



American Recreation Coalition

*Dedicated to the protection and enhancement of everyone's right
to health and happiness through recreation.*

NEWS

Contact: Derrick Crandall

House Parks Panel Holds Hearing on "Next Century" Needs

Washington, D.C. (August 2, 2007) - On a hot and humid summer day in Washington jammed with hearings and meetings as Congress rushed to begin a month-long summer recess, the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands held a hearing for more than three hours on bold and dramatic ways to increase funding for national parks to ready them for the centennial of the National Park Service. The hearing drew a remarkably large and bipartisan group of Members of Congress, including eight members of the subcommittee and three additional Congressional witnesses, as well as Mary Bomar, Director of the National Park Service, and Gary A. Kiedaisch, President and CEO of The Coleman Company, Inc.

The hearing began with opening remarks from Subcommittee Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva and continued with statements and testimony of numerous Members of Congress, all offering support for park funding increases and innovative solutions to historic underfunding of parks. Especially noteworthy was testimony by U.S. Representative Todd Tiahrt (R-KS), Ranking Member on the Appropriations Subcommittee for the Department of the Interior, which has already authored legislation to implement Administration requests for a large increase in operations funding for the national parks. The Congressman gave a special welcome to and introduction of Mr. Kiedaisch, whose company is based in his Kansas district.

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Gary Kiedaisch praised the Administration for its National Parks Centennial Initiative. “The Secretary of the Interior has presented to the President and Congress a bold, visionary and aggressive call to action that will get Americans outdoors and revitalize our national parks. We can indeed compete for the hearts and minds of young Americans who have now been effectively captured by the home entertainment and electronics industries,” he told the panel, recommending that corporations and others be recruited to work in partnership with the National Park Service. The Centennial Initiative would provide funding to prepare the national parks for the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016. The initiative would boost spending by \$3 billion or more over the next 10 years.

Kiedaisch presented three key recommendations for getting Americans active and back in our national parks. With visits to our national parks declining, Kiedaisch encouraged “a public-private partnership that will help make our parks attractive and relevant to today’s recreating public, including providing additional recreational venues.” He said, “We have failed to introduce our kids to the great outdoors.” Kiedaisch was passionate regarding the need for a series of stepping stones that get our children from the backyard to the campgrounds, and out into our great national parks.

Second, Kiedaisch stressed the need for recreation projects to be eligible parts of the Centennial Initiative. Previous to his comments, National Park Service Director Bomar had testified that over the course of more than 40 listening sessions, the American people had made clear that they seek enhanced recreation experiences during park visits.

Finally, Kiedaisch encouraged the subcommittee members to see that the Centennial Initiative goes beyond funding just physical facilities. “You can build it, and they won’t come,” he told the Members of Congress, because other leisure choices are so abundant and well promoted.

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Members of the panel clearly showed interest in leveraging federal park monies, but some expressed concerns about commercialization of parks to reward sponsors. Director Bomar assured the panel that safeguards are already in place and Mr. Kiedaisch provided further reassurance, noting that The Coleman Company provides substantial annual funding for improvements of the Appalachian Trail in New England through the Appalachian Mountain Club and receives no credit through signage or other markings along the trail. Subcommittee Chair Grijalva responded quickly, noting that Coleman did not need to post signs because virtually everyone on the trail was carrying Coleman products touting the company. “Exactly,” Kiedaisch replied. “We know that getting Americans outdoors will be good for them – and Coleman. That is why the partnerships proposed in the Centennial Challenge will work!”

Derrick Crandall, President of the American Recreation Coalition and an active voice in national recreation policy for three decades, called the hearing remarkable. “First, to assemble this sizeable and bipartisan group of Members of Congress at a hearing on the eve of a recess is highly unusual, unless the national media is out in full force – and there were no cameras in this room. Second, the Chairman, the Ranking Member and all of the Members present repeatedly talked about a ‘hybrid’ solution, incorporating elements of the two bills being considered by the committee, which share goals but differ substantially in detail. And third, the focus of the hearing was on an event nine years away in a town that too rarely looks beyond the next November in an even-numbered year.”

Gary Kiedaisch commented after the hearing, “We often talk about the widespread passion of the public for parks and the Great Outdoors. Today we saw proof that Members of Congress share this passion. I’m heartened. I was delighted by the strong support shown by Chairman Grijalva and the panel’s Ranking Member, U.S. Representative Rob Bishop of Utah. And I hope that many Members will do what Congressman Ron Kind of Wisconsin told us he and his family were doing starting next week: heading to a national park!”

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House Parks Panel Holds Hearing Add Three

Staff members are expected to work to develop legislative modifications over the recess to allow consideration of the creation of a National Park Service Centennial Challenge Fund this fall. Further information on the Centennial Initiative and copies of testimony by Mr. Kiedaisch, ARC President Crandall and Joe Fassler, Chairman of the National Park Hospitality Association, are available at www.funoutdoors.com.

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