

Congressman Glenn 'GT' Thompson  
Hearing on H.R.642, the Oil Region National Heritage Area Reauthorization Act  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
April 30, 2019

Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young and Members of the subcommittee: thank you for holding this hearing today and the opportunity to provide testimony about Pennsylvania's Oil Region Heritage Area.

In the 1850s, 'Colonel' Edwin Drake arrived in oil-rich Northwestern Pennsylvania intending to extract petroleum for lighting, lubrication and various other products. After several years, Drake finally built a wood derrick and struck oil nearly 70 feet underground in August of 1859.

As a result of this innovation, Drake drilled the world's first commercially successful oil well and established Pennsylvania as the birthplace of the modern petroleum industry. In the years after Drake's Well, the industry thrived in the region and Northwestern Pennsylvania became an energy powerhouse.

The emergence of the petroleum industry in Pennsylvania had important impacts not just locally and on our nation, but worldwide. It is for this reason that locally we refer to Pennsylvania's Oil Region as "the Valley that changed the world."

With recreational opportunities second to none, beautiful landscapes, and a local national forest, the Pennsylvania Oil Region is a wonderful place to live and visit. As our legacy oil and gas operators continue to play an important role in our economy, we also continue to celebrate this well-known history and communities that directly emerged as a result of Drake's Well and the petroleum revolution.

Because of this region's important historical and cultural significance, President George W. Bush signed into law legislation that created the Oil Region National Heritage Area in 2004.

The Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism is the Heritage Area's coordinating entity. As such, the Alliance is charged with three tasks: Heritage Development, Economic Development, and Tourism Destination Marketing.

From 2005 through 2015, the Oil Region Alliance has invested more than \$6.8 million in Heritage Development projects; \$6.7 million in Economic development activities; and attract nearly 240,000 visitors each year.

Because the 2004 authorization sunsets next year, I have introduced H.R. 642, along with my colleague Congressman Mike Kelly, to extend the authorization for our National Heritage Area through 2026.

Extending this authorization is crucial for the Oil Region Alliance to continue its mission of preserving the Oil Region's history, educating the public about this history, and stimulating the local economy.

One great example of the results of economic development is the Tarbell House, located in Titusville, Pennsylvania. Until 1876, this historic house was the home of legendary investigative journalist Ida Tarbell but recently was fully restored by the Oil Region Alliance and its partners.

While this is just one of the Alliance's projects, they've completed countless other initiatives that support our communities, educate the public and help local businesses grow and thrive.

I am proud to introduce this legislation and look forward to working with you to move H.R.642 through the legislative process. Since the Oil Region Heritage Area expires in the coming year, time is of the essence.

Thank you again for holding this hearing today and the opportunity to be here.