

Testimony

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On

HR 4612

27 April 2006

Mr. Chairman, it is a pleasure to represent the Wright Family today in support of HR 4612. It is a special feeling to follow in my father's footsteps who testified in 1991 in support of creating this National Historical Park. Thanks to the 102 nd Congress, we have witnessed the establishment and construction of one of America's great National Parks. I trust my testimony today will encourage the members of the 109 th Congress to make the right decision. Change is the one constant and I see passage of HR 4612, and all of its provisions as a way to make this Park even better.

I also want to recognize the outstanding work of the National Park Service, and their special partners who operate and support this Park: Dayton History at Carillon Park, the Ohio Historical Society at Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial, Aviation Trail Inc, at the Aviation Trial Museum and Visitor Center, and the United States Air Force at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright Patterson AFB. Each of these entities is responsible for commemorating and interpreting the lives of three very unique individuals, Wilbur and Orville Wright and Paul Laurence Dunbar. All of the partners have made significant financial and programmatic contributions to the telling of this story, and I believe that in Dayton Ohio, we are setting the standard for "partnership parks" within the National Park system.

For all the Wrights, this Park is a special place. It tells the story of Uncles Wil and Orv, where they lived, worked and invented the airplane. And it is also special to us as it tells the story of Paul Laurence Dunbar and his work as one of America's outstanding poets and literary figures at the turn of the century. All three of these individuals helped change the world.

The Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act was right on target in 1992. It focused on the right history, the right community and the right partners. As we look ahead, however, it seems that we will be better served to change the name of the Park to be sure we get the right names before the visiting public. History is made by people, not cities, and renaming the Park places the focus on the principal characters of this story. It seems to make sense to recognize the individuals in the Park's name versus that of their home town. This is particularly crucial in the case of Paul Laurence Dunbar. The Park is not telling the story of Dunbar as an aviator, but telling his life story as a "man of letters", in a time when few African-Americans were given the opportunity to write professionally. Like the Wright brothers, his story is one of overcoming obstacles. It is fitting for the association of Uncles Wil and Orv with Paul Laurence Dunbar to continue in such a visible and public way with the re-naming of this park as Wright Brothers-Dunbar National Historical Park.

I'm sure that some might say that name will confuse visitors with that other Wright Brothers site in North Carolina. I believe the name change is a proper step toward setting the record straight. While it is true the Wright brothers first flew at Kill Devil Hill in North Carolina, they invented the airplane in Dayton Ohio. It should be noted the brothers' patent application for the plane was dated March 23, 1903, **eight** months before they actually flew in North Carolina. It is only fitting that we focus the name of the Park on the principal history makers that the park commemorates, not on the place were they lived.

The Wright Family supports the entire legislation, including the provision providing grant authority to the National Park Service. The Dayton community has demonstrated its commitment to this Park and I am pleased to report that since 1995, the Wright Family Foundation has donated over \$435,000 to area aviation organizations including the National Park. This is just a small percentage of the overall community contributions. Providing grant authority will allow the National Park Service to play its part in keeping this one of the best parks in the Nation.

It is our understanding the National Park Service will be proposing some technical corrections to the National Aviation Heritage Area legislation. Having personally testified before this Subcommittee in 2003, I must express my appreciation for your support of the National Aviation Heritage Area. The Wright Family sees the National Aviation Heritage Area as

an appropriate development for the region and its history. What Uncles Wil and Orville started, grew over the decades, spawning new companies and pioneers in the world of aviation and aerospace development. It's not a coincidence that the first man who walked on the moon, lived a mere 60 miles from the first men who learned how to fly.

In closing, I want to thank Congressman Turner and those who co-sponsored this legislation, Congressmen Hobson, Boehner and Oxley. It is a privilege and honor for me to appear before all of you and make this statement on behalf of the Wright Family. We look forward to passage of this legislation and the designation of the Wright Brothers-Dunbar National Historical Park.