

Statement of Vin Cipolla
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Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Concerning H.R. 3094, “National Park Centennial Fund Act” and
H.R. 2959, “National Park Centennial Challenge Fund Act”

August 2, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. We commend the sponsors and this committee for their commitment to preparing our national parks for the challenges and opportunities of the next century. My name is Vin Cipolla and I am the President and CEO of the National Park Foundation. The National Park Foundation is the national charitable arm of the National Park Service, chartered by Congress in 1967 to encourage private philanthropic support for America’s national parks. Involvement by a diverse charitable community deepens connections to an understanding of both the history of the parks and how much they mean for our future.

Since February, when the President focused the attention of the nation on the National Park Service Centennial in 2016, there has been a lot of thoughtful dialogue – including the proposal by Chairmen Rahall and Grijalva – on how to ensure the future of our national parks. As the national charitable partner for the parks, we think it is key to continue the rich tradition in which the parks were founded and have been sustained—public and private interests working in tandem.

Both of the proposed bills recognize the importance of this complementary approach. The National Park Centennial Challenge Fund Act (H.R. 2959) seeks to raise up to \$100 million each year over a ten year period from private donations and to match those donations with federal funding up to \$100 million annually. The proposal introduced by Chairmen Rahall and Grijalva (H.R. 3094) clearly anticipates private philanthropy as well. These proposals continue the long history of private philanthropy that has created our unequalled system of national parks.

More than one hundred years ago, people from across this country gathered to protect the places they loved and the places they knew would matter long into the future. It is their spirit and ideals on which the National Park System was founded. Together, they had the vision to transform the natural treasures of our country into the first national parks so future generations could enjoy these magnificent places and learn about our nation’s proud history. Thirty parks were directly created through donations.

Private philanthropy has traditionally been held in the hands of a few individuals whose commitment is strong, consistent, and valuable. We view the future success of private support not only in the capable hands of Congress and the National Park Service, but also in the hands of the 80 million plus national park visitors and enthusiasts. The future of philanthropic support is in both diversifying the opportunity to experience national parks, and in diversifying the opportunity to support our parks.

The National Park Foundation and friends groups, cooperating associations and others, continue this legacy of public private partnership. Together, we are reinvigorating a movement for park philanthropy to benefit all parks.

This new century presents wonderful opportunities for our national parks, but also serious challenges. The parks exist in increasingly complex environments with varied and often competing demands placed upon them: the U.S. population is growing older and more diverse, children are spending less time outdoors, and technology is bringing rapid changes. The National Park Service and we as a nation are challenged to respond.

We believe the American people, like the generations before, are ready to embrace this challenge and provide the innovation, creativity, and charitable support necessary to protect these places for the next 100 years and beyond. In the United States, charitable giving in 2005 exceeded \$260 billion. Of which, approximately \$90 billion went to causes related to the National Park Service mission – education; health; arts; culture and humanities; and the environment. The National Parks received only a small portion of these gifts. We can do better. Our preliminary conversations with major donors and philanthropic organizations surrounding the Centennial have been very promising. We see great opportunities to make the national parks an important and prominent place for individual charitable giving. In the last fiscal year, we've been able to increase our number of individual donors by 40%. We believe these gifts pay dividends in deepening not just the financial, but also the emotional commitment that Americans have to their parks.

Throughout its history, The National Park Foundation has worked with many significant corporate partners. Their support has enabled the National Park Service to enhance and expand important programs in such areas as education, preservation, community engagement, health and wellness, and volunteerism. Unilever, the longest-standing corporate partner of the National Park Foundation, has been working with us for nearly 15 years and through one of the many programs they fund has provided nearly 200 of our parks with 11,000 miles of recycled lumber. For the last eight years, Ford Motor Company has helped place PhD students in parks across the system to help park managers understand and find solutions to challenging transportation issues. American Airlines has helped us fund critical programs and global conservation initiatives dealing with migratory birds. Coca Cola North America recently pledged several millions of dollars to help parks across the system restore hiking trails for visitors.

Having worked with the parks for such a long time and in such significant ways, I can assure you that both the Foundation and its partners understand and share the concern that corporate support for parks not become confused with and not lead to commercialization. We will work carefully within Director's Order #21 to ensure that corporate involvement adheres to this guideline. Over the last number of years, we have looked at this issue far too conventionally. Today's media environment creates multiple opportunities for donors and parks to work together in new and creative ways that do not lead to the commercialism of parks.

This renewed interest in encouraging park philanthropy and partnerships creates many opportunities. First is the opportunity to connect and strengthen the fabric of support for parks on

a national and local level. Our parks offer the best investments in the areas of youth-enrichment, education, health, and volunteerism, yet philanthropic potential on a grand scale and in line with contemporary thresholds has not been realized. Federal funding offers incentives for charitable partners to work collaboratively and creatively to develop fundraising campaigns that affect the entire park system. The National Park Foundation is prepared to take the necessary national leadership role to make this a reality and is currently working with an outside firm to examine the feasibility for creating a national philanthropic campaign to support national parks for the next century.

Second is the opportunity to expand the dialogue around park partnerships. A richer conversation about parks will lead to incorporating best practices and innovation, especially at the state and local levels, which allow us to bring new ideas and models to national parks.

Third is the opportunity to support the National Park Service as it works to enhance important youth and diversity programs system-wide. The approaching Centennial encourages us to build relationships that crosscut the full spectrum of American society. By working together to address under-reached audiences in ways that create meaningful park experiences, we ensure that all Americans feel connected to our shared heritage and accept their responsibility as future stewards of the national parks.

We are glad to see the focus on children and diversity in the proposed legislation. While the charitable involvement of the American people has helped preserve and protect our parks, a lot of charitable activity today helps connect children to our parks – something the federal government can't do alone. The National Park Foundation continues to expand and support our own programs surrounding this initiative. We have seen support for the Junior Ranger and WebRangers programs at about \$2.5 million over the last two years and continue to expand and increase our Electronic Field Trips, connecting 37 million children in a simultaneous visit to our parks during the last national park week. We will continue to work to improve the relationship of children to their national parks, and plan to work with private charitable organizations promoting these programs. Additionally, the African American Experience Fund is working to connect people with national parks that present African American history and culture.

We at the National Park Foundation look forward to this century of giving. We will be convening the first National Leadership Summit on Philanthropy and Parks at the University of Texas in Austin on October 14-16 to bring together leaders from across our nation to shape strategies, which will ensure that our national parks remain the world's premier centers of learning, science, recreation, preservation, and partnership.

The state of our parks at the Centennial Celebration in 2016 will say a lot about our priorities as a nation. I applaud efforts to increase base funding for the National Park Service so it can carry out its mission more fully. Opportunities for philanthropy must be central to any Centennial legislation and we are confident this can be accomplished in a manner that allows our partners at the local level to be successful and for programs at the national level to extend the benefits of philanthropy to all parks. Philanthropy is critical to not only leveraging the federal investment, but to creating new opportunities for more of the public to relate to their parks and to generate the creativity and innovation the National Park Service will need in the coming century.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your ongoing support of national parks and for allowing me the opportunity to speak about the important role philanthropy plays in supporting the noble mission of the National Park Service and in connecting all Americans to these very special places.