

**Statement of Council Member Joann Ariola  
32nd Council District, NYC City Council  
before the  
House Sub Committee on Federal Lands  
Thursday October 19th, 2023**

***“Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1727, H.R. 5283, H.R. \_\_\_\_ (Rep. Tiffany), “Trash Reduction And Suppressing Harm from Environmental Degradation (TRASHED) at the Border Act and H.R. \_\_\_\_ (Rep. Westerman), “Ensuring Border Access and Protection on Federal Land Act” | Federal Lands Subcommittee***

"Protection of public lands must not become a pendulum that swings back and forth depending on who's in office. It's not a partisan issue."

These words were spoken by President Joe Biden just two years ago. In the time since they were spoken, however, the protection of our public lands seems to have very much become a partisan issue. As a result of a grave mismanagement of the situation on our southern border, our cities have now become inundated with asylum seekers for whom we have no room nor financial means to provide shelter to. In order to alleviate this situation, there are some in government who wish to place newcomers in our National Parks, effectively closing those parks to the public and transforming them into housing compounds.

This is something that we should all be united against. We should all recognize that the thought of transforming a place like Yosemite National Park into a sprawling tent city is something that should never stand. It is something that we need protections against, and that protection comes in the form of HR 5283.

This is a protection that would not only cover national parks like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon, but it is a one that would cover each and every National Park in the country as well. As Barack Obama once said, "it's not just the iconic mountains and parks that we protect. It's the forests where generations of families have hiked and picnicked and connected with nature. It's the park down the street where kids play after school. It's the farmland that's been in the family longer than anybody can remember. It's the rivers where we fish, it's the forests where we hunt." Those words are especially true today – even if that National Park is seen by some here as "just an old airport in Brooklyn."

That "old airport in Brooklyn," Floyd Bennett Field, is an especially important area for the people of New York City and to the people of my district in particular. In a city which suffers from a lack of green space, Floyd Bennett Field draws on average nearly one million visitors each year to its meadows, fields, forests, and shorelines. Remote control aviation enthusiasts make use of the old runways, students utilize the sporting fields and wait all year for their field trips to the seasonal petting zoos and pumpkin patches, and families make use of the campgrounds to enjoy the thrill of gathering around a campfire and sleeping under the stars without ever having to leave the five boroughs. Fishermen dot the shorelines, momentarily forgetting about the stresses of their home lives while they hope for the next big catch, and birdwatchers patrol the meadows in search of rare migrating bird species.

All of these things stand to be in jeopardy should we allow Floyd Bennett Field to be transformed into a tent city for those crossing our southern border. Thousands of asylum seekers being placed in the middle of this park would mean that the many daily visitors who rely on this urban oasis to get a fleeting glimpse of the great outdoors would be unable to do so. Sections of the park would be completely sealed off from the public, converted into tents and support facilities. The campgrounds would be made into an administrative center for the new complex, the runway turned into living space, the meadows suddenly too busy with activity for birds to arrive. The list of changes would go on and on, and would radically alter the park as it is known and enjoyed today.

This is why it is so vital that we act to protect this space, and all other national parks across the country. These places were meant to be enjoyed by all – not turned into temporary housing as a result of a complicated immigration issue thousands of miles away. And that is why I urge everyone to sign on to HR 5283, so that we can ensure our parks remain protected, and that whatever fallout from any other political issues in the future does not jeopardize the amazing green spaces that are loved and enjoyed by millions of Americans all over the country.