

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

T E S T I M O N Y
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Vice Chair
Inventing Flight: Dayton 2003
In Support of
H.R. 5036,
"Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendment Act of 2000"
Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands
The Honorable James Hansen, Chair
September 7, 2000

Mr. Chairman and esteemed members of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, I appreciate the invitation to testify on behalf of our Chair, Brad Tillson, and the *Inventing Flight: Dayton 2003* organization in support of H.R. 5036, the "Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendment Act of 2000." As Vice Chair of *Inventing Flight* and Executive Director of Carillon Historical Park, one of the park partners, I am probably uniquely positioned to give a community perspective on this legislation.

Inventing Flight: Dayton 2003 is a public-private, community-based non-profit organization planning the celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the Wrights' first flight in 2003. In 1991-2, we served as the community arm of the effort to create the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. We felt that only a national park could provide the appropriate level of preservation and interpretation of our Wright Brothers assets; the National Park Service is among the best in the world at saving our nation's treasures and telling their stories.

In 2003, we expect hundreds of thousands of visitors to come to Dayton for the centennial of flight celebration. The centennial year represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Dayton, Ohio to tell the story of the Wright Brothers and birth of aviation and our most significant medium for telling that story is the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. The park has got to be completed in time for 2003.

During our most significant centennial of flight event, planned for July of 2003, the national park will serve as the "living history" experience for visitors. What better venue to help the visitor feel the excitement of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Dayton - when the Wrights walked the streets, arguing about wing length or engine design - than the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, which is uniquely set in the neighborhood where the Wrights actually worked, lived and played? What better venue to celebrate the dawning of "The American Century", when independent early engineers like the Wrights and Edison and Ford dared to dream and, in the process, shaped our great nation? We feel Dayton, which at one point in history held the most patents per capita, is uniquely positioned to tell this story.

To make the national park a success, which is so critical to our celebration, we support passage of the "Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendment Act of 2000," which addresses two significant issues: increasing the park's boundaries and eliminating the funding cap.

Increasing the boundaries of the park will add but a small area, only 0.7 acres, but will give the park critical context. Of the additions, only the two small houses adjacent to the Wright Cycle Co. building will actually be owned by the National Park Service, and those buildings will be donated by the City of Dayton, the current owner. The addition of the Setzer or Aviation Trail Building will preserve the historic fabric of the Wright Brothers Print Shop by allowing critical support improvements, such as an elevator shaft and restroom facilities, to be built in the adjacent structure. Finally, the "wings" newly constructed onto Wright Hall provide important interpretive space for the Wright Flyer III, space that was not anticipated when Orville Wright helped to design the building in the late 1940's.

The other significant issue in H.R. 5036 is the removal of the Prohibition in Section 109 placing a ceiling on federal funds for non-federal sites. This park has always been envisioned as a partnership effort requiring commitment from all of the park partners. To-date, the Dayton community and State of Ohio have directly invested **well over \$7 million** in the park sites. This investment includes acquiring buildings for National Park Service ownership, rehabilitation, and even the construction of the East Interpretive Center, and does not include the tens of millions of dollars invested in the areas around the park sites. The community's financial interests began before the park was even established when the Dayton community underwrote all of the costs for the Management Alternatives Study, a first-step toward park creation that is typically funded through federal appropriations. Once the park bill was passed, the local community again stepped up to the plate and paid for a half-year of the first park superintendent's salary in an effort to begin the park development process as soon as possible. As we build toward 2003, the community will continue to invest its dollars, time and energy in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. We are proud of our park.

Mr. Chairman, as you can see, time and again the Dayton community has risen to the challenge of creating a world-class historical site. We feel it is only proper that the National Park Service and the federal government play its full role in this partnership effort as well. The cap only serves to inhibit the full potential of the park's partnership. Because it is so broadly worded, other non-National Park Service federal funds could be interpreted to be included - grants that have been awarded through the "Save America's Treasures" program, for example, or National Endowment for the Humanities awards. These are grants that our non-federal partners have successfully competed for on the national stage, with NPS support, but independent of NPS operational funding. In addition, we are concerned that the technical expertise and other in-kind support the National Park Service could provide the non-federally owned properties could potentially be included. This would create an administrative nightmare.

But most to the point, we are concerned about the future of the Wright Brothers Print Shop Interpretive Center project. Because the adjacent building - which is owned by Aviation Trail, a non-profit dedicated to the preservation of aviation history - is not owned by the federal government, any construction managed by the National Park Service can be affected by a very narrow interpretation of the cap language. Again, the Aviation Trail building provides a very important support function for the Wright Brothers Print Shop and the Aviation Trail organization has already invested approaching \$1 million dollars in that structure. It would be virtually impossible to move forward and provide adequate facilities for visitors without the Aviation Trail building. And at this point, so close to 2003 and the arrival of our hundreds of thousands of visitors, redesigning the project and starting over will be nothing short of fatal for our celebration and our

community.

Mr. Chairman, we have been hard at work, shoulder to shoulder with the National Park Service and all of the park partners, planning and preparing for our moment on the world stage in 2003. We urge the committee and Congress to pass H.R. 5036 in order that we may get on with the task at hand and complete our pact as full partners in this endeavor.

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