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Oversight Hearing on "Management of the Statue of Liberty National Monument"*

The Once and Future New York Harbor

New York Harbor is a remarkable 771 miles of coastline dotted with city, state and national parklands full of rich history, culture and natural splendor, a place that is ranked among the great wonders of the world. Today, it is poised for the first time in a generation, to realize its potential as a national park.

America begins in New York and New York begins on the Harbor. From the time of the first explorers, to successive waves of immigrants, to shipmasters and pleasure-boaters, it is the link that first attracted settlers to the new world and propelled the city's growth into the nation's most populous, most vibrant city.

In the 19th century, Herman Melville wrote in the opening pages of *Moby Dick*, all Manhattan streets led *water ward*, and the shore was filled with dreamers staring out to sea on a Sunday afternoon. Later, New York turned its back on the harbor, ringing it with highways, parking lots and housing projects, as Broadway eclipsed Riverside Drive. Ordinary New Yorkers lost their access to the water and even the sense that the water was there. They hardly knew they lived on an archipelago.

But there remained people -- visionaries -- who saw that New York Harbor was still one of the world's great natural seaports. Marian S. Heiskell, the chairman of the National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy, was an early pioneer.

The concept of an urban national park first emerged thirty years ago when Mrs. Heiskell and other farsighted New Yorkers, including Mayor John V. Lindsay and New York Congressman William Fitts Ryan, secured the transfer of a unique amalgam of sandy beaches, secluded inlets and grasslands, wildlife refuges and forests, camping and playing fields, historic forts, military bases and airfields on New York Harbor to the National Park Service, saving them from development and placing them under the protection of the federal government. In 1972, Congress ratified the transfer by creating *Gateway National Recreation Area*.

The vision for *Gateway* was to bring a national park experience to city dwellers, to those who were not afforded the opportunity to go camping in Yosemite or Yellowstone or snorkel in the great coral reefs of the Virgin Islands.

Gateway's founders wisely wanted just one thing more: federal funds to finance public transportation links to the park. That was where Congress drew the line, however. And perhaps that is why, in part, *Gateway* has still not realized its full potential.

It was not until this decade that other visionaries stepped forward invited by the National Park Service, which integrated *Gateway* with other 22 other national parklands in and around the harbor, including landmarks like the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, designating this new constellation as the “*National Parks of New York Harbor.*” The National Park Service invested \$3.0 million towards its launch including imaginative new icons to unite its family of parks. [*See attached.*]

In 2001, the private sector, led again by Mrs. Heiskell and joined by me, David Rockefeller Jr., whose family for more than 100 years has been in the forefront of preserving public land for the American people, and the Congressionally-chartered National Park Foundation, were asked to harness the energy of the community and provide a collective vision for these disparate places. We ultimately founded a new non-profit entity, the *National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy.*

In New York, there had been no private citizen voice to speak for these unheralded parklands. There had been no outreach to connect these parklands, or, for that matter, those administered by other jurisdictions. There had been no unified, powerful, accessible and attainable vision for the future of all our parklands to inspire and guide a new era of stewardship, conservation, respect and understanding of our heritage.

The prospect was indeed daunting. But, the potential was awe-inspiring. We accepted the challenge. With initial funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and The New York Times Company Foundation, we began to spearhead an innovative portfolio of programs, projects and activities to help these parks shine and to make them more accessible.

With 26,000 acres, the National Park Service is the largest landholder, public or private, on the waterfront, hosting approximately 20 million visitors annually --- four million of whom visit the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

Lower Manhattan is the epicenter of its network of harbor parks, historic sites and recreation areas that arc across three other boroughs of the city --- Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island --- and across to New Jersey on both the Upper and Lower Bays of the harbor. [*See attached map.*]

Last year, Mayor Bloomberg envisioned “Harbor District,” a new tourist destination on the inner harbor. Our Harbor Conservancy is a member of the Harbor District Advisory Board. It is consortium of existing parks such as Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Liberty State Park and Battery Park, and new parks in development, including Hudson River Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and Governors Island, for 200 years-off limits to the public and recently transferred to the State and City of New York with the National Park Service having jurisdiction over 26 acres.

But, you can't get from one to the other. Beyond the National Park Service trip to the Statue or Ellis, the natural asset that touches each park --- the harbor itself --- has been a barrier rather than a seamless transportation artery.

What does this mean for today's hearing on the "*Management of the Statue of Liberty?*"

For all the National Parks of New York Harbor, especially *Gateway* and the city's new proposed *Harbor District* to realize their full potential, the four million annual visitors should be afforded the opportunity to make the Statue of Liberty not merely a final destination *but their gateway to the other harbor parks and destinations.*

With private funding and in partnership with *Gateway*, our Harbor Conservancy has commissioned an *actionable* transportation plan. There is no doubt it will propose specific routes via the expansion of transportation services to Statue of Liberty, especially from there to *Gateway*, and will further define the Statue's vital role in any overall vision for harbor transportation.

We are very pleased that the new contract between the National Park Service and Hornblower Yachts finally calls for looking at additional ferry routes in the Harbor. Hornblower also included Governors Island as a stop on their new island tour to Statue and Ellis Islands. So, for the first time, a visitor will experience two jewels on the harbor in the course of one trip.

For the first time in a generation, a ferry operator stands ready --- in all ways possible --- to help link national parks into a seamless necklace, a viable harbor-wide transportation system including neighboring parks in all five boroughs. He does so as a *new* New Yorker and as a good citizen involved in the life of our great international city and its harbor for the future benefit and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.

With the National Parks of New York Harbor, the Harbor Conservancy inaugurated a harbor visitor center at Federal Hall and since last year thousands have visited the site. In two harbor tours that the Harbor Conservancy itself launched, we've already demonstrated that there is a market for tourism that goes well beyond the harbor's signature destinations. For three years, our *Gateway to America* harbor tour has run seven times daily telling the stories of the historic, cultural and urban estuary. Our military history tour relates the complete and untold story of harbor defense, from the Battery where the Dutch originated homeland security nearly 400 years ago, to a New York attacked and held hostage until the end of the Revolutionary War, to a city that was never attacked again until September 11.

We can already measure our success, not just by revenue to the ferry operator and to the Harbor Conservancy, but also by our ability to interpret these places and share their stories, stories that help visitors to experience the history of our great nation where it began.

Beyond tourists to the Statue, another one million visitors are going on our tours and on other harbor excursions. A generous gift of \$1.0 million from Tiffany & Co. Foundation will enable us to produce, among other programs, two new harbor tour excursions.

However, only one of the National Park sites has docks to welcome these potential visitors.

Last weekend I traveled by ferry past the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island and to sites that may be less well known to the members of this committee, but equally steeped in history.

Experiencing the majesty of the harbor from the Lower Bay, passing under the Verrazano Bridge past the parks of Gateway National Recreation Area in Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island and New Jersey, we strain for adjectives to describe the natural history of New York Harbor that ordained its destiny.

With ferries shuttling back and forth, we now are now afforded a rare opportunity, to finally access these places and at the same time help reconcile the yearnings for a national park experience that will enrich the lives of all Americans, reminding them that these parks belong to them and illuminate and celebrate human achievement.

Our promise is to make the Arrowhead --- the symbol for the greatest and most enduring conservation movement the modern world has known --- and the National Park Service Ranger as recognized on the harbor as they are on the trails of Yosemite.

Today, with the leadership of the National Park Service, and other harbor partners, we are working to restore the harbor to the people to create the finest urban waterfront park system in the world and then *to help get you there.*

National Parks of New York Harbor Icons

CASTLE
CLINTON

GATEWAY

FORT
HANCOCK

GENERAL
GRANT ***
MEMORIAL

FORT
WADSWORTH

JAMAICA
BAY

MILLER
FIELD

FLOYD
BENNETT
FIELD

ST. PAUL'S
CHURCH

GREAT
KILLS
PARK

FORT
TILDEN

HAMILTON
GRANGE

CANARSIE
PIER

JACOB
RIIS
PARK

THEODORE
ROOSEVELT
BIRTHPLACE

SANDY
HOOK

BREEZY
POINT

Map of The National Parks of New York Harbor



