



Testimony of O. James Lighthizer, President Civil War Trust

Before the Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies United States House of Representatives

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is James Lighthizer, and I am the President of the Civil War Trust. I come before you today to respectfully request that the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies fund the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program (CWBPP), financed through the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the Department of Interior, at its authorized amount of \$10 million.

I would like to start by providing a little information about our organization. The Civil War Trust is a 55,000-member nonprofit organization — the only national one of its kind — dedicated to preserving America's remaining Civil War battlefields. To date, the Trust has permanently protected more than 32,000 acres of hallowed ground in 20 states, most of it outside National Park Service (NPS) boundaries.

I am here today to discuss with you the highly effective federal land conservation program that has made much of our success possible: the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program (CWBPP). This authorized competitive matching grants program, operated through the National Park Service (NPS) American Battlefield Protection Program office, requires a 1 to 1 federal/non-federal match, although on many occasions the federal dollars are leveraged much more than 1 to 1. The program has successfully promoted cooperative partnerships between state and local governments and the private sector to preserve targeted, high priority Civil War battlegrounds outside NPS boundaries. Since it was first funded in Fiscal Year (FY) 1999, the program has been used to protect more than 17,500 acres of our nation's hallowed ground.

Battlefield Lands are Our Shared American Heritage

These battlefield lands are an irreplaceable part of our shared national heritage. These lands are consecrated with the blood of brave Americans who fought and died to create the country we are today. By preserving these hallowed grounds, we can rightfully honor all who made the ultimate sacrifice, whether it was on the rolling fields of Gettysburg or the sandy beaches of Fort Wagner.

Development threatens to erase these sacred sites; living history — our shared history — will consequently fade into distant memory. The private sector organizations engaged in battlefield preservation — and we are just one among many nonprofit battlefield preservation groups — are competing with developers to acquire this land. Once these hallowed grounds are lost, they are lost forever.

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We estimate that 30 acres of battlefield lands are lost every day. These lands, when preserved, serve as outdoor classrooms to educate current and future generations of Americans about this defining moment in our nation's history. In addition, preserved battlefields are economic drivers for communities, bringing in tourism dollars that are extremely important to state and local economies.

With the sesquicentennial commemoration of the Civil War underway, now is the opportune time to reaffirm our national commitment to the protection of these hallowed grounds. Throughout the sesquicentennial, millions are expected to learn about our nation's unique history by visiting Civil War sites around the country. This anniversary provides the perfect opportunity to promote preservation of Civil War battlefields.

Origins of the Program

In 1990, Congress created the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC), a blue-ribbon panel composed of lawmakers, historians and preservationists. Its goal: determine how to protect America's remaining Civil War battlefields. In 1993, the Commission released a study entitled "Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields." The report identified the 384 most historically important Civil War battlegrounds and further prioritized them according to preservation status and historic significance. Eighteen years later, this landmark report and a recent update conducted by NPS remain our guide for targeting only the most historically significant remaining Civil War battlefields.

In addition to creating a prioritized list of battlefield preservation targets, the Commission also recommended that Congress establish a federal matching grant program to help the nonprofit sector save high-priority Civil War battlefields. The Commission's proposal for a federal matching grant program was the genesis of the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program.

Congressional Funding and First Successes

Five years after the "Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields" was released, Congress acted upon the Commission's recommendation by setting aside \$8 million over a three-year period from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for Civil War preservation matching grants. Grants were competitively awarded through the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP), an arm of NPS. Funding was solely for acquisition of properties outside NPS boundaries at battlefields identified in the 1993 report. Land could be purchased from willing sellers only; there was — and there remains — no eminent domain authority.

Thanks to the new program, there began an unprecedented and almost-immediate surge in Civil War battlefield preservation. The \$8 million appropriation generated \$24 million for land acquisition by encouraging state and private investment in battlefield land protection. The program inspired the Virginia and Mississippi legislatures to appropriate

\$3.4 million and \$2.8 million, respectively, to meet the federal match. The Civil War Trust alone contributed \$4 million in private sector funds to meet the match. As a result of the non-federal funds generated by the program, battlefields like Virginia's Brandy Station and Manassas received a new lease on life. In addition, other sites such as Prairie Grove in Arkansas, Champion Hill in Mississippi, and Bentonville in North Carolina — just to name a few — were substantially enhanced. Largely because of the success of those first three years, Congress appropriated an additional \$11 million for the program in FY2002.

Authorization of the Program

The Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program was first authorized through the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Act of 2002. Supporters on Capitol Hill felt that authorization of the program would convey to the Department of the Interior Congressional intent regarding the program's goals and objectives. The bipartisan bill formally tied the program to the 1993 CWSAC report, creating a federal conservation program with a highly focused, prioritized list of acquisition targets. It also provided for an annual appropriation of up to \$10 million per year — the level originally recommended by the Commission in 1993. The Civil War Battlefield Preservation Act was passed with the unanimous consent of both the House and Senate in the fall of 2002, and was signed into law by President Bush on December 17, 2002 (P.L. 107-359). Authorization has provided funding predictability for the program's non-federal partners, encouraging continued private-sector involvement in battlefield preservation.

Program's Continued Successes and Reauthorization

Since the program was first funded in FY1999, Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program grants have been used to protect 17,500 acres of hallowed ground in 14 states. Among the many battlefields that have benefited from this program are: Antietam, Maryland; Aversboro, North Carolina; Chancellorsville, Virginia; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Corinth, Mississippi; Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; Mill Springs, Kentucky; and Prairie Grove, Arkansas.

The Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program was reauthorized as part of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (H.R. 146), which President Obama signed into law on March 30, 2009 (P.L. 111-11).

Urgent Need for Funding

We thank the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies for providing \$9 million for the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program in FY2012. This appropriation has allowed for the preservation of many historically significant lands at battlefields such as: Bentonville, North Carolina; Franklin, Tennessee; Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; New Market Heights, Virginia; South Mountain, Maryland; and Perryville, Kentucky.

To build off the successes of the program in FY2012, we respectfully ask the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to fund the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program at its authorized amount of \$10 million. We recognize that these are difficult economic times and appreciate the constraints on this Subcommittee as you work to draft an appropriation bill that meets the needs of the agencies and programs under your jurisdiction. However, we believe that now, as we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the conflict that shaped our nation, is the opportune time to provide robust funding for the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program.

Funding at this level will allow for the continued success of the program and the preservation of key battlefield lands that will serve as lasting, tangible legacies for the sesquicentennial. In addition, with time rapidly running out to forever protect these hallowed grounds, funding for this program will soon no longer be necessary. We estimate that in the next ten years the remaining Civil War battlefield lands will be either paved over or protected. That is why we must act now in order to preserve as much key battlefield land as possible before time runs out.

Conclusion

There is no question that the Civil War was a defining moment in our country's history. For four long years, North and South clashed in hundreds of battles that reunited our nation and sounded the death knell for slavery. More than 625,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians perished as a result of the war.

Preserved battlefields not only honor the memory of our Civil War ancestors, but all of our nation's brave men and women in uniform. Further, preserved battlefields serve as outdoor classrooms to teach new generations of Americans about the significance of the Civil War — and remind them that the freedoms we enjoy today came at a terrific price.

Mr. Chairman, I sincerely hope you and your subcommittee will consider our request to provide funding of the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program at its authorized level of \$10 million. We look forward to working with you and other subcommittee members on battlefield protection and other historic preservation issues. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.