

STATEMENT OF GARY A. KIEDAISCH, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE COLEMAN COMPANY, INC., BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 2959 AND H.R. 3094, BILLS TO ESTABLISH A FUND FOR THE CENTENNIAL OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AT A HEARING CONDUCTED AUGUST 2, 2007.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to add my voice in support of the goals and key elements of both H.R. 2959 and H.R. 3094, bills that would establish funding for the National Parks Service Centennial Celebration. I am here as an advocate for using the Centennial as a catalyst for new partnerships between corporate America and America's parks, partnerships which can be key forces in park revitalization and re-engaging the public with the outdoors.

I'm a fortunate American because, as President and CEO of The Coleman Company, my passion for the outdoors coincides with my vocation. I frequently suggest to audiences, "If you're never awakened on a crisp fall morning inside the warmth of a sleeping bag under the protection of a tent next to a babbling brook, you have missed one of life's greatest experiences. And if you have never shared this experience with a child, you have missed one of life's greatest opportunities." But this experience I describe in reality depends upon foot soldiers with the right skill sets, working cooperatively. We at The Coleman Company, in concert with an army of partners in the outdoor industry, in the retail trade and with organizations like the Boy Scouts and public park agencies, have been cultivating that skill set for more than a century.

Beginning in 1900, the role of The Coleman Company has been to lead the charge in getting people outdoors. When you expose people to the great outdoors, our founder said, you're introducing them to the wonder, the healing powers and the joy of being close to nature. So many others have echoed that sentiment, most notably President Theodore Roosevelt. I am proud that The Coleman Company has championed this message throughout its 100+ years. One of my predecessors, Sheldon Coleman, came before this panel in the 1960's -- as well as other bodies, including the platform committees of both political parties -- to urge creation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. He also championed the expansion of the Dingell-Johnson Fund and creation of the National Trails System and the National Scenic Byways Program, and served in a leading capacity on the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors side by side with the late and Honorable Mo Udall. Yet today the messages of Teddy Roosevelt, and Sheldon Coleman, and Mo Udall, and of many of you, are falling on deaf ears - or at least distracted ears.

Today, the average youth spends six and one-half hours every day tied to television and computer screens. Today, nearly 20,000 additional American children are being diagnosed with diabetes annually. Today, we face an obesity epidemic for all age groups, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and especially among urban and suburban youth. Today we have millions of youth diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and medicated to control disruptions in classrooms. Today, we see unrelieved stress leading to drug abuse, roadway rage and abuse of loved ones. Today, we are grappling with the long-term healthcare costs of growing numbers of inactive senior Americans.

And today, we know that regular doses of healthy active fun in the outdoors are a remedy – a cost effective and medically effective remedy – to these challenges that now jeopardize the quality of life for millions, render many U.S. businesses uncompetitive and pose daunting economic hardships for government agencies at the local, state and national levels.

A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTNERSHIPS

The National Park Service and other government entities should not be the only foot soldiers in this campaign to re-engage the public with the outdoors and harvest the physical, the mental and the spiritual benefits. That has been increasingly the pattern over fifty years, under Democratic and Republican leadership alike. And it has left us with an underfunded system of parks and other public places and declining visitations. It is time to be as bold as we were as a nation one hundred years ago, as bold as we were fifty years ago. It is time to invite the business community in as a partner to help provide the places and the programs that serve societal needs.

The corporate world is a huge, untapped resource for both funding the outdoor places and the message about the benefits of these places. And it is at its best in getting messages out. In addition, business has the power to make getting outdoors into a national priority. That is a marketing challenge, the very skill set that business has in great supply.

Engaging corporate America in this campaign will, without question, broaden public support. It will also help tap into a national structure for communicating the message from the local, to the regional, to the national parks level using the same tried and true business practices that have made this country's economy the strongest in the world.

At The Coleman Company, our business is making the outdoors more accessible and more appealing to an ever more sedentary population. We provide the tools and the information for people to get to the fun of the outdoors faster and make the experience one that they'll want to repeat over and over again. The mandate of our company - get people outdoors, have fun and reap the ancillary physical and emotional benefits of the outdoor lifestyle. And we're not alone. Corporate America has gotten the outdoor message, has been preaching it in its marketing messages and is ready to answer your call.

In partnership with the National Park Service, key corporations can help make our National Parks relevant to today's Americans. Businesses know the consumer pretty well. Knowing the customer is the difference between success and failure. And it is important to remember that consumer spending on recreation in America today is some \$400 billion annually and growing.

At Coleman, our insights into America's leisure wants are delivered through the marketplace, and the success of our efforts is reflected in the fact that most families visiting national parks arrive with one or more of our products: a cooler or a lantern, a stove or a sleeping bag, a tent or one of our fishing rods, a Coleman canoe or an inflatable water tube or kayak.

But our parks are largely disconnected from feedback from the marketplace.

Case in point - visits to Shenandoah National Park have been declining significantly in recent years. One of several reasons - the park hasn't added the infrastructure that people seek. Mountain biking, one of the fastest growing categories in family outdoor activity, for example, has been ignored despite available administrative roads and underused trails. Corporate American knows how to fix a disconnect like that by linking park offerings with consumer demand.

Forging this coalition is an opportunity for government to bring together a broad cross-section of American business resources, including representatives from a wide array of different sectors, each with a vested interest and each with unique contributions.

Imagine recruiting executives from the country's most successful entertainment companies, healthcare companies, travel companies, outdoor companies and auto companies, as well as countless others, and setting them to the task of repositioning the National Parks as destinations, not just places to visit. I ran a four season Ski and Golf resort and know, all too well, the painful difference. Marketing is what drives business and marketing, along with park revitalization, will be the driving force behind this campaign's success.

I recently learned that the average length of stay at many of our national parks is equal to the time it takes to drive across them. Think of it, visiting the natural wonders of Death Valley National Park, an area roughly the size of the state of Connecticut, for only three hours. What a waste. Want the solution? Ask business.

One of the critical missions of this initiative is to remind the American public of their responsibility to be stewards of the land by using and not abusing it. Business applauds this and, through effective marketing, will make it possible for the parks to include stewardship education. Coupled with the right park offerings, visits and length of stay will increase. By identifying and funding new activities that will attract today's consumer to the parks, participation rises and everyone wins.

I am not simply touting real effective partnerships as an academic exercise. The Coleman Company relies heavily on partners – partners like the Continental Divide Trail Alliance and the Appalachian Mountain Club, Wal*Mart and specialty sporting goods retailers. We combine dollars and manpower and other assets to serve seamlessly those people who seek positive memories of time in the Great Outdoors. And this is the template that the National Park Service should pursue as it approaches its Centennial and enters its second century.

Partnerships will help us focus on and overcome the barriers that exist to connecting Americans with their lands – barriers like onerous insurance requirements placed on non-profits and profits seeking to help youth discover the fun of the outdoors at parks. In my discussions on Capitol Hill and with Administration executives over the last year, I have often referenced the model of the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) as a way to meld public and private forces into a force for the public good – in that case, equipping American youth to achieve greatness and stand on podiums to receive medals in international competition. And the USOC succeeds without commercializing sports, just as we need to succeed without commercializing parks.

This Congress and this Administration are engaged in a dialogue that demands a win/win. We need to transcend divisions, including political divisions. And we need to open the doors to innovation. It is time to look closely at innovative efforts underway within many state park systems, including partnerships that replace investments of public funds with private capital. It is for us to adopt lessons learned from partnerships at Wolf Trap Center for the Performing Arts – a National Park Service unit – and the Smithsonian. We need to learn and adopt the best practices from partnerships like the Claude Moore Colonial Farm – a unit of the National Park Service that serves the public without a NPS staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON LEGISLATION

I opened my testimony by applauding both pieces of legislation subject to today's hearing. It is easy to find elements of both bills to support. Yet I urge the committee to look for a synthesis of these bills complete with some new elements as its work product.

First, we applaud the increase in investments in our national parks under both bills. HR 3094 proposes an assured addition of \$100 million, regardless of achieved matches. HR 2959 would provide up to that amount in federal funds – if matching funds were attracted. That could boost annual funding to \$200 million or more annually through 2016.

We strongly support the higher target and the requirement that the agency solicit support which will leverage available federal funding at least 1:1. This seems especially appropriate because we are talking about a Centennial Fund not to cover normal operations and facilities, but to fund excellence in the parks. This is truly an exciting opportunity for individuals, non-profits and businesses to be invited to the table to help define the programs that deliver this revitalized outdoor experience and share the tab.

Practically, this also creates broad ownership in the Centennial effort. For many of us who admire and support the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the idea of a more engaged base of support is very, very attractive. This provision could be essential in assuring that the Centennial Fund will be fully funded and make it to 2016 – perhaps continuing long thereafter.

Let me also express strong support for a change to the legislative proposals before you to capitalize on recent lessons. Both bills envision a Centennial Fund. HR 2954 expressly calls for contributions to this fund to create the matches needed for approved projects. Far more preferable would be a fund from which matching grants could also be made. A model for this would be the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act, which, since 2000, has received nearly \$3 billion from the auction of surplus federal lands in Southern Nevada. It is used to award grants for annual projects in land acquisition, capital projects and environmental restoration. Typically, the projects it funds are leveraged, but these matching funds do not need to be deposited into a federal account and the projects can be achieved faster and often more efficiently than through traditional federal procurement efforts. We urge adoption of a similar model for the Centennial Fund, with project selection vested in the Secretary of the Interior and with oversight from a board created in the Centennial legislation.

I am also told that the goals we share must be resolved in compliance with federal budgeting and appropriations guidelines. I live well outside the Beltway and don't profess to understand PAYGO and offsets. I appreciate that HR 3094 addresses this issue and commend the commitment reflected to not work for a symbolic success - one that will not deliver the results to the ground in national park units across the nation. The support of America's business leaders for the Centennial Initiative will be strong if the Fund is truly a mandatory program through 2016, with a definite commitment of federal funds.

Finally, I need to comment on the language in HR 3094 regarding project categories and categorical percentages. While some guidance is needed, I strongly urge the Congress to avoid highly prescriptive formulas that may force the National Park Service to ignore the public and partner input into the Centennial initiative. Far better would be regular Congressional oversight and consultation with the agency - something HR 3094 already contemplates. My concern with the formulas in HR 3094 is exacerbated because the legislation fails to include a category of vital interest to The Coleman Company and all recreation interests: needed investments in recreation infrastructure.

A visit to a national park should not be defined by time spent looking through the windows of your personal vehicle or a park tram, and it should not be focused on time spent in a visitor center. America's parks need more and better trails, better campsites - developed and backcountry - and better fishing piers and boat launches. The Coleman Company's interest and support of the Centennial initiative, and that of our partners, is focused on the recreation infrastructure of the parks.

Additionally, I strongly support use of the Centennial Fund to go beyond the physical aspects of parks. Attention to and investment in is needed to such non-physical needs of the parks as marketing, interpretation, events and outdoors activity training programs.

SUMMARY

As a lifelong outdoor advocate working in a company whose name is synonymous with the outdoor lifestyle, I can think of nothing that would affect positive change faster in the use of these national treasures than to increase the number and diversity of interests engaged in their revitalization.

The goals for this effort are clear. The benefits to the public are also clear. All that remains, as we say in business, is to get the right people on the bus, put them in the right seats, and decide where the bus should go.

Today I ask you to include corporate America on the National Park Service Centennial Celebration bus as a partner in this important initiative. Its contributions will be many, its financial support will be significant and the result will be a healthier, happier and more outdoors oriented public. Together, we will make the National Park Service Centennial Celebration into a lifestyle changing reality for everyone.

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