

**Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez**  
**Testimony on HR 6176**  
**National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee Hearing**  
**Tuesday July 15, 2008**

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on behalf of HR 6176, legislation to authorize the expansion of Fort Davis National Historic Site in Fort Davis Texas and for other purposes. I represent the 23<sup>rd</sup> District of Texas which extends from El Paso east to San Antonio. My district includes 7 of the 13 National Park Units in Texas

In the 1800s the District I represent today was scattered with US Army Forts designed to protect travelers and settlers along the Western Trade Routes from San Antonio to El Paso. The oldest and most preserved of these forts is Fort Davis, now a National Historic Site. I am here today to testify on behalf of Fort Davis, which is of incredible historical importance to the culture and development of the communities throughout West Texas.

Built by the US Army 1854, Fort Davis provided for the safety of travelers along the San Antonio-to-El Paso Road and was instrumental in the development of West Texas. The Fort was active during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at any given time was manned by about 200 men. The Fort is of specific historical significance for Buffalo Soldiers, who were stationed there from 1867 to 1885. Many of these Buffalo Soldiers were formerly enslaved men who served their country honorably. This Fort is often regarded as one of the best preserved Forts in the American Southwest. Visitors today can see many of the same views as troops and pioneers did back in the 1800s.

Currently the entire western viewshed of this Historic Site is protected by federal and state land, with the exception of a prominent bluff. This prominent bluff is on a 38-acre tract of land which was recently put on the market for sale. With the private land for sale, there was the potential danger of development that would have damaged the Fort's western viewshed. Luckily, a strong community movement led to the purchase of the land by a conservation buyer, who in conjunction with the Conservation Fund hopes to

sell or donate the land to the National Park Service. It is the desire of the community of Fort Davis and the surrounding region that the Fort Davis Historic Site acquire the prominent bluff so that landscape of the Fort Davis Historic Site can remain the same as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The legislation I have introduced would authorize the National Park Service to acquire approximately 55 acres of land which would include acquisition of the prominent bluff from willing sellers. In order for the Park to acquire this land an increase in the acreage cap of the Historic Site is necessary and this legislation would provide for this as well. The legislation gives the National Park Service the authority to acquire these additional acres of land and provides them with the ability to include this tract a part of the national historic site.

The bluff that the legislation aims to protect is vital to the experience of the visitors to Fort Davis Historic Site as well as the surrounding community of Fort Davis. It is my hope that this legislation will provide protection for this important Historic Site and will allow the park to continue to serve as an example of a typical western military fort from the 1800s. Additionally, I would like to include into the record, a letter from the Friends of Fort Davis conveying their support for my legislation.

Thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the legislation for the Fort Davis Historic Site. I believe this legislation is vital to preserving the important history of West Texas. Thank you.