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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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Testimony of
The Honorable Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Re: The Paterson Great Falls National Park Act of 2007, HR 189

before the
House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing
U.S. House of Representatives

March 29, 2007

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I very much appreciate your having me here today.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss an issue that is very close to my heart - the possible creation of a National Historical Park at the Great Falls Historic District in Paterson, New Jersey. I am confident that you will find that the Great Falls Historic District is uniquely deserving of being designated a National Park Service unit.

Fifteen miles west of New York City, the Great Falls was the second largest waterfall in colonial America. No other natural wonder in America has played such an important role in our nation's historic quest for freedom and prosperity. At the Great Falls, Alexander Hamilton conceived and implemented a plan to harness the force of water to power the new industries that would secure our economic independence.

Hamilton told Congress and the American people that at the Great Falls he would begin to implement his ambitious strategy to transform a rural agricultural society, dependent upon slavery, into a modern economy based on freedom. True to Hamilton's vision, Paterson became a great manufacturing city, producing the Colt revolver, the first submarine, the aircraft engine for the first trans-Atlantic flight, more locomotives than any city in the nation, and more silk than any city in the world.

Scholars have concluded that Pierre L'Enfant's innovative water power system in Paterson, and many factories built later, constitute the finest remaining collection of engineering and architectural structures representing each stage of America's progress from a weak agrarian society to a leader in the global economy.

This proposed National Park would also encompass historic Hinchliffe Stadium, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service in 2004. This

stadium, built in 1932, is adjacent to the Great Falls and was home to the New York Black Yankees. Baseball legend Larry Doby played in Hinchliffe Stadium both as a star high school athlete and again as a Negro League player, shortly before becoming the first African-American to play in the American League.

Notably, the Great Falls Historic District is the only National Historic District that includes both a National Natural Resource and a National Historic Landmark. In a special Bicentennial speech in Paterson with the spectacular natural beauty of the Great Falls in the background, the late President Gerald R. Ford said, "We can see the Great Falls as a symbol of the industrial might which helps to make America the most powerful nation in the world."

As a lifelong resident of Paterson and the city's former mayor, I continue to live and work in the shadow of the Great Falls of the Passaic. I have fought for many years to bring much deserved recognition to this natural wonder and historic landmark.

In the 1970s, I worked closely with Mary Ellen Kramer, who was the driving force in gaining Federal recognition of the Great Falls Historic District. I was there on that great day in June 1976 when President Ford came to Paterson and designated the 118 surrounding Great Falls a National Historic Landmark. As Mayor of Paterson, I worked closely with fellow Patersonian Senator Frank Lautenberg, who was a warrior for this worthy cause.

Now, so many years later, we are that much closer to making the dream of a National Park in Paterson a reality. The legislation we are here to discuss today, the Paterson Great Falls National Park Act of 2007, would achieve this long sought-after goal. This bill is cosponsored by every Member of New Jersey's Congressional delegation, both Democrats and Republicans, and companion legislation has been introduced in the Senate.

National conservation and historic preservation organizations, our nation's most renowned Hamilton scholars, an esteemed former Smithsonian Institution curator, and distinguished professors at Yale, Princeton, Harvard, NYU, Brown and other universities have documented that this historic district meets all of the standards to become a National Historical Park.

Editorial boards, federal, state, and local officials and community groups, including New Jersey's Governor Corzine, have also endorsed the campaign to award a National Park Service designation to the Falls.

Some have argued that because the State of New Jersey, the City of Paterson, and other entities are working to protect and preserve the Great Falls Historic District, that we do not need a National Park there as well. This is completely false.

Governor Corzine himself has maintained that the State of New Jersey cannot preserve, protect, and present the Great Falls Historic District to the public without Federal Government assistance. Additionally, in order to attract private investment, it is imperative that the site be designated a National Park. In the long-term, major private donors will require the integrity, professionalism, continuity, and permanence of the National Park System.

The National Park Service has a long history of federal-state cooperation, from Lowell in Massachusetts to Redwood in California. It is Park Service policy to foster state and federal partnerships to fund and manage parks, and Great Falls should be no different.

Mr. Chairman, if the Great Falls District were added to the Park System, federal resources could be leveraged to revitalize the Great Falls area, refurbishing the beautiful, historic mill buildings and maintaining and protecting the waterfall.

Through this federal partnership, the Great Falls would be transformed into an attraction for visitors and Patersonians alike that could lead to the economic revitalization of Paterson, and be a living reminder of our nation's rich industrial history.

Congress must act now to pass this vital piece of legislation, so that we may fully recognize these cultural and historic landmarks that have played such a seminal role in America's history.

Thank you for your time.