

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2709, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK BOUNDARY MODIFICATION ACT

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4467) to modify the boundary of the Vicksburg National Military Park in the State of Mississippi, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4467

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Vicksburg National Military Park Boundary Modification Act".

SEC. 2. VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK CONVEYANCE AND BOUNDARY MODIFICATION.

(a) CONVEYANCE.—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Secretary of the Interior (referred to in this Act as the "Secretary") shall convey to the State of Mississippi (referred to in this Act as the "State"), by quitclaim deed and without consideration, the Federal land described in paragraph (2) to be used in accordance with subsection (c).*

(2) *DESCRIPTION OF FEDERAL LAND.*—*The Federal land referred to in paragraph (1) is the following:*

(A) *The parcel of approximately 1.69 acres of Federal land within the boundary of Vicksburg National Military Park (referred to in this Act as the "Park"), as depicted on the map entitled "Vicksburg National Military Park Proposed Disposal of a Portion of NPS Tract 01-103", numbered 306/194,908, and dated September 2024.*

(B) *The parcel of approximately 5.74 acres of Federal land within the boundary of the Park, as depicted on the map entitled "Vicksburg National Military Park Proposed Disposal of a Portion of NPS Tracts Near Union Ave", numbered 306/194,907, and dated September 2024.*

(b) *BOUNDARY MODIFICATION.*—*On conveyance of the Federal land described in subsection (a), the Secretary shall modify the boundary of the Park to exclude the Federal land conveyed.*

(c) *USE OF LANDS.*—*The Federal land conveyed to the State under this Act—*

(1) *shall be used to facilitate public access to the Park and to enhance the visitor experience at the Park in a manner consistent with the interpretative mission of the Park, as determined by the Secretary;*

(2) *shall not be used in a manner that adversely impacts Park resources or the Park visitor experience, as determined by the Secretary; and*

(3) *shall be subject to any use restriction the Secretary determines to be appropriate.*

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentlewoman from Maryland (Ms. ELFRETH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4467, the bill now under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4467, the Vicksburg National Military Park Boundary Modification Act, which was introduced by Representative THOMPSON and is cosponsored by the entire Mississippi congressional delegation.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation conveys two small parcels of National Park Service land to the State of Mississippi to build a new state-of-the-art welcome center for Vicksburg National Military Park.

Vicksburg National Military Park marks the site of the Battle of Vicksburg, one of the true watershed moments of the Civil War. Over the course of 6 weeks in 1863, Union forces under General Ulysses S. Grant encircled the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg National Military Park, ultimately forcing its surrender on July 4, 1863. The victory gave the Union full control of the Mississippi River and split the Confederacy in half. It is widely recognized by historians as a turning point in the war.

Today, Vicksburg National Military Park contains more than 1,300 monuments and markers; 20 miles of reconstructed trenches; the USS *Cairo* gunboat; and the Vicksburg National Cemetery.

The park serves as a major destination in Mississippi for education, reflection, and historical tourism. In fact, in 2022, more than 400,000 visitors came to Vicksburg, generating approximately \$36 million in economic activity and supporting hundreds of local jobs.

While that economic and educational impact is substantial, it is currently constrained by aging visitor facilities that limit public engagement. To address this, the State of Mississippi is leading an effort to build a new state-of-the-art welcome center, which would be financed with non-Federal dollars.

H.R. 4467 helps support this effort by transferring two small parcels of National Park Service land, totaling approximately 7 acres, to the State so they can build this new facility for visitors.

This legislation is an important and practical step that will enhance the visitor experience without unnecessary expense to the Federal taxpayer. This is a model for future public-private partnerships and a win-win for both the Federal Government and the State of Mississippi.

By improving visitor experiences and enhancing a site integral to American history, this bill also directly advances the goals of President Trump's executive order on celebrating America's 250th birthday.

I thank the entire Mississippi congressional delegation for their work advancing this practical bill that will improve public access and education during America's 250th anniversary year at this hallowed site.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ELFRETH. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4467, a bill offered by my colleague, Representative THOMPSON of Mississippi.

H.R. 4467 authorizes the National Park Service to convey two small pieces of property within Vicksburg National Military Park to the State of Mississippi. This partnership will enhance the visitor experience at the park by facilitating the construction of a new visitor center, built and eventually staffed by the State of Mississippi.

Strategically partnering with the State will empower our Federal park rangers to provide visitors with a deeper understanding of such a sacred and important place.

The siege of Vicksburg was a crucial moment in the Civil War. Positioned on the Mississippi River in central Mississippi, Confederate President Jefferson Davis called the city of Vicksburg the nailhead that holds the South's two halves together. As President Lincoln saw it, Vicksburg was the key to winning the war.

Eager to capture this important city, Union General Ulysses S. Grant ordered the siege of Vicksburg in 1863. By July 4 of that year, the Union Army finally had full control over the Mississippi River. Coupled with the defeat of the Confederate troops at Gettysburg, the siege of Vicksburg was a turning point in the war, paving the way for Union victory.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the founding of our Nation, we must reflect on all parts of our history—the good, the bad, and the ugly; the lessons we need to learn; and the mistakes we cannot afford to repeat.

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Sites like Vicksburg Military National Park are where Americans can learn about our past, and sanitizing these hallowed sites is a disservice to our Nation's history. H.R. 4467 is an opportunity. My hope is that the new visitor center will convey the full weight of the painful battle and the context of the Civil War to share the uncomfortable truth rather than perpetuate, unfortunately, this administration's erasure of history.

I thank Representative THOMPSON and the entire Mississippi delegation for introducing this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 4467 and to

join me in the preservation of our Nation's past.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I am prepared to close. I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ELFRETH. Mr. Speaker, again, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, this is a commonsense bill that helps a local community improve a pivotal Civil War-era military park while reducing the Federal estate.

As we celebrate our Nation's 250th anniversary, this bill will allow Mississippians to take the lead in telling the story of Vicksburg for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4467, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SMALL CEMETERY CONVEYANCE ACT

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4284) to amend the Small Tract Act of 1983 to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to convey, without consideration, certain cemeteries, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H. R. 4284

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Small Cemetery Conveyance Act".

SEC. 2. CONVEYANCES OF CERTAIN CEMETERIES.

(a) AMENDMENTS TO SMALL TRACT ACT OF 1983.—The Small Tract Act of 1983 (16 U.S.C. 521c et seq.) is amended—

(1) in section 2(a)—

(A) in paragraph (1), by striking "and" at the end;

(B) in paragraph (2), by striking the period at the end and inserting "; and"; and

(C) by adding at the end the following:

"(3) to convey, without consideration, certain parcels used, or previously used, as cemeteries in accordance with section 9.;"

(2) in section 3(6), by striking "a cemetery (including a parcel of not more than 1 acre adjacent to the parcel used as a cemetery), a landfill, or" and inserting "a landfill or"; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

"SEC. 9. CONVEYANCES OF CERTAIN CEMETERIES.

"(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may convey, without consideration, to a qualified

person any parcel of land used, or previously used, as a cemetery (including a parcel of not more than 1 acre adjacent to the parcel used as a cemetery).

"(b) CONDITION OF CONVEYANCE.—A conveyance under subsection (a) shall be subject to the condition that the property conveyed under that subsection may only be used for the purpose of operating a cemetery.

"(c) REVERSION.—If the Secretary determines that at any time a parcel conveyed under subsection (a) is used for a purpose other than the purpose required under subsection (b), all right, title, and interest in and to the parcel conveyed pursuant to such subsection, including any improvements thereon, shall, at the discretion of the Secretary, revert to the United States.

"(d) WAIVER OF CONVEYANCE COSTS.—

"(1) EXCEPTION AVAILABLE.—The Secretary may waive the application of any requirement under section 4 to a conveyance to a qualified person under this section if the Secretary determines that such a waiver is appropriate based upon the demonstrated need of the qualified person.

"(2) CLARIFICATION OF AUTHORITY.—The waiver authority under paragraph (1) shall be in addition to the authority available to the Secretary pursuant to the last sentence of section 4.

"(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

"(1) CEMETERY.—The term 'cemetery' means a natural or prepared physical location (regardless of location below, on, or above the surface of the earth) into which human remains are deposited—

"(A)(i) as part of—

"(I) a death rite or ceremony of a culture; or

"(II) a common burying ground of a community; or

"(ii) that is determined to be a cemetery by an Indian Tribe; and

"(B) that, as determined by the Secretary, is a parcel of land less than or equal to 40 acres.

"(2) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term 'Indian Tribe' means the governing body of any individually identified and federally recognized Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, community, affiliated Tribal group, or component reservation included on the most recent list published pursuant to section 104(a) of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 5131(a)).

"(3) QUALIFIED LAND GRANT-MERCED.—The term 'qualified land grant-merced' means a community land grant issued under the laws or customs of the Government of Spain or Mexico that—

"(A) is recognized under New Mexico Statutes Chapter 49, Articles 1 and 4 (or a successor statute); and

"(B)(i) has a record of historical or traditional use on Federal land under the jurisdiction of the Secretary; or

"(ii) has a patented exterior boundary that is or was previously located on or adjacent to Federal land under the jurisdiction of the Secretary.

"(4) QUALIFIED PERSON.—The term 'qualified person' means, with respect to a cemetery, a State or local government, Indian Tribe, or qualified land grant-merced that has a bona fide interest or historic claim to the cemetery."

(b) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section or an amendment made by this section may be construed to modify, waive, or otherwise affect the application of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentlewoman from Maryland (Ms. ELFRETH) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4284, the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of Representative LEGER FERNANDEZ' bill, H.R. 4284, the Small Cemetery Conveyance Act.

Mr. Speaker, all across the West, there are small, historic cemeteries in rural communities that sit on or adjacent to Federal land.

These are places where families and communities have laid their loved ones to rest for generations long before jurisdictional boundaries were drawn on a map. Due to the Federal Government's large footprint all around these large cemeteries, basic access for upkeep, ceremonies, or simply paying respects to loved ones can turn into a bureaucratic mess.

H.R. 4284 is a commonsense fix. It gives the U.S. Forest Service, which administers a significant portion of the lands near or under these cemeteries, clear authority under the Small Tract Act to transfer small cemetery parcels to the people who are best positioned to care for them, the local and Tribal Governments with close connections to those laid to rest.

Rather than going through the lengthy process of requiring an act of Congress to convey each individual parcel on a one-off basis, this bill establishes a legal framework for communities to gain possession of historic cemeteries.

The legislation respects local stewardship and reduces the Federal footprint, all while ensuring safeguards are in place to make sure that these hallowed sites are used as cemeteries in perpetuity.

This bill puts locals in charge of the cemeteries they have maintained for centuries, allowing the Forest Service to focus on their core mission: restoring health and resiliency to our Nation's overgrown, fire-prone Federal lands.

This bill removes red tape from the burdensome process of transferring land in these special cases so that local communities can more easily honor their loved ones and be stewards of the places where their ancestors are at peace.

I support this bipartisan piece of legislation. I thank Representative LEGER FERNANDEZ and Representative HURD for their work together on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.