

Testimony of U.S. Representative Tim Ryan (D-OH-13)
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
1334 Longworth House Office Building
Wednesday, May 22, 2019 @ 10:00 a.m.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and I am very excited that you are having this hearing and taking up these initiatives.

My bill—H.R. 2525—is the Steel Valley National Heritage Area Act of 2019. This new heritage area would include Mahoning and Trumbull counties in Northeast Ohio, and Mercer and Lawrence counties in Western Pennsylvania. This legislation designates these counties the Steel Valley National Heritage Area, encouraging community-based historic preservation, natural resource conservation, cultural interpretation, heritage tourism, and recreation.

Northeast Ohio and Western Pennsylvania have a rich steel history. For decades this region was one of the five largest steel making areas in the world. Its mills played a fundamental role in the development of our nation—raising American cities, building iconic infrastructure, and supplying multiple war efforts. At a time when our society was fraught with division, steelmaking created racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities forged by a common identity. Steelworkers powered the labor movement, grew the middle class, and were the economic and cultural lifeblood of the industrial Midwest.

The Steel Valley National Heritage Area would honor this legacy by integrating and promoting steel-related heritage sites, cultural initiatives, and recreational opportunities within this region. The bill establishes a commission of Ohioans and Pennsylvanians with knowledge of historic preservation, conservation, economic development, tourism, organized labor, and the arts.

The story of Steel Valley is the story of America. It is a great story of Americana. We had so many people in our community who for so many years were an integral part of the great industrial middle class in America.

I would just like to say why this bill is important, Madam Chair. We are in the process of reinventing ourselves—Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown, the old steel towns and the old mill towns of the heartland. As we begin to move into the newer technologies, as we move into 3D printing and additive manufacturing, as we move into driverless cars and trucks, electric vehicles, wind and solar—all of these new technologies—it is critically important for us to also remember where we came from.

We have an opportunity to increase the quality of life for people in this region. To be sure, these designations help us designate our history, but it is also a quality of life matter. This allows us to bring investment into these communities. These designations are essential for travel tourism, for restoring a sense of pride to our young people to encourage them to come back. You can have all the jobs you want in the world, but if you do not have quality of life and a sense of place young people will not want to come back to these communities.

This is not just a historic preservation issue, or a conservation issue. It is a much-needed component to economic development in our area. So I'm very thankful for the opportunity to be here, and I hope and encourage the committee to act on the Steel Valley National Heritage Act of 2019.

I yield back the balance of my time.