

Statement of Representative Bud Cramer
Before the House Committee on Resources,
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
Hearing on H.R. 2628, the "Muscle Shoals National Heritage Study Act of 2001,"

February 7, 2002

Mr. Chairman, Madame Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today in support of my legislation, H.R. 2628, the "Muscle Shoals National Heritage Study Act of 2001."

As the map indicates, the area that we in North Alabama generally refer to as the Shoals, is located in the Northwest corner of Alabama. The Shoals has a total population of approximately 209,000 people spread across six major municipalities --- Florence, Sheffield, Tuscumbia, Muscle Shoals, Russellville, and Moulton --- in two full counties and portions of two others. In addition, the map shows some of the numerous National Park Service units and National Historic Landmark Sites in or near the Shoals, thereby, giving some indication of the historical importance of the region.

In general, mine is a District that is geographically and culturally defined by the Tennessee River.

This is particularly true for the Shoals. It is the river that defines and anchors us, gives us sustenance, sparks our creativity, and centers our lives. Our history, therefore, is intertwined with that of the Tennessee River. This history runs deep and speaks directly to what it means to be an American. The earliest days of our history can be tracked to when native Americans once freely roamed the river's banks to those dark days centuries later when they were forced to march pass its somber banks during the Trail of Tears.

It can be found in the Civil War when the river ran red as brother fought brother in a struggle that would determine the fate of our union.

It can be seen at that moment early the 20th century when the river was tamed by the massive Wilson Dam that foretold the advent of public power as manifested by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Moreover, the richness of the Shoals' history is revealed by the contributions made to American History by the sons and daughters of the Shoals. Whether you talk about Florence native W.C. Handy --- often called the "Father of the Blues" --- and the role he played in developing this most uniquely American music. Or whether you're in Tuscumbia visiting the birthplace of Helen Keller --- one of this century's most outstanding examples of an individual overcoming tremendous personal disabilities through determination, perseverance and strength of character. Or whether you talk about North Alabama native, Jesse Owens who through his athletic grace transcended sports and shook the conscience of the world by discrediting Hitler's theory of racial superiority. The Shoals has a story to tell that, I believe, is as central to the story of America as can be told by any other region in the country.

My bill, H.R. 2628, the "Muscle Shoals National Heritage Study Act of 2001" represents my attempt to get this story told. The Subcommittee should also know that while the bill primarily focuses on my Congressional District, it does include language allowing for the scope of the feasibility study to include

areas that "are adjacent to or in the vicinity of" the Shoals area. Consequently, I'm pleased to report to the Subcommittee that both Representatives Robert Aderholt, whose district is just south of my Congressional District, and Roger Wicker, whose district is just west of my Congressional District in Mississippi, have signed onto my bill as co-sponsors.

In addition, H.R. 2628, represents the culmination of several years of grassroots efforts on the part of the business, academic, and civic leadership of Northwest Alabama to categorize, preserve, and showcase the rich natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Muscle Shoals Area. To demonstrate the extraordinary level of local support this bill has generated, I would like to submit along my testimony, the two dozen or so support letters I've received from a wide spectrum of the communities' local leadership. Included among these are letters of support from Senator Bobby Denton, and Representative Nelson Starkey, both of whom represent parts of the Shoals communities in the Alabama State Assembly. I've also included letters of support from the Alabama Historical Commission, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, as well as from the Shoals Chamber of Commerce, the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, the Tennessee Valley Art Association, and the W.C. Handy Music Festival.

These letters demonstrate what I've found as I've talked to people throughout the Shoals about this bill --- and that is that we in North Alabama are fiercely proud of our history and we believe that our history, with all of its many different tales of tragedy and redemption, offers a glimpse into the American spirit. H.R. 2628 gives us the opportunity to share this history with the rest of the country and the world.

As the legislative process moves forward, I hope you will come to this same conclusion.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Madame Ranking Member and Members of the Subcommittee for allowing me to offer testimony in support of my legislation, the "Muscle Shoals National Heritage Study Act of 2001."

I look forward to working with each of you in the coming months to move this bill through the legislative process. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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