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Comments: The Red, the White, and the Blue: American Rock Climbing and How The Climbing Community Preserves, Protects, and Uniquely Cherishes America's Wilderness

Fellow leaders of America, thank you for your service and expertise. The National Park Service and Forestry Service are great American institutions with impressive legacies.

I had an experience recently in Red Rock National Park that speaks to my American principles behind why I am not in support of the proposed ban on bolts on the bases of freedom, safety, and responsible use.

It happened on MLK Day this month while hiking the Calico Hills outside of Las Vegas when I heard the sound of a young man proudly singing our National Anthem. Moved, I started singing too. Flourishing notes of "And the rockets' red glare" and "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave" arose deep from within me and with such weight of sentiment that I could only muster them in a whisper. The man's voice on the other hand sung so strong that his voice reverberated around the amphitheater of the red rock all around us.

In the distance a rock climber is developing a new multi-pitch route on the impressive face of The Gallery Wall with the assistance of select, drilled bolts. Exploring new frontiers is synonymous with the American spirit and made for the perfect backdrop for "The Star-Spangled Banner." Going where no one has climbed before, this climber is creating new pathways for his pioneering spirit, as well as for anyone who wants to climb it too. Ban bolts and ban a full expression of freedom and right to safely recreate as rock climbers in America's wilderness.

And this is just one day experienced by two friends in The Calico Hills. Other climbers hooted and hollered in shared American joy for the spirited serenade. These kinds of wilderness areas here host a haven of premier climbing, enjoyed by climbers visiting from all over the world with some choosing to call Las Vegas their home. I am one of them, and I cannot wait to ascend this new route with my friend.

My holiday outing only happened because I was heading out to rock climb. My friend and I picked the climb called The Great Red Book where famed local Randall Granstaff perished from a rappelling accident due to no safe rappelling options. His needless loss of life does not have to be repeated if we come together to continue your partnership of 60 years with the climbing community around the delicate discussion on bolting in America's wilderness.

The USA has a proud heritage of Nature and stewardship of her prosperity for all to share. Without rock climbing, her wonderful wilderness would have mostly been lost to me. Climbing is a force for good in my life and others who discover their love of it. It takes me to places that cannot be reached-except by technical rock climbing with its gear and the community's ethics on conscientious bolting.

Climbers have demonstrated for decades that, thanks to our deep appreciation of America's lands, we are dedicated stewards in partnership with you. Together we do what it takes to make these wonders accessible, such as trail building and spray paint removal from rock faces in places where we climb. Our collaborative efforts with the National Park Service and the Forestry Service create access and educational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds for their American pride to swell in their hearts too.

I have positive experiences with the ethics of Leave No Trace, which approval of the legislation balances. I lived in Pennsylvania and New Jersey for 13 years as an educator and regularly took weekend trips into the Shawangunk Mountains where climbers are not permitted to bolt climbs. Instead, climbers must build removable

gear anchors as they progress up a wall.

In many ways, the local ethos feels like a hearty homage to the traditional style of the first rock climbers who followed this community consensus on best style for completing ascents. I liked this ethic a lot, because of its balance of boldness with its profound respect for Nature's untampered beauty.

There is a concern, however, about hiking down from the top of an ascent of an extensive cliff line or mountain peaks in general. Rope anchors begin to appear around trees or rocks in order to make a rappel safe and repeatable. Often, these techniques lead to a mess of rope at these makeshift anchors, which grow unsightly to maintain their safety by adding more rope to the point in which four or five wrap a tree.

To solve this problem, the community came together for a compromise of Leave No Trace ethics and the need to balance between safe, efficient rappelling with bolts and tattered eye sores of slings around trees and rocks. In the spirit of responsible use, the climbing community installs bolts instead and maintains them so people trust their use while keeping Nature as untouched as possible. The bolts are placed in strategic areas where the rock is solid, using a safe minimum of them and placing them out of sight as often as possible.

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts" Aristotle said, and I say that we are moving backwards if separated in our efforts; together we can build on top of 60 years of policy precedence of our combined determination to protect, preserve, and provide a truly life-changing experiences in America's wilderness. On the principals of freedom, safety, and responsible use, I hope for the cancelation on the proposed ban on bolts.

Please listen to the voices of the American Alpine Club and Access Fund. Please hear what they have to say from their committed excellence to America's wilderness, camping areas, and safe, sustainable climbing access. As found on NationalForests.org, "National Forests are managed for many purposes-timber, recreation, grazing, wildlife, fish, and more." Please continue your support of our freedom to recreate responsibly in American wilderness.