

**STATEMENT OF SHEILA RABB WEIDENFELD, CHAIR CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK COMMISSION BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. \_\_\_\_, TO AMEND THE CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL DEVELOPMENT ACT AND EXTEND THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK COMMISSION.**

**SEPTEMBER 16, 2010**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of H.R. \_\_\_\_ which would amend Public Law 91-664, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Development Act, by extending the life of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Commission for 10 more years.

For nearly 40 years the Commission's 19 members, nominated by local jurisdictions and appointed by the Secretary, have met to consult and advise the Secretary of Interior or the Secretary's designee on general policies and specific matters related to the development and administration of the national park. Commission members provide an important service to the Secretary, bringing issues and concerns to the attention of the National Park Service, and advising on how best to realize the intentions of Congress, as expressed in the park's enabling legislation.

The Commission's original authorization was for a ten-year period. However, because of its value to the National Park Service and the unique nature of the park, legislation has passed three previous times extending the Commission's term to the current forty years. Over the past 39 years no other changes have been made to the direction or composition of the Commission. I encourage your support of this Bill to extend the life of this commission.

The establishment of the Advisory Commission on January 8, 1971 stemmed in part from the unique nature of the Canal. It is unlike most areas administered by the National Park Service as it runs along a 185 mile stretch of river shoreline and is flanked by the nation's capital, suburban communities and numerous small rural towns.

Recently, Carrie Johnson, staff aide to U.S. Senator Charles Mathias Jr. who worked with Senator Mathias and U.S. Representative Gilbert Gude on the legislation described the genesis of the idea of the Commission. She wrote:

“The idea of a locally-oriented advisory panel originated in the Canal park bills proposed by Representative, then Senator, Charles McC. Mathias Jr. and Rep. Gilbert Gude in the 1960s.”

She went on to say:

“Messrs. Mathias and Gude emphasized that a new Canal park in such a sensitive location would need to communicate and collaborate especially well with its neighbors. They saw an advisory panel as a key vehicle for that. The commission they proposed had a carefully balanced composition and a very strong local-state base. It included eight members representing the Maryland counties, with two to be appointed by each county's governing board; eight representing Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia, with two appointed by each Governor and the D.C. Mayor; and three including the chairman, appointed at large by the Secretary of the Interior. The at-large seats were intended to provide broader perspectives and enable the Secretary to respond to suggestions from Congress and national conservation groups.”

She summarized by saying:

“The commission has been more active, and the NPS more hospitable to it, than many expected at first. The benefits of this partnership, from Cumberland, Maryland to the Tide lock in Georgetown, District of Columbia, have fully justified both the local-state-federal structure of the commission and Congress' decisions to extend its life.”

Carrie Johnson was right.

The Commission, the National Park Service and the numerous communities and residents along the canal's tremendous length have worked well together; perhaps even more so in recent years as the economic benefits of heritage and recreation tourism have been realized.

Washington County Commission President John Barr recently wrote me saying:

“The C&O Canal National Historical Park Advisory Commission is an integral part of Washington County, Maryland. The Commission has supported many local projects to help better our County and citizens.”

“The Washington County Commissioners strongly support the reauthorization of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Advisory Commission before the January 8, 2011 expiration date. The Washington County Commissioners also support the current structure of the Advisory Commission and the ability for county governments, including Washington County, to recommend two members to the Commission.”

Frederick County Commission President Jan Gardner recently wrote me as well saying:

“I am writing on behalf of the Frederick County board of County commissioners to express our strong support for the extension of the Chesapeake and Ohio canal

National Historical Park Advisory Commission and the continuation of the current commission membership and structure.”

“The C&O Canal National Historical Park is a valued historical, cultural, educational and recreational resource for Frederick County. The Commission has successfully served as an effective and efficient venue for listening to local concerns and park users, to collect helpful advice in developing the General Plan for the park and most importantly has served as a conduit ensuring long-term citizen engagement.”

Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members:

- The Commission brings together, in a formal forum, representatives of the nine million residents who live in the 3 states and the District of Columbia, as well as 13 counties and dozens of cities, towns and communities near the canal.
- The Commission serves as an important venue for addressing community and individual concerns and provides a venue for active listening to all sides of an issue.
- The Commission hears statements on a full range of administrative and development issues facing the communities and the park and makes recommendations that account for the best interests of all parties.
- At its quarterly meetings, the Commission reviews dozens of briefing statements, which represent a wide range of park operations, projects and issues, ensuring transparency and accountability.
- The Commission listens to concerns and issues of traditional users, private in-holders and fish and game clubs and has recommended NPS work creatively to resolve their issues fairly and in a timely manner.
- The Commission reviews the park’s priorities to ensure they are consistent with approved plans.

For the past 39 years the C&O Canal National Historical Park Commission has performed a valuable service in advising the NPS in the administration and development of the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

The unique nature of the national park clearly warrants the need for a commission that gives voice to those who live, work and recreate along the canal. Just as the hard work of managing the C&O Canal National Historical Park will not end on January 8, 2011, the public engagement, and need for accountability and transparency should not end either.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of both the sitting members of the Commission and their nominating bodies we strongly recommend enactment of H.R.\_\_\_\_\_.

This completes my prepared comments concerning H.R.\_\_\_\_\_ I will be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.