

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

March 12, 2019

President William J. Clinton
55 West 125th Street
New York, NY 10027

Dear President Clinton:

I write to request your presence before the Committee on Natural Resources on the topic of presidential monument designations and the Antiquities Act. Your perspective would be uniquely informative for our members and the public.

As you know, the Antiquities Act allows Presidents to unilaterally create national monuments on federal lands where objects of antiquity are at risk – without public participation, congressional review, or any procedural requirements. The statute does not lay out any public process requirements, nor are designations subject to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which normally governs major federal actions. There are, however, several limitations on this power. One relates to the size of a monument, which “shall be confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected.” Presidents increasingly ignore Congress’s clear intent in this regard.

For example, you stood on the south rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona to declare your creation of the nearly 1.9-million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, an area larger than several Eastern states combined. There was no consultation with any state, county or local leaders in Utah, our federal office-holders or our people.

As uncovered in a 1998 Committee on Resources report, the designation was almost entirely politically motivated to assist the Clinton-Gore reelection effort. Leading up to the designation, your staff, Council on Environmental Quality Chair Katie McGinty, expressed the following concerning the designation: “I’m increasingly of the view that we should just drop these Utah ideas. we do not really know how the enviros will react and I do think there is a danger of ‘abuse’ of the withdraw/antiquities authorities especially because these lands are not really endangered.” She also wrote to you that the action “would help overcome the negative views toward the Administration created by the timber rider. Designation of the new monument would create a compelling reason for persons who are now disaffected to come around and enthusiastically support the Administration.”

You, by law, were the sole determining voice over this vast region and the countless communities and individuals impacted. The designation had significant negative impacts on our residents, our State’s school funding and economy. For example, 176,000 acres of school trust lands and 24,000 acres of state-owned school trust lands were locked inside the monument. At the time, the Utah Education Association President called this action a “felonious assault on Utah school children.”

You are not totally to blame. The fact that such a law even exists is an indictment against Congress for vesting vast, unilateral authority in a single person while foregoing a transparent and public-driven process. As we seek to improve these processes, your perspective would be of tremendous value to the Committee.

I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rob Bishop", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rob Bishop
Ranking Republican
Committee on Natural Resources