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Pearson Air Museum bill set for March 14 hearing before House subcommittee

Herrera Beutler leading effort to transfer ownership to city of Vancouver



Photo by [Zachary Kaufman](#)

The National Park Service has terminated an agreement with the city of Vancouver, putting Pearson Air Museum under management of the park service's Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

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A bill to transfer ownership of Pearson Air Museum from the National Park Service to the city of Vancouver is moving forward and will go to a hearing before the National Resources Committee on March 14, said U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Camas.

Herrera Beutler introduced HR 716 on Feb. 14. If the House Natural Resources Committee's Public Lands and Environmental Regulation Subcommittee votes to approve it, the bill will then move to the House floor.

"All along, I've pledged to help restore (Pearson Air Museum) as an accessible community resource," Herrera Beutler said. "There is still time for the Park Service to alter its approach and start compromising with our community, but I intend to shepherd this legislation through Congress as quickly as I can."

HR 716 would transfer 7 acres from the Park Service so the museum can reopen under management by the Fort Vancouver National Trust, which had operated the museum for the city since 2005.

"My goal is for this not to be a partisan bill," Herrera Beutler said. "My hope is this can be seen as a local issue and not something for or against national parks. We all love national parks."

The bill will be heard along with two others by the subcommittee, she added.

"I think once we see how it's received, we'll have a better idea (of whether it will pass or not)," Herrera Beutler said.

The museum switched management on Feb. 6 as conflicts came to a head between the National Park Service, which owns the land and building, and the Fort Vancouver National Trust, which had operated the museum for the city of Vancouver for several years.

The site had been set up to run as a collaborative endeavor between the Park Service, the city and the trust through 2025.

Much of the dispute between the groups revolved around the criteria for events. The Park Service wanted the museum and event scheduling to be under the control of the superintendent of the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, with a strong focus on history. The trust wanted to continue to run it as a community and educational site.

When it vacated the site, the trust removed the exhibits, which it either owns or is responsible for, before turning the building over to the Park Service.

The Park Service took over management on Feb. 6 and reopened it on Feb. 27, with limited exhibits on transportation — which include displays of a car, boat and tractor — and the site's historic spruce mill.

Herrera Beutler said she was disappointed that the trust, city and Park Service couldn't work together to run the museum as intended.

Asked about the Park Service's new displays and rapid reopening of the site, Herrera Beutler sighed.

"I guess I'm just wondering if the Park Service is not really aware of how much they've lost the trust of the community," Herrera Beutler said. "This is about a relationship. The go-it-alone strategy (that the Park Service is using) — the loser is really our community."

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