Testimony of Congresswoman Jo Ann Davis (VA-01)

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

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George Washington Birthplace National Monument Boundary Expansion, HR 3449

Westmoreland, Virginia

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 3449, which would authorize the National Park Service to revise and expand the boundaries of the George Washington Birthplace National Monument in Westmoreland County, Virginia by an additional 115 acres.

Mr. Chairman this bill was first offered by my predecessor Herb Bateman in 1991. Mr. Bateman's bill, HR 2444, passed both the House and Senate in the 102nd Congress. (It did not make it to the President's desk because the property owner, at that time, had a change of heart.) I am happy to again bring this measure before the committee to realize a long standing effort by the Park Service and the community to preserve this undisturbed land for future generations to enjoy and learn of the Washington's way of life during our nation's formative years.

George Washington was born on this property on February 22, 1732, and lived on the farm for three and a half years, and again for several years in his teens. The farm lies between Pope's and Bridge's Creeks, tributaries of the Potomac River, in Virginia's Northern Neck, about 60 miles southeast of Washington, D.C. The location includes a Memorial House designed to recreate the original birthsite as revealed by excavations. The Memorial House was finished in time for George Washington's 200th birthday in 1932, and is one of the center pieces of the National Monument. The National Park Service also operates a colonial farm that recreates 18th century plantation life. Living history demonstrations including colonial cooking, blacksmithing, and spinning wool continue to occur as special events.

John Washington, George Washington's great-grandfather, immigrated to America and acquired this property in 1664. Over time, George Washington's father, Augustine Washington, continued to add various parcels to the property until the Washington land ran uninterrupted from Bridges Creek to Pope's Creek. George Washington's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather are buried in the family cemetery located on the National Monument property.

The park currently comprises 550 acres of land. However, because of the Monument's current boundary configuration, over 100 acres of private land outside the Monument's boundary are sandwiched between two units of the monument and the Potomac River. Willing sellers are again amenable to transferring the property to the National Park Service, and Congress needs to consequently act so that this opportunity will not be lost.

Because of the rural character and natural beauty of Virginia's Northern Neck region, the shore line of the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay have become attractive locations for development. Many retirees have

come to the Northern Neck in recent years because of the tranquil lifestyle and low property taxes, and properties within close proximity of the George Washington Birthplace have become the sites for new residential homes in recent years. Mr. Chairman, Congress needs to act soon so that the current owners will not be tempted to entertain other offers.

Again, most of the 115 acres I am seeking to have authorized not only abuts the site but in fact splits the property at one portion of the park. Development of this land would seriously compromise the historic quality of the park. The federal government can play a critical role in acquiring this important property to maintain the integrity of the Washington homesite.

HR 3449 is a fitting tribute to a man who has long been revered as our greatest founding father, a man of high moral integrity and character, a man with distinct leadership capabilities, and above all a man who guided Americans to freedom and led them to union. I urge your support of this measure. Thank you.

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