

Securing History

The Times of Trenton Editorials

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In the rush toward the future, we're all too apt to cast aside pieces of the past standing in the way of that progress.

Landfills are rife with the outmoded, the world of fashion depends upon such transience, and vast areas are paved in favor of something bigger, better, newer.

As the pace and demands of the modern world continue to accelerate, though, we need to keep in mind a sense of the history that lies at the foundation and character of this country. There's no better way to do so than by visiting one of the many sites preserved as living monuments to those who died fighting for liberty.

In this history-rich region, there are an array of sites that help tell the epic story of the quest for independence and democracy. But here, as in other areas of the country, unchecked development threatens to shadow and swallow some of these battlefields and related sites. Concern over that encroachment prompted U.S. Rep Rush Holt, D-N.J., to sponsor legislation that would establish a federal grant program specifically for preserving and protecting battle sites associated with the American Revolution and the War of 1812. The preservation act, which has been passed in the House and now awaits a vote in the Senate, would address sites in 33 states.

There's a pressing need for action: 170 of 677 nationally significant sites, including the Princeton Battlefield State Park, are in danger of being destroyed in the next 10 years, according to a National Park Service report.

"The battlefields of the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 provide a unique opportunity for Americans to experience where and how the epic struggle for our nation's independence took place," Holt said. "Preserving these American historic treasures is essential in remembering the sacrifices that our forefathers made to secure our freedom and independence, and in educating future generations about our rich cultural history."

Holt's legislation, which proposes that the preservation be financed through the existing Land and Water Conservation Fund, also calls for working closely with state and local governments to maintain the sites.

Such a collaborative effort should go a long way toward conserving these sites as reminders and a touchstone of the sacrifice and courage that changed the course of human events in those very uncertain times. It would also further establish the Trenton area, the site of so many decisive battles in the American Revolution, as a tourist destination.

With the amplified federal backing, New Jersey and other states will be able to fend off developers and maintain these sites not as Disneyfied attractions but with the dignity they deserve.

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