

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN P. MARTIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1686, TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION HERITAGE ACT OF 1988 TO PROVIDE FOR THE OPERATION OF THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER.

May 16, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 1686, a bill to amend the Constitution Heritage Act of 1988.

The Department supports enactment of S. 1686 with some amendments.

The construction of the National Constitution Center (NCC) was a major component of the reconstruction of Independence Mall, the three city blocks north of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This multi-year planning effort also included a new Independence Visitor's Center completed in 2001, and the Liberty Bell Center completed in 2003.

Improvements to the Mall landscape are continuing.

The NCC represents a true exemplar of the value of public-private partnerships being undertaken today at Independence National Historical Park by the National Park Service. The state of the art facility, designed with more than 100 advanced interactive exhibits, opened to rave reviews on July 4, 2003, and continues to provide an outstanding visitor experience. Visitors to the NCC come away with an understanding of the framing and implementation of the Constitution of the United States, and as important, its continuing relevance to today's society. The NCC's programs are challenging, thought provoking and have received wide acclaim by visitors and

scholars alike. The National Park Service is proud and privileged to be a partner with the non-profit organization of the same name, the National Constitution Center, which operates the NCC, in this most successful endeavor.

S. 1686 would clarify the authorities that support current operations and agreements between the National Park Service and National Constitution Center. It would amend Section 4 of the Constitution Heritage Act of 1988 by adding a new subsection (c) relating to provisions of a cooperative agreement between the Secretary of the Interior and the National Constitution Center. The provisions specify that any revenues from facilities and services of the NCC shall be made available to the National Constitution Center to offset operating expenses without further appropriation, as is the current practice. It would also ensure the continuation of an existing cooperative agreement, and allow a subsequent agreement to be negotiated for up to 30 years, instead of the current limit of five years. This longer time period would facilitate the National Constitution Center's efforts to obtain financing. Other provisions would require the National Constitution Center to purchase insurance, provide annual reports, and take other administrative steps as part of a cooperative agreement. The bill also provides amendments to a number of sections by striking the word "Center" and inserting "NCC" to clarify the difference between the physical building and the 501(c)(3) organization.

The relationship of the National Park Service with the National Constitution Center is a significant model for successful public-private partnerships. We look forward to continuing our productive partnership in the future and request that the committee favorably act on S. 1686.

We propose a few amendments to the bill to clarify when we are referring to the organization operating the NCC and not to the actual building. In addition, based on Public Law 107-217, we need to update a reference to an existing law that has been superseded. We would be glad to work with the committee on these proposed amendments.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the committee might have.