

Statement of the Honorable Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Before the
Subcommittee on National Parks
of the
House Resources Committee

June 9, 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 1096 – legislation to help restore the Thomas Edison National Historic Site. I congratulate my colleague Scott Garrett for introducing this worthy legislation. I look forward to continuing to work closely with Representative Garrett and Representative Don Payne, whose district houses a large portion of the Edison site, to preserve this national treasure.

I am proud that I represent a region of New Jersey that has given birth to some of the greatest innovations in our nation's history: Thomas Edison's Glenmont estate in West Orange and the Great Falls National Historic District in Paterson – America's First Industrial City. Each of these impressive areas – only 10 miles apart - sprang from the imagination of two of the great pioneers in American history: Thomas Edison and Alexander Hamilton. Both of these sites – the Edison National Historic Site and the Great Falls Historic District – have been included among the most endangered historic areas in our nation. The artifacts of both sites are in terrible physical condition and are in grave peril of being lost to the country forever.

Together, these majestic places tell the inspiring story of the rise of the greatest technological and economic power the world has ever known. Mr. Chairman, I strongly believe that it is the role of the federal government to partner with the local community to preserve the glory of these places for all future generations to behold.

Although these sites are both close to my heart, I am here today to specifically voice my support for the Edison National Historic Site, which embodies Edison's legacy as a pioneer of American technology. The Edison National Historic Site, encompassing Edison's home and laboratory complex, is regarded as one of America's original research and development facilities. Half of Edison's astonishing 1,093 patents were earned during the 44 years he lived in West Orange.

The classic inventions created at this site include the phonograph, electric generating systems, the dry storage battery, and the motion picture camera. Edison left a vast collection of artifacts, models, photographs, drawings, and furnishings at the Edison site. In addition, he left nearly 3,500 notebooks documenting every experiment, idea, failure, observation and business strategy of his long career.

Even as Thomas Edison lives on as one of the leading visionaries of our time, his home and labs have tragically fallen into severe disrepair due to age-related decay. The public and private sector must work together to ensure that adults and young people alike will always be able to rediscover the genius of Edison and the impact he has had on all of our daily lives.

As you will hear from George Keenan, Executive Director of the Foundation, a newly formed partnership is expected to complete the first phase of renovations at the site in 2006. The Edison Preservation Foundation-National Park Service partnership is a model for other historic sites in this time of limited federal funds. The support of the National Park Service has enabled the Edison Preservation Foundation to create a vital public-private partnership to maintain the site as a major community and educational resource.

Despite this progress, Congressional support through H.R. 1096 is vital to the Edison site's long-term success. The legislation is an important symbol of Congress's commitment to preserving the legacy of one of America's most influential inventors and to restoring a federal site that is a historic landmark. It is my hope that the Subcommittee will move forward and approve this important legislation.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

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