

Statement by Rep. Frank R. Wolf of Virginia
Before the Senate Resources Committee
September 28, 2006

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today in support of H.R. 5195, a bill to establish the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area.

I'd like to begin with a quote from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address:

"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."

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground winds its way along U.S. Route 15 for 175 miles through four states from Jefferson's home of Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia, to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. 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 business 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."

This bill is modeled after legislation Senator Warner and I introduced to create the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District in the Shenandoah Valley in 1996. Through that legislation, the Civil War battlefield sites in the Valley are being preserved. Similarly, with the legislation before the committee today, local, state and federal officials, working along with landowners and business leaders, will be able to better promote the history of The Journey Through Hallowed Ground by attracting tourism and an appreciation for the unique history of this area.

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 choose preservation and protection along with the right to choose to build town homes, malls and highways.

The legislation clearly states: "Nothing in this Act shall be construed to modify the authority of Federal, State, or local governments to regulate land use." Additionally, the only new federal funds accessible to The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership will be for the management of the heritage area.

The bill also specifically prohibits the use of eminent domain and the ability of the management entity to regulate land use. The Government Accountability Office, the nonpartisan research service for the legislative branch, 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."

This legislation is a local effort to recognize the history and beauty of this region. The organizers are local landowners who have the vision to appreciate that they live among the nation's most precious resources and history. The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership conducted a poll of the residents in the heritage area and found that 81 percent of those polled expressed support for the initiative.

To understand the importance of this initiative, I refer to the words of Thomas Jefferson in his Notes of the State of Virginia:

You stand on a very high point of land. On your right comes up the Shenandoah, having ranged along the foot of the mountain

a hundred miles to seek a vent. On your left approaches the Potomac, in quest of a passage also. In the moment of their junction, they rush together against the mountain, rend it asunder, and pass off to the sea. The first glance of this scene hurries our senses into the opinion that this earth has been created in time, that the mountains were formed first, that the rivers began to flow afterwards, that in this place, particularly, they have been dammed up by the Blue Ridge of mountains, and have formed an ocean which filed the whole valley; that continuing to rise they have at length broken over this spot, and have torn the mountains down from its summit to its base. The piles of rocks on each hand, but particularly on the Shenandoah, the evident marks of their disruption and avulsion from their beds by the most powerful agents of nature, corroborate the impression. But the distant finishing, which nature has given to the picture, is of a very different character. It is a true contrast to the foreground. It is a placid and delightful as that is wild and tremendous. For the mountain being cloven asunder, she presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small catch of smooth, blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate in the calm below.

The landscape Jefferson describes has been inspirational to American leaders for hundreds of years. Every American citizen should take a trip along this route so that they know not only where we have come as a nation, but also where we are going. Our nation is struggling to define itself as we find ourselves in an ever-changing and even frightening world. 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 a glimpse of 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 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.

As we come upon the 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.