

STATEMENT OF ERIC L. MULLER, MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE HEART MOUNTAIN WYOMING FOUNDATION AND DAN K. MOORE DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF LAW, CONCERNING H.R. 3989, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY TO DETERMINE THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ADDING THE HEART MOUNTAIN RELOCATION CENTER, IN THE STATE OF WYOMING, AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

April 27, 2010

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of H.R. 3989, the Heart Mountain Relocation Center Study Act of 2009, introduced by Representative Lummis of Wyoming. The bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a Special Resource Study to determine the suitability and feasibility of adding the Heart Mountain Relocation Center, in the State of Wyoming, as a unit of the National Park System.

I appear today as a member of the Board of Directors of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, a Wyoming charitable and educational organization that is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the site and the memory of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center between the towns of Powell and Cody in the Shoshone River Valley of northwest Wyoming.

Between 1942 and 1945, Heart Mountain was one of ten confinement facilities for Japanese Americans run by the federal War Relocation Authority. At its peak, the camp confined nearly 11,000 people of Japanese ancestry whom the military had evicted from their homes and communities on the West Coast. More than two-thirds of Heart Mountain's internees were United States citizens. As the Congress found in Public Law 100-383, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II at Heart Mountain and the other War Relocation Authority facilities lacked an adequate security rationale and was motivated largely by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.

My organization, the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, has for many years been working to preserve the Heart Mountain site, with strong support both from the surrounding Wyoming communities and from Japanese Americans who were confined there. We are just a little more than a year away from our capstone achievement, the grand opening of a state-of-the-art Interpretive Learning Center on the site, where visitors from across the region, across the country, and around the world will be able to learn about the injustice that occurred there and will be challenged to think about how to prevent such an injustice from ever happening again. We believe that the Interpretive Learning Center will turn the site, which already enjoys designation as a National Historic Landmark and a Wyoming Heritage Site, into a premier place of study of this important and tragic episode in our nation's history.

The Special Resource Study contemplated in H.R. 3989 would be a core component of a long-term strategy for preserving and interpreting this important historical site for current and future generations of Americans. The legislation will provide the National Park Service with the authority to engage the public in an important dialogue about the future of the site and to outline various options to conserve and manage the site's important historic resources, which include a number of original buildings still standing in their original placements. The bill will enable stakeholders to develop a vision for the long-term management of the site and to provide additional information for Congress and the public at large on future options to realize the full educational potential of the Heart Mountain site.

We are in a uniquely strong position to foster and sustain such a public dialogue because of the broad and deep support for the site from the local community in the State of Wyoming. As a former member of the faculty of the University of Wyoming College of Law, I know how important public support is to projects of this sort, even those like ours which do not contemplate the acquisition by the federal government of any private land. The record of this hearing will include strong letters of support for this Special Resource Study from the Board of County Commissioners of Park County, Wyoming, the Northwest Regional Director of the Wyoming Business Council, the Powell Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the Cody Country Chamber of Commerce. In addition to the current Wyoming congressional delegation, we are also very fortunate to have strong support for this Special Resource Study from former Wyoming Senator Alan Simpson and former Congressman, Cabinet Secretary, and Heart Mountain internee Norman Mineta, whose lifelong friendship began at a joint Boy Scout jamboree sixty-six years ago behind the barbed wire of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center.

The Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation thanks this Subcommittee for its consideration of a bill that we are confident will contribute to the preservation and interpretation of a challenging and important chapter in our nation's diverse history.