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Herrera Beutler's Pearson bill passes to House floor

It would transfer ownership of museum and land from Park Service to city of Vancouver



Photo by [Troy Wayrynen](#)

Visitors to the Pearson Air Museum were greeted by very different displays when the National Park Service reopened the facility in Late February.

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Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Camas

A bill to transfer ownership of Pearson Air Museum from the National Park Service to the city of Vancouver has passed through the House Natural Resources Committee and will head to the House floor.

On Wednesday morning the markup committee voted 20-14 to move HR 716 forward.

Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva, an Arizona Democrat, had planned to introduce three amendments at the markup aimed at giving the city, the Fort Vancouver National Trust and the Park Service more time to come to a cooperative agreement about how to manage the museum.

He withdrew them after saying he had been told meetings between the agencies were taking place.

“The legislation should not have been necessary,” Grijalva said.

Grijalva also voted against the bill because “I think more time would have been helpful,” he said.

Rob Bishop, R-Utah, chairman of the Public Lands and Environmental Regulation Subcommittee, expressed his support for the bill at the markup, noting that the legislation “represents an abject failure of the National Park Service to work with a local partner.”

He entered letters from the city and the trust into the record. Bishop voted in favor of the bill.

HR 716 was introduced by U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Camas, on Feb. 14 after negotiations on a management agreement for the site broke down between the Park Service, the city of Vancouver and the trust, which had managed the museum for the city since 2005.

Herrera Beutler said she was happy to see the legislation move forward.

“On one hand, I’m glad that our bill to restore Pearson Air Museum is quickly moving forward in the U.S. House,” Herrera Beutler said in a news release. “Yet, I continue to hope that the Park Service will take a cue from the strong support that’s building in Congress and agree to a solution that is acceptable to our community.”

On Feb. 4, the Park Service, which owns the land but did not own the museum's contents, demanded that the trust hand over the keys and alarm codes for the museum by Feb. 6. The trust moved the displays and contents out and turned over control to the Park Service within that 48-hour time span.

The Park Service reopened Pearson under its own management Feb. 27.

Rep. Doc Hastings, a Central Washington Republican and chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, said he was frustrated by the 48-hour window that the trust was given to turn over keys and codes and accused the Park Service of "arrogance."

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site Superintendent Tracy Fortmann has said that the Park Service planned to transition management of the museum over a 45-day period and that the 48-hour window was not a deadline to move out, but rather a part of the transition process.

After the hearing, Elson Strahan, president of the trust, said he was happy to see the bill continue to move forward.

"This bill has moved with uncharacteristic lightning speed and the trust is very pleased about the committee's determination that the action taken by the NPS to take over the museum was not appropriate or supportable," Strahan said.

He also noted that the Park Service hasn't met with the trust since the trust handed over the building on Feb. 6, despite Grijalva being told that meetings were under way.

"Moreover, we have had no contact from the NPS, but they have used the month to try and firmly establish (their own) operations at the museum," Strahan said.

If the bill is approved by the House, it will still need to go through more steps before it can turn into a law, said Casey Bowman, a spokesman for Herrera Beutler.

"It could either pass the U.S. House and the Senate could decide to take it up as is, or the Senate could pass its own bill and the differences between the two bills would be worked out in a conference committee," Bowman said. "Or, the bill could be attached to another piece of legislation."

He added that Herrera Beutler's office has been keeping Washington Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, both Democrats, updated on the situation.

"Jaime's office continues to keep Sens. Murray and Cantwell updated on the bill's progress, and we remain hopeful that they will take legislative action," Bowman said.

Strahan said the senators have also been talking to the trust about the situation.

“Both of the senators have been extremely helpful and have intervened with the NPS, including personal contact with Director (Jonathan) Jarvis over a month ago, to encourage a path forward that would resolve this dispute,” Strahan said.

No date has yet been set for a full House consideration of the bill but “we’re working to get it to the floor as quickly as we can,” Bowman added.