Henry Ford famously said “history is bunk.” A House committee chair went him one better today, dismissing prehistoric art with the term “bull crap.”

Now that I’ve got your attention, here’s a little background. President Obama today designated a new 704,000 acre Basin and Range National Monument under the Antiquities Act. This immediately set off a storm of protest in Congress. E&E News provides a priceless quote from House Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) about Obama’s action:

“There is nothing that Obama did today that had anything to do with an antiquity,” Bishop said. . . .When asked about the Native American artifacts at the Basin and Range National Monument site in Nevada, including cave paintings, he said, “Ah, bull crap. That’s not an antiquity.”

Pretty remarkable.

Bishop’s statement did make me wonder, though, whether there might be some peculiar definition of “antiquity” in the statute that somehow excluded ancient Native American art. But no. The criteria in question seem pretty straightforward: public land that contains “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest.”

The new Basin and Range National Monument certainly seems to meet this standard. According to the draft Presidential Proclamation, the site contains the following among other things:

- Bristlecone pines over 2000 years old.
- Evidence of campsites and artifacts as early 13,000 years ago.
- Prehistoric cave art, dating back 4000 years.

Those seem to qualify as “objects of historic or scientific interest” without stretching the statute’s language even a millimeter.

Bishop seems incensed about Obama’s use of the statute, but it’s not as if this law has only been used by Democrats. President George W. Bush established large marine monuments covering over 200 million acres, creating what he called the largest protected ocean area in the world. There is a long string of Presidential actions going back a century. For instance, the Supreme Court upheld the use of the Antiquities Act to protect the Grand Canyon in Cameron v. United States, 252 U.S.

450 (1920).

Except for that fact that some folks feel enraged the moment President Obama gets up in the morning, it’s hard to figure out the source of Bishop’s outrage over this particular monument.Bishop’s statement is all the stranger because of his career before Congress, when he was a high school history teacher. (AP courses, no less.)

You have to wonder, whatever on earth did he teach those kids?