

Testimony given by Greg Bryan, Mayor of the Town of Tusayan, Arizona
Before the joint hearing of the House Committees of Natural Resources
and Oversight and Government Reform

Wednesday October 16, 2013

Good morning Chairman Issa, Hastings and committee members –

Thank you for the invitation to testify this morning and share our experiences during this federal government shut down and the closure of Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP).

Tusayan Arizona is a small town of 558 residents, located at the South Rim entrance and exists solely to serve the millions of visitors that come to experience Grand Canyon National Park each year. Tourism is our only industry. Without the National Park open we have no business and thus no employment for our residents.

October is a very high occupancy month and the last month for many of our businesses to put away funds for the winter months when some close down and others try to just meet payroll so staff can feed their families and pay their bills. At the end of September our hotels were forecasting 90+ % occupancy for the month of October based upon reservations already on the books. Then, because our elected members of Congress and the President could not agree on funding legislation, Grand Canyon National Park and 400 other Parks and Monuments were closed to the visiting public on October 1. Suddenly our source of business, the reason for our customers to visit our community, was shut off. Within a few short days massive

cancellations and early departures were taking place in our community. During the first seven days we estimate the loss of more than \$1 million in revenue to our small town and businesses. The River Outfitters estimate that they would lose \$900,000 in revenues due to the Park closing and having to cancel trips. To some businesses the loss was too much to take and they simply shut their doors, hoping to be able to reopen next year.

Tusayan is located on US Highway 64 that comes north to the Park and then turns east to connect with US Highway 89 at Cameron, AZ. It is a prime conduit for all of our visitors to connect with other Parks and destinations in Arizona and Utah. It is a key route to all of our bus tours. Without that thru road, the tours simply cross us off their routes, cancelling rooms and meals, let alone no shopping in our gift shops. GCNP Superintendent Dave Uberuaga kept the road open for the first two days and then closed it to all visitor traffic due to safety concerns. While we agree that there were safety issues, we feel they could have been addressed by simply allowing travelers to use the parking spots along the road, rather than barricading them. Consequently cars, RVs and tour busses were parking on the shoulders and even in the roadway to get a view of the Grand Canyon. We believe the road closing decision was not necessary and was the final nail in our community's industry coffin. The results we were disastrous and immediate. We were now at the end of a 51 mile dead end road and visitors and tour buses weren't willing to back track.

Immediately our community started to raise funds to offset the costs of reopening the Park like had been done in 1995/6 when the last shutdown had taken place. At that time Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and Arizona Governor Symington worked out a deal where

State and private funds were used to enable a limited reopening of the Park until a Federal Budget was finally passed and the government reopened. Our Town Council authorized the use of \$200,000 in Town funds to assist in the reopening the Park or Highway 64 through the Park. The business community also responded and pledged another \$200,000+ to the effort. We communicated this offer to the Park Superintendent and he said thank you, but there would be no reopening of GCNP unless all 401 National Park Service (NPS) locations were reopened. When we tried to say we were simply asking to repeat what had happened in 1995/6, we were told that was not an option any longer due to NPS policies barring the use of third party funds to reopen a Park. We believe that he was simply following directions from the Administration and had no authority to say anything different or negotiate.

We then began discussions with our Congressional delegation and had immediate support from Senators McCain and Flake. They sent a letter to Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell asking why third party funds could not be used today as in 1995/6. They also asked when this policy had been created and for a legal explanation of the policy. They gave recent examples of how this policy was not being followed in other situations within the NPS. We in turn also sent a letter from the Town of Tusayan to Director of the National Park Service, Jon Jarvis, asking the same questions and under what legal basis were they denying the use of our funds. We asked our Congresswoman, Ann Kirkpatrick, to see if she could get an answer to our questions. She indicated she also tried but did not get an answer either. As cancellations continued to rise and revenues declined, we were left with few options, except to start closing businesses and laying off employees or reducing hours.

We also were facing the 2000+ NPS and concessionaire workers inside the National that were no longer working and thus no money for food or bills. St. Mary's Food Bank in Phoenix began to bring hundreds of meals to our communities to help feed families that had no income. Our community was hurting and we were not getting any answers or acceptance of our offers to help. We were not offering our \$426,000 as a loan, but rather as a payment for services rendered. We had to try and stop the bleeding.

We began conversations with Arizona Governor Jan Brewer to see if she could help us and the State by getting Arizona's number one tourism draw reopened. Her staff indicated that they too were being told that third party funds could not be used to reopen the Park. We were being told it was not about the money to open GCNP, it was the Administration's continuing position of all the Parks or none of the Parks were going to be opened. We continued to be told there is NO way and it is against NPS Policy.

Suddenly on Thursday, October 10, day 10 of the shutdown, the Administration announced that it would open negotiations with states that agree to pay the expenses to reopen National Parks. We are very grateful for Governor Brewer's staff for negotiating a deal to get GCNP reopened last Saturday. We are confused however, about why it took 10 days and the loss of millions of dollars to our economy, for them to change their minds and say third party funds are now okay.

We believe there are several important lessons to be learned from this unfortunate and disastrous experience of a shutdown. We continue to believe that if a community is willing to step up to serve and protect its citizen's livelihood, the Federal Government should support and

respect that commitment and courage. Once this shutdown has ended, we would like to work the Department of the Interior, our Congressional delegation and the Governor's Office to clarify the policy on third party donations. We feel that legislation be passed that clearly allows a community to assist in keeping their National Parks or Monuments open and protect their citizen's livelihoods.

We sympathize with the Department of Interior, the vast majority of its employees on furlough, and recognize the difficulties there must be the decision-making process during a government shutdown. As a General Manager of a local hotel, I understand how important it is to be fully staffed. If my hotel was at full occupancy, and my housekeepers, maintenance, desk clerks and food & beverage team were furloughed, it would be a disaster. That's what happened at the Grand Canyon.

In Tusayan, our community was the first to step up to offer a helping hand. People put aside the political differences that divide our town and worked to raise over two thirds' of the total Arizona donation to keep the Park open. We are proud of our actions and hope they are not in vain. People in both parties, at all levels of government, came to Tusayan's aid during this crisis. We appreciate that very much and hope our efforts set an example for Congress and the President. If bipartisanship can triumph in opening our National Parks, imagine the possibilities if Congress and the President worked together to solve the country's many pressing needs.

Thank you for your giving us the opportunity to share the impacts the federal shutdown has had on our small Town. We realize there are many other stories like ours and worse, due to the shutdown. We hope

that it will be over soon and people's lives can find some balance once again.