

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

Statement of Congressman John Thune
before the
House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
on

S. 382, the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site Establishment Act of 1999

First, let me thank the Chairman for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on this important issue. I also would like to recognize the hard work and dedication of Tim Pavek who has championed efforts to preserve the sites and Senator Johnson for introducing S. 382, the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site Establishment Act of 1999.

I, like many Americans, grew up during the Cold War when tensions between America and the Soviet Union were at their highest point. My memories of this time are vivid. I remember Vietnam, the renewed arms race, and the immense pride and patriotism I felt when the Berlin Wall came down.

My hometown of Murdo, South Dakota, is only 60 miles east on I-90 from the Delta One command center. Surrounding that center were 10 nuclear missiles. In South Dakota an important reality of the Cold War existed. For current generations and generations to come, the creation of the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site would provide an opportunity to see what happened behind the scenes. We can learn more about the story of the lives of the officers who lived and worked in the missile silos and command centers.

All Minuteman II silo launchers have been eliminated except for the site designated Delta-9. Delta-1 and Delta-9 would provide a unique opportunity to preserve that history. Under an interagency agreement between the Air Force and National Park Service, this site has been preserved. However, this agreement has expired, prompting the need for immediate legislative action.

Congressional action on S. 382 also bears important national security implications. The Ballistic Missile Development Organization's National Missile Defense program uses the boosters from Minuteman Missiles in testing. However, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) precludes the use of encryption technology during flight tests until all missiles of a type have been retired or turned into a museum. Preservation of this site would eliminate this security concern.

From a purely practical standpoint, the site is conveniently located along the major access highway to the Blacks Hills National Forest, Mount Rushmore National Monument, and the Badlands National Park. The Minuteman Missile site would form a mutually beneficial relationship with the existing attractions.

We face a critical opportunity. In addition to the encryption issue, should the site be destroyed, an important landmark would be lost forever. These sites serve as an important reminder of our Cold War strategy.

I therefore ask the Subcommittee to favorably report this bill soon so that we can move closer to enactment and establishment of what would prove to be an invaluable asset to this nation.

I thank the Chairman and would be happy to answer any questions other members of the panel may have.