

TESTIMONY OF PAUL W. BUCHA ON HOUSE BILL 2082

Pennsylvania House of Representatives Gaming Oversight Committee

Wednesday, February 8, 2012, 9:30 AM EST

I would like to thank the members of this committee for allowing me to speak here today on behalf, and in favor of House Bill 2082. If enacted, this legislation would permanently protect Gettysburg National Military Park and Flight 93 National Memorial, two of our nation's most hallowed and historic sites, from incompatible casino development.

While others will undoubtedly speak to the economic power of heritage tourism and the role it plays in creating sustainable, non-exportable jobs, I am not here to discuss such concerns, as important as they may be. Rather, as a veteran of the United States Army and a recipient of the Medal of Honor, I am here today to testify on behalf of the fallen – to speak for those who can no longer do so themselves.

As a combat veteran, Gettysburg matters a great deal to me. All around Gettysburg, I think is, perhaps the most hallowed ground in the United States — and for that matter, probably all of North America. The history of what happened there does not simply begin and end at an imaginary line drawn by the National Park Service. The battlefield at Gettysburg was immense — and the significance of what happened there was even larger.

Make no mistake: Gettysburg is more than a bucolic landscape, it is a living, breathing memorial that commemorates where men fought and bled, died and were buried. Each step you take is on ground that was soaked with the blood of Americans, fighting over principals. Not with the purpose of gaining wealth, not with the purpose of expanding the size of the country, but over profound principals.

Too many times in modern wars we forget what it must have been like to fight on American soil, to invade their neighbor's farm and try to kill them, or to defend your own home from the same. It must have had a passion to it that was absolutely incredible.

For me and, I firmly believe, most Americans, visiting Gettysburg is like walking in to a huge cathedral consecrated with the blood of our ancestors, men who volunteered to lay down their lives for the principles that continue to shape our nation today. It is a special place, a sacrosanct spot. It's not a place for games, or for someone to tongue-in-cheek try to make a buck. This is a place for people to understand how important values are, and to remember what thousands of young boys and men did here 150 years ago, and to realize that the impact of those heroic acts did not just last three days, nor for the remainder of the war. From their sacrifice, our nation emerged stronger than ever before, recommitted to the principles of liberty and equality. The blood spilled at Gettysburg forged the country we inhabit today and we must not forget that basic fact.

In a world where division, partisanship and discord seem to plague every aspect of life, there are fewer and fewer places which bind us together, which remind us of what “e Pluribus Unum” really means. Gettysburg is one of those places.

Flight 93 National Memorial is another. Although separated in time by nearly a century and a half, the events these two sites commemorate are deeply connected in the continuum of American history. On the fields of Gettysburg, the fate of our nation hung in the balance as two great armies wrestled for the destiny of a continent. For three days, 51,000 Americans shed their blood, giving what President Abraham Lincoln, termed “the last full measure of devotion” for causes dearer to them than life itself. Within our own lifetimes, in the skies over Shanksville, a cadre of everyday Americans stood up for those same principles as they overtook their attackers on United Flight 93.

Though separated by many years, Gettysburg and Flight 93 share a unique bond – they are places on the Pennsylvanian landscape where American blood was spilled in defense of our most basic ideals – where fields ran red with the living crimson of our countrymen who fell in defense of liberty.

The 10-mile casino buffer proposed in this bill proactively addresses the concerns of the majority of Pennsylvanians who feel that sites like Gettysburg and Flight 93 deserve our respect and attention. It is a worthwhile piece of common-sense legislation that has also been endorsed by the American Legion, America’s largest Veterans service organization.

I firmly believe that a vote in favor of House Bill 2082 is a vote in favor of honoring American sacrifice, whenever it occurred. A vote for this bill proves we have taken to heart the challenge laid forth by Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg in 1863, we too highly resolve that these dead have not died in vain.

And so, in closing I would ask that you never forget why we preserve these places; but more importantly, I would ask that you honor that memory in both word and deed by voting yes on House Bill 2082 to permanently protect these magnificent American treasures.