

**Prepared Testimony of Congressman Brian Higgins (NY-26) on Fiscal Year 2018 Priorities**

**House Appropriations Committee**

**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

**February 28, 2017**

Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding a number of priorities within the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill that play a critical role in my district in Western New York. There are a number of programs that I support in this bill – but I want to highlight just a few here today.

First, I would like to express my support for full funding of programs at the National Park Service that provide assistance to Western New Yorkers seeking to preserve and rehabilitate historic properties in my District and across the country.

Specifically, the Technical Preservation Services account within the National Park Service administers applications for eligibility for use of the federal historic tax credit. As you may know, the federal historic tax credit provides a 20% credit for the rehabilitation of historic properties for income producing purposes. Since the program's creation in 1976, HTCs have rehabilitated more than 39,600 buildings, driving more than \$109 billion in private investment and creating 2.3 million jobs all while providing the Treasury with \$1.25 for each dollar invested.

This use of the historic tax credit is a central component to the revitalization of neighborhoods across my district. In Buffalo and Western New York, the HTC has been vital in stimulating private investment towards urban revitalization by encouraging developers to

purchase dormant commercial buildings and transform them into apartments and office space, contributing to the renaissance of a historic downtown. Since 2002, more than \$70 million in federal historic tax credits have flowed into my community, leading to more than \$420 million in total development. In the absence of these incentives, developers would have considered many of these projects too risky to pursue, leaving many historic properties vacant and left to decay.

Second, I also support funding for the Heritage Partnership Program, which provides grants to state and local governments and nonprofit groups to facilitate the preservation of cultural, historic and natural resources. Through innovative public-private partnerships, National Heritage Areas have effectively leveraged federal resources, attracting an average of \$5.50 of private funding for each dollar appropriated.

In my own district, both the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and the Niagara Falls Heritage Areas have delivered a vast array of recreational and educational opportunities to visitors, residents and the entire region. The Fiscal Year '17 bill included language extending the Erie Canalway's funding cap, and I look forward to seeing that language carried forward in the Fiscal Year '18 bill so that it can continue its important mission.

Third, I urge this Committee to continue to provide funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 2016, the combined federal allocation of the NEA and NEH was .0003% of the \$4 trillion federal budget. In the 114th Congress, the NEA and NEH combined awarded \$837,000 grants to 13 Western New York intuitions. These organizations have been vital to the cultural resurgence in Buffalo and Niagara

Falls. I urge the committee to, at minimum, maintain current funding levels for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Lastly, I encourage the Committee to provide at least \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Since the creation of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in 2010, nearly \$2.2 billion has been invested in projects to clean up the Great Lakes, the world's largest freshwater system. Locally, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative supports a number of initiatives including the restoration of the Buffalo River. Declared biologically dead in 1968, the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper utilized GLRI funding to restore the river through an innovative public-private partnership, which has established the return of various native species of birds, mammals, fish and other creatures as well as canoeists and kayakers, a sight which would have been unthinkable only a few decades ago.

I thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and hope that my testimony has provided insight into the tremendous impact the aforementioned programs have in my community and throughout the country, and the imperative that they continue to receive robust support.