

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

August 6, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum,

We write with deep concern regarding the implementation of Secretarial Order No. 3431(SO),¹ issued on May 20, 2025, pursuant to President Trump's Executive Order 14253, "*Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*," and its consistency with the National Park Service Centennial Act and the National Park Service's management policies.

America is a nation where innovation and progress have long thrived—grounded, in no small part, in our willingness to confront and learn from the past. Rather than honoring that legacy, this directive seeks to rewrite history to present a propagandized, inaccurate version of our national story.

Even more troubling, as part of your directive to "review property for inappropriate content", the administration has taken the alarming step of asking visitors to report "any signs or other information that are negative about either past or living Americans or that fail to emphasize the beauty, grandeur, and abundance of landscapes and other natural features."² These efforts have already resulted in the removal or alteration of stories, narratives, and historical events at National Park System units all over the country.

Recent reports indicate that the National Park Service has removed the exhibit "History Under Construction" from Muir Woods National Monument.³ This exhibit was installed in 2021 to provide visitors with a deeper understanding of the Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo people's profound connection to the landscape. It challenged visitors to grapple with the colonial violence used to displace native tribes who stewarded the land for centuries and highlighted efforts by women's organizations to save the forest in the early 20th century. Censoring content that reflects the site's full historical legacy diminishes the richness of the visitor experience and undermines the National Park Service's mission to present an accurate and complete account of the American story.

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Secretary's Order No. 3431, *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History* (May 20, 2025), <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order/so-3431-restoring-truth-and-sanity-american-history>.

² Ibid.

³ Olivia Hebert, *Muir Woods Exhibit Becomes First Casualty of White House Directive to Erase History*, SF Gate (July 22, 2025), <https://www.sfgate.com/california-parks/article/muir-woods-national-monument-history-erased-20781301.php>.

This is just one example of a broader pattern and much larger problem. The attack on history started earlier this year when the stories of transgender and queer Americans were erased and suppressed at Stonewall National Monument.⁴ Unfortunately, it did not end there. The SO explicitly promotes revisionist history at Independence National Historical Park, a site that symbolizes the founding ideals of the United States and preserves national and international icons of freedom and democracy, by downplaying the brutalities of slavery. At Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, efforts are underway to obscure references to the imprisonment of Native Americans inside the Spanish stone fortress.⁵ Reports also indicate that signage will omit anything deemed “negative” at Manzanar National Historic Site, one of the locations where Japanese American citizens were incarcerated during World War II.⁶

The screening process and censorship also extend to bookstores and gift shops.⁷ Materials flagged across various park units include a Junior Ranger book addressing slavery, accounts of Navy-caused damage to Native lands in Guam, books about civil rights icons like Malcolm X and the Freedom Riders, and descriptions of the methods used to control enslaved people.⁸ To make matters worse, reports indicate that at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the administration is set to review and possibly remove or alter signs that explain how climate change is driving sea-level rise—an existential threat to the area.⁹ Similarly, at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, officials are considering edits to an exhibit on the environmental consequences of air pollution.¹⁰

The consequences of these actions are deeply troubling and threaten to undermine the integrity of the National Park System. Sites of remembrance like Sand Creek and Amache may no longer speak plainly about massacres of Native Americans or the large-scale internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.¹¹ At Lowell National Historical Park, the struggles of immigrant laborers who fueled the Industrial Revolution may be softened or obscured. And at Selma-to-

⁴ Ed Shanahan, Katherine Rosman and Liam Stack, *U.S. Park Service Strikes Transgender References From Stonewall Website*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 13, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/13/nyregion/stonewall-transgender-parks-service.html>.

⁵ Maxine Joselow and Lisa Friedman, *Trump Told Park Workers to Report Displays That ‘Disparage’ Americans. Here’s What They Flagged.*, N.Y. Times (July 22, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/22/climate/trump-national-park-service-history-changes.html>

⁶ Olivia Herbert, *Signs to police ‘negative’ history went up at Manzanar. Historians are nervous.* (June 16, 2025), <https://www.sfgate.com/california-parks/article/signs-negative-history-manzanar-historians-20376758.php>.

⁷ Jake Spring, *Park Gift Shops could remove books on slavery and the Civil War*, Washington Post (July 25, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/07/25/parks-gift-shops-banned-books/>

⁸ Heather Richards, *Burgum Asked Park Rangers to Flag Negative U.S. History. They’re Delivering*, Politico (July 15, 2025), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/07/15/burgum-asked-park-rangers-to-flag-negative-us-history-theyre-delivering-00453403>.

⁹ Maxine Joselow and Lisa Friedman, *supra* note 5.

¹⁰ Maxine Joselow and Lisa Friedman, *supra* note 5.

¹¹ John Meyer, *Signs Posted at National Park Service site seen as threats to ‘whitewash’ dark side of Colorado history*, The Denver Post (July 1, 2025), <https://www.denverpost.com/2025/06/29/signs-national-parks-whitewash-colorado-history/>

Montgomery National Historic Trail and César E. Chávez National Monument, the resilience, sacrifice, and complexity that define America’s ongoing fight for justice risk being censored.

Units of the National Park System play a vital role in preserving and interpreting the full scope of our nation’s history. They offer opportunities not only to celebrate our nation’s achievements, but also to acknowledge and recognize the more difficult chapters of our past—so that we may continue to learn and move closer to realizing America’s founding ideals.

As a shared heritage for all Americans, national parks and monuments are entrusted to the National Park Service, which is responsible for preserving these sites and their full histories, including stories that may reveal moments of systemic injustice and suffering. Any attempt to reshape history must be approached with care and balance. A truthful account of the past must include not only moments of achievement, but also events and figures that are complex, painful, or difficult to face.

Congress passed the National Park Service Centennial Act on a broadly bipartisan basis in 2016. This ongoing effort to reframe history and science not only infringes on intellectual freedom and institutional integrity—it directly violates the Act’s clear directive that the National Park Service ensure “a broad program of the highest quality and interpretation and education” that reflects “current scientific and academic research, content, methods, and audience analysis.”¹² Pressuring historical interpretation to conform to specific political or ideological preferences threatens unbiased scholarship and public education. Such interference weakens both the quality and credibility of what visitors encounter and clearly violates the spirit, if not the letter, of this law.

If we erase these stories, we don’t just alter historical interpretation—we compromise the public’s ability to understand who we are as a nation, how we got here, and what it means to be American. What’s left is not a fuller or more unifying account of our past, but one deprived of many stories of people who helped build, defend, and shape our nation. This concern is not ours alone. The response of the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians to the SO included these concerns:

“New policies that purge words, phrases, and content that some officials deem suspect on ideological grounds constitute a systemic campaign to distort, manipulate, and erase significant parts of the historical record. Recent directives insidiously prioritize narrow ideology over historical research, historical accuracy, and the actual experiences of Americans.”¹³

The SO raises a fundamental question: *What does it mean to be American?*¹⁴ That question echoes throughout every corner of the National Park System, where every site preserves a piece

¹² P.L. 114-289

¹³ American Historical Association & Organization of American Historians, *Joint Statement on Federal Censorship of American History*, American Historical Association (Mar. 13, 2025), <https://www.historians.org/news/aha-oah-joint-statement-on-federal-censorship-of-american-history/>.

¹⁴ National Parks Conservation Association, *What Is an American?*, National Parks Conservation Association (last visited July 1, 2025), <https://www.npca.org/articles/1172-what-is-an-american>.

of the answer. These places do more than mark land; they mark the moments that define who we are and who we aspire to become. Yet under the SO, that story is being rewritten in a way that is inconsistent with the core mission of many parks, the law and the agency's own policies.

For example, Chapter 7.3.1.1 of the 2006 National Park Service Management Policies affirms that, “Parks will be managed as places to demonstrate the principles of science, to illustrate the national experience as history, to engage learners throughout their lifetimes, and to do these things while challenging visitors in exciting and motivating settings.”¹⁵ The policies also underscore the importance of remaining relevant in the 21st century by engaging a diverse public, reflecting on civic responsibility in a participatory democracy, and interpreting pressing contemporary issues, including the effects of climate change. All of these commitments now appear to be at risk.

We recognize the importance of presenting history in a way that fosters unity and pride. At the same time, it is vital to maintain a truthful and comprehensive account of our past, including its more difficult aspects. This balanced approach is essential to honoring the experiences of all Americans and preserving the educational mission of our public lands and institutions. True patriotism involves engaging with our nation's history honestly, building unity not by erasing the past, but by acknowledging it and promoting reconciliation through a shared commitment to equality and justice. Erasing or glossing over elements of our history risks not only legal and regulatory conflicts but also undermines the trust and respect of communities whose stories are integral to our national narrative. The freedom to learn the full scope of our history remains a fundamental part of our American heritage.

The rewriting and whitewashing of history coincide with a devastating proposed budget that would decimate the National Park Service, slashing the operating budget by approximately \$900 million, or 30%, the largest cut in more than a century.¹⁶ These cuts would severely impact historic preservation programs, natural resource initiatives, and staffing, threatening thousands of positions across the agency. The budget even considers transferring or selling off smaller park units—including national historic sites, national memorials, and other treasured historical resources that tell some of our most complex and dynamic histories.¹⁷ Taken together, these actions raise serious concerns about this administration's stewardship of our national parks.

The SO also includes strict timelines. Each land management bureau was required to conduct a comprehensive review within 30 days to identify all public monuments, memorials, statues, markers, or similar properties that have been removed or modified since 2020 and submit a formal report within 60 days. The SO further directed the land management bureaus to conduct a thorough review of all properties within 90 days to ascertain the presence of any inappropriate content. Additionally, each bureau is required to facilitate the removal of all content deemed to “inappropriately disparage Americans” within 120 days.

¹⁵ National Parks Service, US Department of the Interior, Management Policies (2016), https://www.nps.gov/subjects/policy/upload/MP_2006.pdf

¹⁶ Office of Management and Budget, The White House, Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request (May 2025), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2026-BUD/pdf/BUDGET-2026-BUD.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.


As we approach the 90-day mark, the American people deserve to know how decisions are being made about the future of their national parks.

Pursuant to the Committee on Natural Resources' jurisdiction under House Rules X.1(m) to conduct oversight and investigations of all matters relating to national parks, and as part of ongoing efforts to understand the administration's approach to history and interpretation within the National Park Service, please provide the following documentation by August 20, 2025:

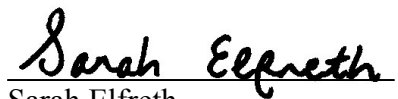
1. A detailed rationale for the ongoing efforts to rewrite history, including a reconciliation of the SO with Section 301 of the National Park Service Centennial Act and Chapter 7 of the National Park Service's 2006 Management Policies;
2. All comments from the public to the Department of the Interior or any of its bureaus that were submitted between May 20, 2025 and the date of this letter regarding interpretation content;
3. Documents sufficient to show the criteria the Department of the Interior or its bureaus are using or will use to make decisions about interpretation content;
4. Documents sufficient to show the names and titles of all personnel involved in making decisions about interpretation content at any unit managed by the Department of the Interior or any of its bureaus;
5. Documents sufficient to show all changes in interpretation that have been made or are planned at any unit managed by the Department of the Interior or any of its bureaus;
6. Documents and supporting reference materials sufficient to show the justification for each change in interpretation that has been made or is planned at any unit managed by the Department of the Interior or any of its bureaus;
7. All communications about Secretarial Order 3431 and its implementation; and
8. All documents produced pursuant to Secretarial Order 3431.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



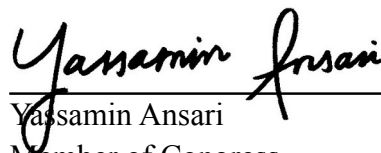
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee
on Natural Resources



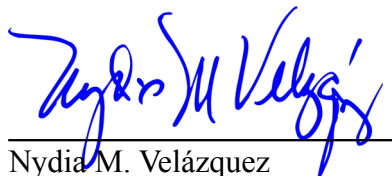
Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress



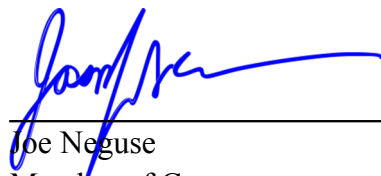
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress



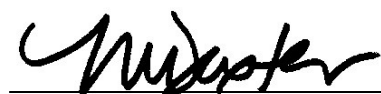
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



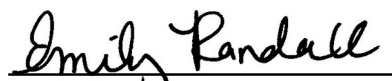
Maxine Dexter
Member of Congress



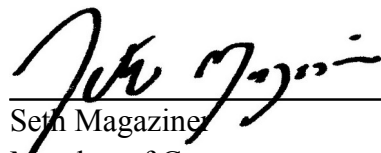
Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



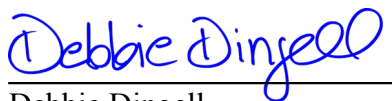
Dave Min
Member of Congress



Emily Randall
Member of Congress



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress