



United States
of America

Prince William County Public Library
Manassas, VA.

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 95th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 123

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JUNE 6, 1977

No. 96

Prince William County Public Library
Manassas, Va.

House of Representatives

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE: THE MANASSAS NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK BILL

Mr. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, the House of Representatives today has an important opportunity to safeguard a slice of our Nation's history by approving H.R. 2437, my legislation to preserve certain properties on which the Civil War Battles of Manassas occurred. This bill would add approximately 1,800 acres in both Prince William and Fairfax Counties, Va., to the current Manassas National Battlefield Park, a national attraction just 30 miles from the Nation's Capital.

SUPPORT FOR PRESERVATION WIDESPREAD

Legislation to preserve the park's boundaries essentially identical to H.R.

2437 passed the House of Representatives on September 29, 1976, as part of H.R. 14224, an omnibus national parks bill. This year's bill is cosponsored by five of my colleagues from Virginia—Congressman ELLER, Congressman DAN DANIEL, Congressman FISHER, Congressman THURMOND, and Congressman WHITMAN. The bill was reported from the House Interior Committee by a unanimous vote with the Department of the Interior supporting expansion.

Support from organizations is wide ranging, including the American Legion and the Civil War Round Table Associates. Additionally, preservation of the park has been endorsed by the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Prince William Federation of Civic Associations, the Prince William League for the Preservation of Natural Resources, and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

I am pleased to share with my colleagues two editorials from community newspapers, the Manassas Journal Messenger and the Potomac News, which also lend their support to preserving these properties:

From the Manassas (Va.) Journal Messenger

Public projects should be administered in such a manner as to provide the maximum benefit for the general public. The subversion of plans for the expansion of the Manassas National Battlefield Park to be used as a medium for opposition to the Marriott Great America theme park were wisely avoided by Congressman Herbert E. Harris in his remarks before an obviously biased group of Park neighbors Sunday evening. In covering the meeting, this editorial writer could not help but notice that many of those present wished to embroil the Congressman's proposal in their continuing fight to drive Marriott out of their own back yard. Some even expressed concern that the Park's future plans might open too much of the Park's land to public access and the possibility that their heretofore untrammelled vistas might be tarnished by the sight of fellow Americans partaking of one of our great historical heritages.

As the one who first suggested that Mr. Harris consider the proposal for the expansion of the Battlefield Park after his predecessor's eleventh-hour attempt to get such legislation through Congress, this editorial writer finds much to commend in this new bill. The bill charts the way for future expansion without committing any tax funds to the acquisition of property or scenic easements. Instead of emphasizing condemnation and coercion on property owners, the bill maintains the right of choice for all concerned. It provides an opportunity for the National Park Service to assimilate a modest amount of additional acreage to ensure reasonable protection for the historic investment contained in the present boundaries. As such, the proposal should stand on its merits for what it can do for the general public under the administration of the Park Service.

Similar planning should have been done many years ago, but since it had not been done, it is best that action in this direction begin now. The limited amount of taxable land which might be lost to the county tax rolls would be more than compensated by additional parkland within the county for which the taxpayers would not have to lay out one red cent for either acquisition or maintenance. In a county which is already overtaxed and for which no reasonable master plan is likely to emerge, the expansion

of the Park should serve as a buffer against additional spot zoning. Even if Marriott's refined zoning request for its self-contained project should be approved, an expanded Battlefield Park offers the best hope of eliminating peripheral development in the vicinity.

In spite of the temptation to lump the Marriott application and the Battlefield Park legislation into one neat package, the two must be considered separately. The current hedgepodge of development which has been permitted to occur in Prince William County points up the future difficulty which may be experienced in acquiring land for historical or recreational purposes. It also underscores the need for the county to halt the proliferation of spot zoning and ill-planned development by early initiation of a meaningful master plan. Expansion of the Battlefield is a federal matter which deserves the support of Prince William County citizens. Controlling the county's other development is a local matter which must be handled by supervisors with enough gumption to construct a no-nonsense comprehensive plan and stick to it.

In the interim, county citizens could do well to express support for the proposal to expand the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The legislation prepared has the double advantage of being non-coercive and free of drain on the taxpayer dollar. It charts a course for the future by enabling the National Park Service to make its acquisitions of land and easements as time and money permit. It is legislation which affords a good chance of passage by the Congress and ultimate approval by the President. It is legislation for the future whose groundwork must be laid today. The project should be backed on its merits and for no other reason. Other controversies should be settled elsewhere by those charged with the responsibility of handling them. The public interest demands no less.