

Statement by Rep. Frank R. Wolf of Virginia
House Consideration of H.R. 1483
October 24, 2007

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area

MR. WOLF. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 1483 which includes a provision to establish the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area.

I appreciate all the assistance of Chairman Rahall, Chairman Grijalva and their staffs in the effort to establish this heritage area, which would span 175 miles through four states from Jefferson's home of Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia, to Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania.

This legislation has been painstakingly drafted to ensure that the rights of private property owners within the district will not be usurped. In fact, designation as a heritage area increases the rights of property owners giving them an opportunity to learn more about the significance of their own property and an alternative to selling their land for development. Landowners should have the right to chose preservation and protection along with the right to chose to build town homes, malls and highways.

The legislation clearly states:

"Nothing in this subtitle alters any duly adopted land use regulation, approved land use plan, or other regulatory authority of any federal, state, tribal or local agency."

It continues:

"Nothing in this subtitle conveys any land use or other regulatory authority to any local coordinating entity."

The bottom line: This bill cannot and does not affect the rights of any property owner.

In fact, the entire state of Tennessee is a heritage area clearly demonstrating that designation has no affect on local authority or property rights.

The Government Accountability Office has investigated the effect of a heritage area designation on land use decisions. Its 2004 report states:

"Heritage area officials, Park Service headquarters and regional staff, and representatives of national property rights groups that we contacted were unable to provide us with any examples of a heritage area directly affecting--positively or negatively--private property values or use."

Not one example, not even one. I would not be a sponsor of legislation which would in any way impair property rights. Looking at the 37 existing heritage areas going

back two decades, not one single example has been found. Why? Because just like this bill, the authorizing legislation not only creates no regulatory authority, it specifically denies it.

This legislation is a local effort to recognize the history and beauty of this region.

Starting as a trail used by the Susquehannock and Iroquois Indians, America's early history can literally be traced along this corridor. Jefferson's Monticello, Madison's Montpelier, Monroe's Oak Hill and Ash Lawn-Highland, Zachary Taylor's home, Eisenhower's farm, Teddy Roosevelt's cabin, John Marshall's home, General George Marshall's home, and Camp David are situated along this route, which is also dotted with numerous Civil War battlefields and sites from the underground railroad.

Designation of this historic route as a National Heritage Area will create a partnership between the federal, state, and local governments as well as local businesses and civic organizations to commemorate, conserve and promote the history and resources along the corridor.

It will help link national parks to historical sites, package tourism opportunities, and provide financial and technical support for sites in the corridor.

This historic corridor includes a significant part of the 10th District of Virginia, which I am proud to represent.

I echo the sentiments of author and historian David McCullough when he said that:

"[t]his is the ground of our Founding Fathers. These are the landscapes that speak volumes—small towns, churches, fields, mountains, creeks and rivers with names such as Bull Run and Rappahannock. They are the real thing, and what shame we will bring upon ourselves if we destroy them."

I applaud the hard work of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership and the many officials, businesses, educators, farmers and historians working to make this heritage area the gold standard.

In fact, over 75 resolutions of support were passed in public forums up and down the corridor and all four state governors – Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania – signed a letter of support. Over 200 community briefings were held between 2004 and 2006. Supporters are as diverse as the land along the corridor from the Jefferson chapter of the NAACP, a sheep farmer, Friends of Slave Quarters, old-time general store and B&B owners, local school teachers, a local community college and even a family which owns a hot dog stand.

In 2005, the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership conducted a poll of the residents in the heritage area and found that 85 percent of those participating expressed support for the initiative.

This corridor has been inspirational to American leaders for hundreds of years and it deserves to be promoted by the federal government. Every American citizen should take a trip along this route to answer questions such as:

What does it mean to be an American? What do we as a nation stand for? What is democracy and federalism?

Traveling along this route can give Americans and even the world the answers to who we are and who we aspire to be. They will learn about the men and women who pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor for the idea of freedom and self-governance. Traveling this route they will learn about Native Americans and those first brave settlers to put a plow to the lush soil of the Piedmont. Along this route courageous men and women risked their own futures to gain freedom for all Americans. It is along this route that General George Marshall drafted a document to show the world who we are as Americans and what democracy means.

During this 400th anniversary of America's birthplace at Jamestown, I urge your support for this legislation to ensure our children and grandchildren can appreciate and learn from the history of these United States of America.

I'd like to end with a quote from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address spoken at the northern terminus of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground corridor:

"We cannot dedicate - we cannot consecrate - we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have hallowed it far above our poor power to add or detract."

I urge support for H.R. 1483.