

Kingston, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today made a direct appeal to New York Governor David Paterson to reverse his decision to eliminate the Hudson River Valley Greenway Communities Council and Conservancy program. The congressman is the author of the legislation that created the Greenway and warned the governor that cutting the initiative and merging it into the New York Department of State would essentially kill the program, which has benefited communities throughout the Hudson Valley since its inception in 1991.

"While I recognize and appreciate the budget challenges raised by the State's serious fiscal crisis, the proposed elimination of the Greenway contributes minimally towards resolving that crisis while also undermining a tremendously important and effective regional program," Hinchey wrote in a letter sent to Governor Paterson today. "The elimination of the Greenway as originally proposed or as modified in your '30-day amendment' would also jeopardize millions of dollars in federal funding to New York State through the National Heritage Area program."

As a member of the New York State Assembly, Hinchey authored the legislation that created the Greenway with the goal of establishing an innovative program that would empower communities throughout the Hudson Valley to develop and implement plans that would improve their economic circumstances and enhance the quality of life for residents. The program, which has been immensely popular and successful, has utilized a "bottom up" approach to regional planning that combines local participation in planning with state and federal dollars in order to achieve the initiative's goals of protecting the incredible natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources of the Hudson Valley.

After coming to Congress in 1993, Hinchey immediately began to work on federal legislation that would complement and advance the Greenway's goals. In 1996, the congressman secured passage of the legislation he authored that created the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. The purpose of this federal designation was to "recognize, preserve, protect, and interpret the nationally significant cultural and natural resources of the Hudson River Valley for the benefit of the nation." The Greenway, which was already well-established, was designated as the local manager of the Heritage Area program.

The establishment of the new federal program opened up opportunities for federal funding of Greenway initiatives. Under Hinchey's guidance, Congress has directed millions of dollars to the Heritage Area program, which directly complemented and augmented ongoing state Greenway initiatives. If Governor Paterson's plan to eliminate the Greenway program goes through, the state would very likely lose the steady stream of federal funding it has received

from the National Heritage Area program in part because federal rules require that the state or local entities at least equally match the federal share of funding. Without the Greenway in place, it is virtually certain that the local or state match would no longer exist and the \$1 million annually in federal funds would cease coming into the state. Additionally, the National Park Service, which administers the National Heritage Area program, discourages state agencies from managing such areas and would likely seek to change the management entity away from the state.

"The Greenway remains a successful and important program for the Hudson River Valley and needs to be reinvigorated rather than eliminated," Hinchey wrote in his letter to Governor Paterson. "The program undoubtedly suffered from the dismantling of the Greenway's leadership in 2000. The change of leadership in Albany over the past several years has brought tremendous hope that this program would be further strengthened and revitalized so that it could be even more effective in realizing the goals set forth in the original Greenway legislation. Like many others in the Hudson Valley, I was alarmed and disappointed to see the proposal to eliminate this program because I personally know how vital and significant it has been to the Hudson Valley. The proposal to eliminate the Greenway threatens to undermine and unravel the dedicated efforts by communities throughout the Hudson Valley to move towards sustainable economic development that respects and protects critical environmental resources...Based on the minimal savings offered by the elimination of the Greenway program and the serious adverse consequences of the loss of this program to the region's economy and environment, I hope that you will reconsider this budget proposal."

The Greenway has played a critical role in promoting and strengthening tourism and agriculture throughout the state. The Communities Council and Conservancy led the creation of the Hudson River Water Trail, organized the annual Hudson River Rambles, and has taken a leadership role in promoting the upcoming quadricentennial celebration. The Greenway's efforts have dramatically improved public access to the Hudson River, upgraded local tourism facilities and amenities, and facilitated the revitalization of long-neglected waterfronts and community centers, which have in turn strengthened the local economy.

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The full text of Hinchey's letter to Governor Paterson follows:

January 29, 2009

The Honorable David A. Paterson
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Paterson:

I am writing to express my deep concern over the state budget proposal to eliminate the Hudson River Valley Greenway Communities Council and Conservancy and merge these agencies into the New York Department of State. While I recognize and appreciate the budget challenges raised by the State's serious fiscal crisis, the proposed elimination of the Greenway contributes minimally towards resolving that crisis while also undermining a tremendously important and effective regional program. The elimination of the Greenway as originally proposed or as modified in your "30-day amendment" would also jeopardize millions of dollars in federal funding to New York State through the National Heritage Area program. I urge you and your colleagues in the New York State Legislature to reconsider this proposal, and I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss alternatives to this proposal.

As a former member of the New York State Assembly, I authored and sponsored the legislation that created the Greenway in 1991. This legislation established an innovative and unique framework that empowered communities throughout the Hudson River Valley to engage in local and regional planning efforts to improve economic opportunities and protect the region's quality of life. The Greenway has helped communities to recognize the Hudson River as a shared, unifying resource and opportunity for sustainable economic development rather a boundary that simply divided them. This program sought to leverage local resources, including direct citizen participation, and promote more sustainable and coordinated local planning in order to protect the incredible natural, historical, cultural and recreational resources of the Hudson River Valley.

As you know, the Greenway model relies on voluntary grassroots community participation and a "bottom up" approach to regional planning that respects New York State's longstanding home-rule tradition for land-use planning and zoning. The Greenway provides technical assistance and financial incentives for communities to work cooperatively to connect trails, identify and protect key resources, and pursue "smart growth" initiatives and intermunicipal cooperation. Since its inception, the Greenway has garnered the voluntary participation of two hundred and fifty-one communities, fifty-six of which have adopted the Greenway Compact and committed themselves to include the goals of the Greenway program in their local zoning and

building codes.

As a member of Congress, I subsequently built on this important model by introducing and sponsoring the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Act, which was passed and signed into law in 1996. The purpose of this federal designation was to "recognize, preserve, protect, and interpret the nationally significant cultural and natural resources of the Hudson River Valley for the benefit of the nation." The Greenway, which was already well established and had built effective relationships with many communities throughout our region, was named as the Management Entity for this new Heritage Area. Since 1996, the Congress has invested millions of dollars in this Heritage Area program, which has strongly complemented and augmented the ongoing state Greenway programs and made tangible positive impacts, particularly on local tourism.

The Greenway remains a successful and important program for the Hudson River Valley and needs to be reinvigorated rather than eliminated. The program undoubtedly suffered from the dismantling of the Greenway's leadership in 2000. The program has also been constrained by flat budget allocations from the State since 1999. Despite these limitations, however, the program has continued to make a significant and positive difference in our communities and enjoys broad based and bipartisan support. The change of leadership in Albany over the past several years has brought tremendous hope that this program would be further strengthened and revitalized so that it could be even more effective in realizing the goals set forth in the original Greenway legislation. Like many others in the Hudson Valley, I was alarmed and disappointed to see the proposal to eliminate this program because I personally know how vital and significant it has been to the Hudson Valley.

The proposal to eliminate the Greenway threatens to undermine and unravel the dedicated efforts by communities throughout the Hudson Valley to move towards sustainable economic development that respects and protects critical environmental resources. The proposed elimination would erode the substantial and historic level of trust developed between the agency and local communities developed through direct relationships over the past seventeen years. The Greenway has been an invaluable tool in promoting and strengthening tourism and agriculture, two of our state's most important industries. The Communities Council and Conservancy have spearheaded the creation of the Hudson River Water Trail, organized the annual Hudson River Rambles, and taken a leadership role in promoting the 2009 Quadracentennial Celebration. The Greenway's efforts have dramatically improved public access to the Hudson River, upgraded local tourism facilities and amenities, and encouraged the revitalization of long-neglected waterfronts and community centers, all of which has strengthened our local economies.

The dissolution of the Greenway program also threatens to result in the loss of future federal funding to New York State through the National Heritage Area program. The legislation creating the Heritage Area mandates that "the federal contribution to the operations of the management entities shall not exceed 50 percent of the annual operating costs of the entities." Clearly, the restructuring or elimination of the program would be incompatible with this legislative provision. Additionally, the elimination or restructuring of the Greenway Conservancy and Communities Council would effectively dismantle and throw into question the Heritage Area Management Plan approved by the Secretary of the Interior in 2002. The Heritage Area designation was largely built upon the existing Greenway and future funding would likely revert to federal agencies if the Greenway was eliminated or substantially modified, thereby putting in question any future allocations to the State of New York. Authorized for up to \$1 Million per year, this loss would directly impact the state's efforts to promote heritage tourism, encourage farmland preservation, and enhance regional coordination on planning issues.

In announcing your state budget, I know that you put forth these proposals as a starting point and a basis for dialogue on how to best cope with New York State's serious budget shortfalls. I appreciate your efforts to generate this important dialogue so early in the budget process, and thank you in advance for your consideration of the feedback on the budget proposals. Based on the minimal savings offered by the elimination of the Greenway program and the serious adverse consequences of the loss of this program to the region's economy and environment, I hope that you will reconsider this budget proposal. I am committed to the success of both the Hudson River Valley Greenway and National Heritage Area programs, and I look forward to working with you and the Legislature, as well as members of the New York Congressional Delegation, to ensure that the tremendous potentials of both of these programs continue to be fulfilled.

I look forward to speaking with you directly on this matter. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance on this or any other issues.

Sincerely,

D. Hinchey

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