

TESTIMONY
CONGRESSWOMAN TERRI A. SEWELL (AL-07)
INTERIOR APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
02/28/2017

Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum –

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. First, I want to thank this Subcommittee for working with me in the past, and for their demonstrated commitment to historic preservation. As you begin to consider the FY18 Interior Appropriations bill, I ask that you continue to strongly support the Historic Preservation Fund, and the National Park Service Construction Account.

Specifically, I am requesting that \$87.4 million is provided to the Historic Preservation Fund, including \$25 million for the Civil Rights Competitive Grants to preserve, document, and interpret the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement and the African American experience. I am also requesting that \$3 million is included for competitive grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities to document the sites and stories associated with the Civil Rights Movement.

Furthermore, I am requesting that the NPS Construction Account be funded at \$252 million. These dollars fund construction projects, equipment replacement, management, planning, operations, and special projects. Under the Construction Account, I ask that \$4.3 million would support the Civil Rights Initiative by completing high priority facility projects at NPS sites related to the Civil Rights Movement and the African American experience.

My district, the 7th Congressional District of Alabama, is also known as the Civil Rights District. Many historic events took place there, from the bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church, to the Children's March, to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, to Bloody Sunday. These stories are of national and international significance, and we are fortunate that the National Park Service is preserving and interpreting these stories. In my district, we have the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, as well as the new Birmingham Civil Rights Monument. I am so grateful that the Park Service has a strong presence in my district, and I have seen firsthand how seriously they take their mission as the nation's story tellers.

The National Park Service not only preserves the sites and stories of our great American history, but they also bring economic revitalization to communities. In my hometown of Selma, the NPS Selma Interpretive Center brings tourism dollars to a rural black belt community. In Birmingham, the Civil Rights Monument will play a critical role in downtown re-development. In fact, for every dollar invested in National Parks, 10 dollars is generated in national economic activity. National Parks also support more than a quarter million private-sector jobs according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Moreover, the American people overwhelmingly support the National Park Service and their mission. According to the National Parks Conservation Association, 95% of voters support NPS and more than 80% have visited a National Park in their lifetime.

However, the National Park Service has faced deep budgetary limitations in recent years. Their deferred maintenance project list continues to grow, and they have been limited in their ability to protect new sites that would more fully tell America's story. That is why we must

increase the NPS Construction Account to \$252 million in order to complete pending projects and expand NPS's presence in more communities across America.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, we must ensure that the Historic Preservation Fund is strengthened. The foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement are aging, and we must document their stories before they are lost. And who better to document those stories than students from our Historically Black Colleges and Universities. These students are the beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Movement, and they have the opportunity not only to preserve history, but to be inspired by brave Americans that risked their lives in the pursuit of social justice and equality. That is why I am requesting that \$3 million is included for competitive grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities to document the sites and stories associated with the Civil Rights Movement.

The funding that I am requesting is an investment – not only in historic preservation, but in economic re-development. We all have history in our districts, and it needs to be preserved. Thank you for listening to my testimony, and I hope that you strongly consider my request.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.