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Neutral Testimony on HB 2476

Presented to House Federal and State Affairs Committee

By Walter H. Wulf, Jr.

Chairman & CEO, The Monarch Cement Company

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Dear Chairman Carpenter, Vice Chairman Kessler, Representative Hoye and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this neutral testimony regarding HB 2476.

As the former Treasurer for the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area Board of Trustees, I am here to clarify that we have been in existence for 18 years and are not a danger to private property rights.

As a private landowner and on behalf of The Monarch Cement Company, which owns over 5,000 acres of land within Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area, I can emphatically say that if Freedom's Frontier were a threat to my property rights or water rights, I would not be a part of it.

As you may have heard, President Reagan, a conservative, created national heritage areas as an alternative to National Parks to stimulate the economic development of heritage and agri-tourism without the government having to own property. Furthermore, President Donald Trump followed suit with his approval of the last 6 heritage areas in the United States.

When you look at the law that governs Freedom's Frontier, you'll find that the organization was created with private property owners in the driver's seat – no property owner becomes a part of the heritage area UNLESS they have agreed to do so in writing.

There has been misinformation that says anyone living or owning property in our heritage area was "opted in" without their permission. Instead, it is exactly the opposite. No one can become a partner in our heritage area without agreeing – in writing – that they want

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to be included. In addition, their property would have to be historically significant for Freedom's Frontier to even consider accepting their application.

Today, we have close to 300 partners up and down the Kansas – Missouri state line which are mostly small museums and county historical societies. The synergies of these small entities working together in concert, under the Freedom's Frontier umbrella, helps tell their tale and link the threads of history between our partner communities. By collaborating and combining their resources our member partners can more effectively and efficiently communicate the rich history relating to the Civil War and pioneering history in these towns. In my opinion, the result of stimulating interest in our rich heritage and culture will be an increase in tourism and the dollars visitors bring with them.

For smaller rural communities like Humboldt, these tourists make a real difference as a revenue stream for our communities. In fact, for every dollar that Freedom's Frontier receives from the federal government to recognize our history, we return \$5.50 to the communities where our partners are located.

For those of you who might not know Humboldt's history, it was burned to the ground by William Quantrill during the Bleeding Kansas border wars.

We have been in existence for 18 years, and we have never had one complaint about private property infringement. That's because – by law – we are not allowed to interfere with land or water rights.

We also cannot interfere with hunting or fishing rights either. That protection has always existed.

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area is an excellent example of how one works. It promotes the settlement of the frontier and its rich agricultural heritage; the Border War and Civil War history of the western frontier; and the enduring struggle for freedom in this region. Historic sites and museums volunteered to be part of this effort by becoming partners with the organization. FFNHA provides grants, support to local museum directors, and publicity to these partners at no cost to the partner or to the county or city in which they are located. Freedom's Frontier simply showcases the partner sites to encourage tourism to their communities.

To summarize, I want to be clear about why Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area cannot be a private property danger:

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BY LAW, no one's land is automatically a part of FFNHA without their written permission.

BY LAW, no private property owner is required to participate or to be associated with FFNHA.

BY LAW, a historic site or museum must request to be included as a Partner with FFNHA.

BY LAW, FFNHA is prohibited from owning any property.

BY LAW, FFNHA has no authority to require access to any property.

BY LAW, FFNHA has no authority for zoning or land use regulation – this one is really important as there has been misinformation that we influence zoning committees.

BY LAW, FFNHA has no authority over land, water or hunting and fishing rights.

BY LAW, FFNHA cannot impose ANY burden on any property owner.

BY LAW, FFNHA's cannot interfere with any state, county or city's laws.

We appreciate being able to clarify this for the committee. I stand for questions at the appropriate time.