

On April 24, 2010, Congressman David Price addressed Blue Ridge Parkway 75th Anniversary Symposium on Appalachian State University's Campus in Boone, NC. The text of Congressman Price's remarks is below:

Thank you for inviting me to join you for this 75th anniversary observance. It is good to be back at Appalachian State University and to see the remarkable work that has gone on here; we are especially grateful to Chancellor and Mrs. Peacock for their gracious hospitality.

My wife Lisa and I take special pleasure in being here, for we both have fond childhood memories of family trips up and down the Blue Ridge Parkway. I'm also happy to be here with my sister, Mary Anne, and her husband, Sam Combs; they live a few miles off the Parkway in Little Switzerland and thus have reason to appreciate it almost every day.

In utilitarian terms, a parkway is simply a road. Our distinguished Secretary of Transportation, Gene Conti, has reminded us of the historic role the Parkway has played in North Carolina's transportation system; his presence at this conference attests to the Parkways' importance to our state. But unlike most of the roads his department maintains, this one is not designed to take people from one point to another in the shortest possible time.

Although the Parkway has been around much longer than the Beatles song, it is in many ways the quintessential "long and winding road," linking Shenandoah National Park and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The drive leads us on a breathtaking 500 mile journey along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains and invokes the very spirit of Appalachia.

For me, being here is really coming home. I grew up in East Tennessee -- in Erwin just across the border -- alongside the Appalachian Trail and near one of the routes originally considered for the Blue Ridge Parkway. That meant that while I was on the Trail frequently, the Parkway was a bit more of an excursion. But it was an excursion our family often made for picnics or extended Sunday afternoon drives. In their later years, my parents and their friends liked nothing better than to get on the Parkway near Asheville and have dinner at the Pisgah Inn.

Such stories have been repeated thousands of times over. It's no wonder that the Blue Ridge

Parkway is the most visited National Park unit in the country. People want to see it, and once they do, they are drawn back. Even those of us who know western North Carolina well are moved by the sight of these mountains, especially after a long absence. It's one of those rare cases in which the familiar retains the power to inspire awe.

Of course, in addition to the scenic value of the Parkway and the personal meaning it holds for so many of us, this Park also has enormous ecological, cultural, and economic significance.

It is world-renowned for its biodiversity: An estimated 1600 species of plants, 74 different mammals, 50 types of salamanders and 35 reptiles, 159 species of birds, and 9 threatened and endangered species find their home here.

It serves as a critical economic driver for the region, generating more than \$2 billion in economic activity annually in dozens of cities and towns along the Parkway in both states. These towns thrive on a tourism economy, and rely on the Parkway to keep them going.

And, it is the birthplace and preserver of the unique Cherokee and Appalachian cultures.

These attributes combine to make the Blue Ridge Parkway not just a road, but a national treasure. And so, as we celebrate this milestone, we must not only reflect on its past, but also look to the future of the Parkway. How can we meet our collective obligation to maintain and protect this national treasure for the generations to come?

It will be no easy task. We will need to address the Park's major maintenance backlog and protect adjacent lands from development. We will need to work cooperatively with communities, private landowners, and other interested stakeholders. And we most assuredly will need to identify additional resources.

There are many people present today who know firsthand what it will take, and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge some of those who have been working to preserve and improve the Parkway for many years.

The dedicated personnel of the National Park Service – currently under the direction of the Park Superintendent Phil Francis - have done yeoman's work maintaining the Park in the wake of declining resources.

The faculty and students of Appalachian State, our gracious hosts, tell the story of the Parkway to visitors and staff its cultural centers, especially in the summer months. Neva Specht, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences here at Appalachian State, is the resident expert on the Parkway's cultural aspects and played a critical role in organizing this symposium.

Dr. Anne Mitchell Whisnant, an historian and administrator at UNC-Chapel Hill, has brought to life the birth of the Parkway – and some of the political maneuvering that led us to be in North Carolina today instead of across the North Carolina-Tennessee state line. Her book, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History*, is a definitive contribution to the history of the Parkway.

And, finally, the conservation advocates - the people who support and staff the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, the Conservation Trust for North Carolina, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, and the Conservation Fund, to name a few – have helped protect additional lands that are part of the Parkway's scenic viewshed. The efforts of the Conservation Trust alone have added 18 properties (all but two of them donated) totaling 1,321 acres to the boundaries of the Park.

Thanks to all of you for stepping up to the plate. It's time for the federal government to do the same, and I think we are already on the right track. President Obama has directed the Administration to conduct a system-wide assessment of the needs of the Park Service and has again made land acquisition a priority in his Fiscal Year 2011 budget. As the Superintendent recounted to us last night, President Obama became the first sitting President to visit the Parkway! We can be assured that the Superintendent laid a few choice facts about the Parkway on the President, and I hope and I expect that the visit reinforced the Administration's positive disposition.

The President has requested \$620 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is the primary federal source of dollars for land acquisition throughout our federal agencies. Although LWCF is funded by revenue from oil and gas leases, the use of these monies is

subject to congressional appropriation of them each year.

Total annual appropriations from the LWCF have fluctuated widely since the origin of the program over four decades ago. We reached the high water mark in FY 2001, with appropriations reaching \$1 billion, even more than the authorized level. But for many years after that, LWCF funding was on the decline.

Fortunately, we're now in a position to turn that around. This is the third year in a row of increasing funds for LWCF, and it is on target to reach the Administration's goal of the fully authorized funding level - \$900 million – by 2014.

I happen to be a member of the House Appropriations Committee, so I am in a good position to advocate for full funding of the LWCF, and I will continue doing just that. In the meantime, there are several specific acquisition efforts in Western North Carolina and East Tennessee that are worth mentioning.

Last year, we were able to secure funding to purchase a tract for the Pisgah National Forest that would provide critical access to the nearby Catawba Falls. My sister made sure I knew the value of this tract!

For the upcoming year, I have requested funding for the Parkway to purchase Hefner Gap and the Orchard at Altapass, each of which has high scenic, recreational, and cultural merits. The 128-acre Hefner Gap tract in McDowell County would provide enhanced public recreation opportunities along the historic Overmountain Victory Trail. The purchase of the 112-acre Orchard at Altapass would protect a 101-year-old apple orchard turned Appalachian cultural center that celebrates the people, music, and art of the North Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains and attracts more than 60,000 visitors each year.

I am also hopeful that we'll be able to complete the purchase of the Rocky Fork tract this year. Rocky Fork is a 10,000 acre tract in the Cherokee National Forest, on the Tennessee side of the Appalachian Trail, and its purchase remains the number one priority acquisition project for the US Forest Service. I brought my hiking boots and am looking forward to visiting this tract, which is only a few miles from where I grew up, tomorrow.

There are a variety of other projects that I know are of importance to the conservation community - Backbone Ridge, Chunky Gal, King Mountain, Mulberry Creek, and Wesser Bald to name a few – and I hope that we will be able to secure funding for these projects down the road as well. Fully funding LWCF will make a big difference.

In addition, Rep. Heath Shuler and I have introduced legislation, developed in consultation with the Conservation Trust of North Carolina, to renew the federal commitment to the Parkway and leverage additional private resources. The Blue Ridge Parkway Protection Act would authorize \$75 million over the next five years to acquire up to 50,000 acres of land bordering the Parkway, helping to protect the scenic views. We will work hard to pass this bipartisan legislation, and then we will have to continue to work year by year to appropriate the funds actually required to make the acquisitions. It needs to be a long-term commitment, and the bill would provide a useful framework.

Seventy-five years ago, despite facing an economic crisis even worse than the one we're in today, the federal government invested its resources, funding public works projects that not only put hundreds of thousands of people to work, but also created, protected, and promoted some of the nation's best loved places – including the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Our challenge for the next seventy-five years and beyond is to continue successfully preserving the historic structures, the varied ecosystems along with all the plants and animals they contain, and the magnificent Parkway views themselves.

It is wonderful to be with you today – it's one of those occasions when looking back instructs and inspires us for the journey ahead. I thank each of you for your commitment to the Blue Ridge Parkway, and I am hopeful that we all leave this symposium with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to ensuring that the Parkway remains the most visited – and beloved – unit of the national park system.

###