festival Grounds, as well as the Maloof Skate Park at RFK Stadium and the non-military functions of the District of Columbia Armory; and the Gateway DC events pavilion and R.I.S.E. Demonstration Center, both located on the campus of St. Elizabeths East. In addition, we manage a portfolio of investments in some of the District's marquee cultural events, including the National Cherry Blossom Festival and the DC Jazz Festival. Events DC also built and serves as landlord for Nationals Park, the home of Major League Baseball's Washington Nationals.

In addition to our core event operations, we are working actively to implement a set of programs to position Events DC for future growth, including the development of new

venues and the optimization of our current assets, none of which hold more potential for improving the quality of life in the nation's capital than the RFK Stadium Campus. With our Board's approval, we have approved a comprehensive redevelopment plan for the site, which is what brings us before the Subcommittee today.

Events DC manages and operates the RFK Campus, programming the site with D.C. United Major League Soccer matches, U.S. Soccer international matches, college football games, concerts, fitness races and festivals. In 2018, D.C. United will leave RFK Stadium, presenting a once-in-a-generation opportunity to re-imagine the future of the 190-acre campus-much of which is currently paved asphalt.

Over the last 24 months, we have worked extensively with the community to help us develop a shared vision for the future of the site. We have hosted or attended dozens of meetings with the community, working to gather feedback from area residents as to what they would like to see at the RFK site in the future. We have also met with more than 40 amateur and professional sports organizations, as well as performed a detailed market analysis to determine the inventory of sports and recreation-based programming that exists within a five-hour driving radius from the campus. At our most recent city-wide meeting earlier this year, we unveiled design concepts based on feedback from across the District; we had more than 400 attendees, which speaks to the level of resident engagement on this significant project.

As a result of those efforts, we have developed a short-term plan for the future of the RFK Campus cognizant of the terms of our current lease with the National Park Service, which stipulates that any programming on the site must be limited to sports and recreational uses. Our short-term plan focuses on the implementation of five key program elements that will help transform the site from the sea of asphalt as it currently sits today. Those short-term programmatic elements are:

- Multipurpose Fields — three multipurpose fields with lighting for both daytime and nighttime activities that will be utilized by the surrounding community as well as youth- and adult-sports leagues;
- Market Hall — a destination marketplace that will complement and support the surrounding program elements on the site, serving a mix of staple foods, specialty foods and prepared foods, serving the surrounding neighborhoods, District residents, and tourists;
- Sports and Recreation Complex — a 350,000-square-foot facility will house indoor recreation activities ranging from basketball courts, soccer fields, tennis courts, and other entertainment and recreation activities. This facility will be designed to also provide extensive options for after-school programming within a 50-mile driving radius;

- Pedestrian Bridges — three new pedestrian bridges that will connect the campus to Heritage and Kingman Islands and beyond to the neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River; and,
- RFK Memorial — a project dedicated to honoring the legacy of Robert F. Kennedy on the site.

Our team is laser-focused on advancing the design and development of these short-term program elements, with the start of construction on the multipurpose fields as soon as early next year.

Additionally, it should be noted that the short-term plan is designed to accommodate the addition of a future implementation of potential long-term anchor scenarios for the site. While our short-term plan preserves the ability to implement these potential long-term concepts, we will move forward with the short-term plan while such potential long-term concepts are further developed. Those potential long-term “anchor” uses include:

- A new NFL football stadium,
- A 20,000-seat arena as a possible replacement of the current basketball and hockey arena in downtown upon the fulfillment of its useful life, or,
- No anchor facility, but the development of additional sports and recreation-based programmatic uses.

Events DC is a fully capable development authority with significant experience delivering lasting projects for the citizens and visitors of Washington, DC, that are financially solvent and constructed on-time and within building. We have served as the lead developer of several of our venues including the Convention Center and Nationals Park. Further, we have extensive experience leading public-private partnerships, including the development of the Convention Center’s headquarters hotel, the Marriott Marquis Washington, DC, as well as the renovation of the historic Carnegie Library, which is now in progress. We are also currently constructing a 4,200-seat multipurpose arena on the St. Elizabeths East campus, slated to open next fall, that will serve as home court for the Women’s National Basketball Association’s Washington Mystics and a National Basketball Association Development League team, along with a range of other sports and entertainment programming. The arena project also includes a state-of-the-art training facility for the National Basketball Association’s Washington Wizards.

We are honored to be leading the effort to re-imagine the RFK site and are clearly well-positioned to lead the delivery of a transformational project for the citizens of our capital and the more than 20 million visitors we see each year.

Again, I would like to thank Congresswoman Norton for spearheading this legislation. Currently, there are 21 years remaining on the RFK Campus lease with the National Park Service. In order to move forward on this exciting project, a lease extension would

allow us to engage with potential partners who would help develop the proposed programming; such an extension is critical for the long-term financing necessary to fund these improvements.

Specific to the lease, we believe that the proposed uses conform to the current terms of the lease; however, we would welcome clarification and guidance relative to this matter. The landscape of sports and recreational programming has changed greatly since the lease was originally drafted. The notion of single-purpose facilities is outdated and thus the evolution of sports and recreational programming, as reflected in our proposed uses, currently represents a multi-dimensional experience for the user, the attendee and for the public good. We are excited to bring that experience to life at the RFK site and would want to ensure that our vision can be realized expeditiously.

Chairman McClintock and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my remarks. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.