

Rep. Scott Rigell (VA-02)

**Remarks to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands in support of H.R. 2087**

Thursday, September 15, 2011

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me here to share some brief remarks today in support of H.R. 2087.

Let me be clear from the outset: this is a jobs bill.

Passage of H.R. 2087 will immediately open the door to new job creation on Virginia's Eastern Shore at no cost to the federal government.

I think that bears repeating – this committee can act decisively to clear the path for job creation without spending so much as a dime from the federal treasury. There is no need to Authorize. No need to Appropriate.

All that is required is to remove an outdated federal land use restriction from a small overgrown field in rural Virginia.

In 1976, the federal government deeded approximately 32 acres of unneeded land to Accomack County through the Federal Lands to Parks Program. The Department of The Interior placed a deed restriction on the land requiring that it be used solely for recreational purposes.

Unfortunately, the land is poorly located for recreational purposes and in recent years the park has been seldom used. Today, as you can see from the photograph I have provided, the park is little more than an abandoned field located adjacent to the NASA/Wallops Flight Facility.

Accomack County has partnered with NASA/Wallops Flight Facility (WFF), the Marine Science Consortium, and the private sector to develop Wallops Research Park adjacent to the WFF. This development will be an aerospace technology park which will create hundreds of jobs in a rural and economically depressed county.

Unfortunately, the unused recreational land blocks the only available ingress/egress to the technology park. In order for the project to proceed, the recreational area must be relocated.

The county unsuccessfully pursued non-legislative means to relocate the park or remove the deed restriction. County officials proposed relocating the park on an acre for acre basis only to be told by the Department of the Interior (DOI) that their policy requires any land swap must be made on a dollar for dollar basis using the land's appraised value at its "highest and best use."

A recent appraisal valued the land at \$815,000 which is more than \$25,000 per acre. Under ordinary circumstances the land would never have been appraised at such a high value, but the appraiser factored in the county's economic development plan which artificially inflated the land's value. The figure of \$815,000 far exceeds what the land has historically been worth or what Accomack County could pay for new recreational property in accordance with DOI policy.

This is a classic example of how Washington all too often hampers economic development and job creation with out of date regulations and an unyielding bureaucracy.

The notion that Accomack County should pay \$815,000 plus construction costs to relocate a recreational park simply to be in compliance with a non-essential DOI policy is nonsense. The good people of Virginia see this as yet another example of an out of touch federal bureaucracy standing in the way of job creation.

H.R. 2087 will remove the deed restriction and allow the county to use the land to its most suitable purpose for creating jobs and reviving economic activity.

As matters currently stand, the land is unused, overgrown, holds no scenic or recreational value, sustains no jobs, and yields no economic benefit.

All of that can be changed if we take advantage of this rare opportunity for Congress to act decisively on the side of job creation and economic growth at no cost to the federal government.

Thank you again for your generous invitation for me to speak to you today. I yield the balance of my time.