National Parks Money Essay, Research Paper

Money Mongers

Keep Them Away From Our Parks

The presidency of Ronald Reagan might have only lasted two terms, but it appears that it will be a long time before its impact is no longer felt. Since the Reagan Era there is a political trend of shifting responsibility away from the government to so-called “private interests.” Adopting this position today is literally politically correct for a politician, whether or not the politician is a democrat or republican. This notion of “private interests” is a little skewed though. These “private interests” which are accepting the responsibility of the government are corporations, in essence creatures of legal fiction which lack any value system except their own profits. Unlike the government, corporations represent only their stockholders. By contrast, the government represents the people as individuals in a republic. Thus the private interests will not act unilaterally to protect the environment, nor will they treat national parks decently under the scrutiny of the federal government given their track record so far.

A corporation is a conglomerate of thousands of stockholders, with stock traded on the public market every day. They grant it the same legal rights as an individual in the eye of the law in this country. However, individuals do not command the economic resources and labor a corporation wields. Therefore, a corporation can exploit the environment far more than anyone individual in this country and manipulate the law to suit its needs. Some of these national corporations these days are whores in a political prostitution ring unparalleled in our nation’s history. Simply put, the lobbyists and party organizations are pimping for the corporations (”private interests”) and the politicians to insure the responsibility for anyone’s behavior falls nowhere that we the people can truly discern. Thus, the responsibility of our national parks is currently in limbo.

Federal funding for the parks has dropped by more than two hundred million dollars since the early nineteen-eighties (Meadows 178). However, the number of visitors to the parks has increased by 30 percent over the same period leaving the parks in a state of decay and deterioration (178). The glory and splendor of our national parks are dwindling from years of blatant overuse and neglect. Currently a push is on in our government to reverse the decline of the parks with the passing of the National Parks Commercialization Act.

It was the practice of the government in the past to use private money from corporations to refurbish and maintain monuments and historic sites. Just recently the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island went under a three-hundred million-dollar renovation funded by private corporations (Meadows 178). They outraged many when the companies involved in the project marketed their “charity,” and claimed credit for doing their part to rejuvenate the national legacy (178). We will see similar advertisements again if they pass the National Parks Commercialization Act and private funding of public operations is a regular practice.

Soon the litter of advertisements will only surpass the litter that pollutes our national parks promoting the products of corporate America within the national park system. The current design of the NPCA restricts corporate logos within the boundaries of the national parks and limits the corporate promotion to a symbol displayed in their advertisements, much like the sponsors of the Olympics (Meadows 178). It would only require the crafty use of eager lobbyists, though, for corporations to capitalize on the potential of the national parks and strike the restricting clause from the act. Corporations possess no compassion for the living environment and will rape the nature preserves of America of everything that offers the potential of profit.

The national park system was founded to protect our lands from the savage and insatiable money mongers of the late nineteenth century. In a sense we are simply opening the door Theodore Roosevelt so tightly shut. The corporations of today are no different from the Robber Barons of the past century. Each played their tricks and push their buttons in Washington to slip through the cracks of social justice. However, there is no Theodore Roosevelt on the horizon to whip them from the bully pulpit. Corporations stand just as much a threat to our national parks’ preservation as the tycoons of the industrial revolution.

The Ketchikan Pulp Company, a subsidiary of Louisiana-Pacific, keeps the congressional delegation from Alaska tightly tucked in its pocket to gain control of rights to deforestation of the Tongass National Forest(Meadows GC). The Interior Appropriations Bill, which is currently in the Senate, bears a rider from the delegation which would halt a plan for continuous management of the Tongass National Forest in Alaska by the federal government(Meadows GC). The delegation from Alaska attaches this rider to almost every bill that passes through congress (Meadows GC). If Congress ratifies a bill with the Tongass rider, they will give the Ketchikan Company a free rein to clear cut as many acres of this rainforest they desire. This “privatization” bodes ill for the future of our National Parks. Congress fails to see the alternatives to the NPCA.

Perhaps it time for the government to put the practices of the capitalistic economy it so proudly protects and preserves to some positive use. Private companies granted rights run park concessions within the national parks. They operate with earnings of about seven hundred million dollars a year while paying only nineteen million dollars in monopoly licenses which are automatically reissued (Meadows 179). The parks could open the bidding of licenses to the competitive market forcing the companies to pay more for operating within the parks (179). Let the government take this one step farther.

The National Parks Service should appropriate control of the concessions. The National Park Service could then use the money to restore and maintain the environmental integrity of our national parks. This suggestion should not be denounced as creating more “big government.” The National Park Service is even more benign than the Post Office. How could this possibly be perceived as an encroachment on our individual rights and autonomy? It is every citizen’s responsibility to protect their national treasures. We should demand the government protect them, not sell them!

Legally, the government does not differentiate between the private citizen and the corporation. However, our government was created in order to represent and protect the ideas and beliefs of every citizen. But of late, more often than not Congress is concerned with the interests of private corporations over that of their citizens. There is a balance to be struck between the two. Corporate America has never been too interested in the preservation and integrity of our natural environment. Similarly, our government has not done a much lately to protect the nature preserves of this country either. There are those in Congress, though, that represent the concerned Americans. Our national parks are some of the greatest gifts we have inherited from the past generations of our nation. Yet with every gift comes sacrifice, and we must be accept that small sacrifice so that the generations to come may receive the gifts of our nation’s legacy. Works Cited

Meadows, Donella H. “Don’t Swamp Parks with Ad Money.” Effective Argument. Ed. J. Karl Nicholas and James R. Nicholl. 2nd ed. Neddham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon. 1998. 177-179.

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