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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore [Mr. DEAL].

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
September 19, 1995.

I hereby designate the Honorable NATHAN DEAL to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING BUSINESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of May 12, 1995, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 25 minutes, and each Member except the majority and minority leader limited to not to exceed 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico [Mr. RICHARDSON] for 5 minutes.

OPEN DEBATE ON NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

Mr. RICHARDSON. Mr. Speaker, I call the attention of my colleagues to the votes today on the Suspension Calendar. On the Committee on Resources, as the ranking member of Public Lands, Shenandoah Valley National Battlefields partnership Act, a good bill that deserves support, the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act, the same, a good bill that deserves support,

and the Presidio bill, a good piece of legislation, all of these are bipartisan. But I have to call attention to my colleagues to one bill that deserves rejection, H.R. 260, and that is the park closure bill, a bill that would threaten 198 of the smallest parks in the National Park System, and I will be inserting in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD a list of those parks and many are in many of my colleagues' districts.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to pay close attention to this list because it represents the potential first draft of the new park closure list which will undoubtedly result from the recommendations of the Park Closure Commission created by H.R. 260, a bill that is opposed by every environmental organization and is opposed by the Clinton administration, the Department of the Interior, and many others.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 260's Parks Closure Commission would have the authority to recommend to Congress specific units of the park system for closure, privatization, or sale to the highest bidder. Many of the proponents of this bill claim that it is the same one that we passed unanimously last year. H.R. 260 is not the same bill we passed last year. This is how.

First, H.R. 260 puts the decision of a Park Closure Commission at the front of the train. It takes the statutory authority Congress currently has and places it in the hands of a politically appointed commission.

Second, H.R. 260 sends a strong signal to the American people that Congress does not have the political will to carry out its responsibilities of oversight over the National Park Service, and H.R. 260 exempts the 54 national park units from closure, leaving the less visited, smaller budgeted parks at the mercy of the Park Closure Commission.

Unfortunately, national treasures, such as Valley Forge, Mount Rush-

more, the Statue of Liberty, the Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson Memorials, and the Martin Luther King National Historic Site could find themselves on the chopping block.

As my colleagues, Mr. COLEMAN and Mr. PALLONE, stated so eloquently yesterday on the House floor, why does the bill only exempt the national park units from the Park Closure Commission? Are supporters of H.R. 260 making some sort of value judgment on the different units of the park system? Are we thinking that some units of the system are more deserving of protection and enjoyment than others?

Mr. Speaker, if the bill exempts national park units, shouldn't it also exempt national monuments, historic battlefields, historic sites, and national battlefield parks? If the bill sponsors are so concerned about an honest, objective review of the entire system, why did they not leave every unit on the chopping block and subject to the recommendations of the Park Closure Commission?

I had planned to offer amendments to H.R. 260 and had made note of my intention to—in a "Dear Colleague" letter to everyone in this body this summer. Despite my stated intentions and the distinct impression I had from the committee leadership that I would be able to offer these amendments as I did in subcommittee, H.R. 260 is being rammed through the House without the opportunity for full discussion and debate. There has been a lot of talk recently about accountability, yet it appears that business as usual continues here in the House.

H.R. 260 is opposed by the League of Conservation Voters. In fact, they have issued a letter declaring that this organization is going to consider this vote when considering its 1995 environmental voting scoring rating.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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