

Testimony of Senator Chris Dodd before Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks

Chairman Akaka, Senator Thomas, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of S. 2519, the Coltsville Study Act. I would especially like to thank my colleagues from Connecticut who have joined me in support of this legislation - Senator Lieberman, who is a cosponsor of the Senate bill, Congressman Larson, who introduced the House version, and Congressman Shays, who is a cosponsor.

The bill direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of Coltsville in Connecticut for potential inclusion in the National Parks System. I recognize that when most of us think of National Parks, we picture the vast, sprawling landscapes of Yellowstone and Yosemite. Clearly, Connecticut's smaller size precludes it from having a national park on the scale of these sites. In fact, Connecticut itself is only about twice the size of Yellowstone National Park and currently has only one national park, the Weir Farm National Historic Site, which spans 60 acres in Ridgefield and Wilton. But, while Connecticut may not possess the physical grandeur of our nation's largest parks, it is home to a rich national heritage that must be made accessible to every American. For this reason, my colleagues and I are proposing to designate a new national park for Connecticut in the area known as Coltsville.

Located in the Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood in Hartford, Coltsville grew around Samuel Colt's firearms factory, a landmark red brick building with a blue onion dome, during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. Colt made Hartford the center of precision manufacturing. While Americans may associate the name Sam Colt with firearms, the Colt legacy goes far beyond. Colt was a key figure of the Industrial Revolution, contributing to the development of waterproof ammunition, underwater mines, and the telegraph. He was also the first American manufacturer to open a plant overseas. Colt set the standard for a nation that fast became known for its technological innovations and industrial productivity. It is also a little-known fact that after Colt's death in 1862, his widow, Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, successfully managed Colt Industries for 42 years and presided over the company during its most prosperous years in a period when men dominated the industrial world.

Today, the Colt armory remains a beacon in the Hartford skyline, and Coltsville still boasts grand Victorian homes, including Armsmear, the home of Sam and Elizabeth Colt, which has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Other nearby attractions include old mill housing, the Church of the Good Shepherd, and the Colt Memorial. A national park at Coltsville would be the main venue on a tour of Hartford that could include sites such as the houses of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Museum of American Political Life, and the riverfront. It would also be a prime destination for anyone taking an

extended tour of historic and scenic New England.

A national park at Coltsville would include about 260 acres and be comprised of both public and private space. The centerpiece would be a museum within the armory celebrating Sam Colt and the growth of American industry. The museum could hold the vast collection of Colt firearms that currently rests in the Museum of Connecticut History as well as other machinery and memorabilia from the industrial revolution. Private property which is currently located within the proposed boundaries of the park, such as artists' studios and condominiums, could remain private. In fact, a museum and visitors' center in the Colt armory itself would take up only part of the building, the rest of which could be left open for private development. The armory already houses a business that manufactures replica Colt firearms, which would only enhance the proposed museum.

The tourist interest sparked by the site would work in tandem with endeavors stimulating business growth, such as the Adriaen's Landing project, to contribute to the continuing economic revival of Connecticut's capital city. One need only look as far as Lowell, Massachusetts, to see what a national park can do for a city. The designation of Lowell National Historic Park has done wonders for a city that is about the same size as Hartford. The textile mills and canals at Lowell have been described as must-see attractions in tourist guidebooks, and I am certain that if Coltsville is designated a national park, the same will be said about the Colt armory and its surroundings.

Mr. Chairman, I am aware that the budgetary hurdles that must be overcome are significant, and that the Administration is reluctant to designate new parks while we are still working to reduce the maintenance backlog at our existing parks. However, I do not believe that we should let these obstacles stand in the way of a project that enjoys bipartisan support from public officials such as our governor, John Rowland, and the Mayor of Hartford, Eddie Perez, as well as important civic groups like the Connecticut Historical Society, the Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame. Finally, the owner of the site is fully supportive of this study.

Finally, I want to convey my support for S. 1609, legislation to authorize a feasibility study of the Metacomet Trail (Connecticut), Mattabesett (Connecticut) and the Monadnock Trail (Massachusetts) for inclusion as a national historic trail. Development threatens many parts of the Northeast and the trails in Connecticut are important and unique ecological resources. There is broad public and private support for this legislation.

I am grateful to the committee for holding a hearing on these important proposals, and I urge my colleagues to report these bills from committee at the earliest convenience.

