

Testimony From Julien Harley

Good day Senator Francis, President of the 35th Legislature and all other Senators present here today. My name is Julien Harley, and I am an indigenous St. Johnian.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice my opinion about the "Landswap" with the National Park. I am totally against it. The National Park owns about 60% of land on St. John and they do not pay any taxes. The National Park also continuously gets land from continentals who are getting up in age and need to leave the island so that they are closer to better medical services or other family members. When these people leave, they are not selling their land to anyone who is black or local. Cruz Bay is the gateway to the National Park but what is the National Park doing to help make Cruz Bay better for locals and tourists alike?

My uncle, Noble Samuel, raised me after my mother died so I grew up in the Park. Let it be known that the Park from long ago and the Park now is completely different. The "Park decision makers" are changing our culture. We locals can't do a lot of things we used to because the decision makers say we can't. They have brought rules that changed things from how we St. Johnians knew it. A high percentage of the previous National Park employees also lived on St. John and even raised their families here, including the Superintendent and his family, they were involved in everything happening on St. John. When I was the Administrator, Superintendent King sent an employee named J.R. to show me where the land for the school would be. I took him to an area known as "Hammers Farm" in the Catherineberg area. We walked a way in the bushes and I showed them. The next thing you know, people who lived close to the area came to my office, agreeing that a school was needed but that site we chose wasn't good. I guess it was too close to their expensive homes. I told them we could plant a buffer so it wouldn't decrease their home value, but they were hell-bent on not having anything like a school so close to them. I was then asked by the Superintendent, "How much land would be necessary?" After meeting with some St. John educators and a former principal of Eudora Kean, I told the Superintendent about 15 to 20 acres. They said they didn't have that much, and I suggested some across the street next to the George Simmonds Housing. That was the end of that.

I want you all to understand that we are getting the benefits from the National Park such as restaurants, taxi services, and boat charters to name a few, but they are also holding landowners hostage by not allowing them to have access to their properties through the construction of roads. Eventually, those same landowners have to sell what they have. The National Park needs to step up and do the right thing. This park - our park is the one and only National Park where you have landowners within the park.

Change whatever rules or laws necessary and just give us St. Johnians the darn land for our school! This situation reminds me of when St. Johnian Theovald Moorehead went to Washington to fight against the Federal Government when they wanted to relocate all the residents of St. John so that the island would become completely Federal land. Believe it or not, there were people on St. Thomas who were actually helping to try and achieve that goal, but St. Johnians stood our ground.

Sincerely,
Julien Harley.