**Testimony of Patrick Murray**

**re state preparations for the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution**

**New Jersey Senate**

**Committee on State Government, Wagering, Tourism & Historic Preservation**

**July 26, 2018**

Mr. Chairman, Madame Vice-Chairwoman and members of the committee:

I am Patrick Murray, former board member and chair of the Crossroads of the American Revolution Association, the non-profit organization designated by Congress to manage the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area.

I commend the legislature for its farsightedness in passing A-4194 which awaits the governor’s signature. In particular I want to express my gratitude to Majority Leader Weinberg and Speaker Coughlin for their determination in spearheading this effort. I also want to acknowledge Sen. Bateman, a member of the New Jersey Historical Commission, for his continued support of these efforts in co-sponsoring this bill. Last but not least, I want to thank Chairman Beach for his sponsorship of this bill and his assistance in its expedient passage.

A-4194 establishes a planning process for the state’s commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. When cities and states host major events, such as the Olympics or the World Cup – which will coincidentally be coming to New Jersey in 2026 – one question the event sponsors have to answer is what will be the lasting legacy for the local community. This is why the legislature had the forethought to assign the state’s 250th planning tasks to a unique public-private partnership. I would like to take a few moments to talk about the role of that private partner.

Let me start by saying I am not an expert in historic preservation or conservation, nor am I a historian. You will be hearing from respected professionals in those fields today. I am, however a huge cheerleader for New Jersey and in particular the unparalleled contributions our state made to the founding of this nation. That is how I first became involved with Crossroads 10 years ago.

I was asked to join the board when the association was going through a federally mandated needs assessment process to establish the management plan for the newly established national heritage area. I became heavily involved in that process and had the opportunity to take part in listening sessions with a broad spectrum of stakeholders – including managers of public and private historic sites, environmentalists, historians, re-enactors, tourism professionals, and business and community leaders.

While each group made a strong case for having more resources dedicated to their particular area of concern, one consistent drumbeat was sounded at all these meetings: New Jersey’s role in the American Revolution lacks a unifying brand identity that conveys its significance both to the state and the nation. What we heard is that the primary contribution Crossroads could make would be to elevate the profile of New Jersey’s wealth of Revolutionary War era resources and in so doing increase the public’s appreciation for these community assets.

During my time with Crossroads, including the last five as chair, we have worked to create an active non-profit board comprised of well-connected business and community leaders from across the state, many of whom are familiar to members of this committee. Over the past few years, Crossroads has focused its efforts mainly on improving the visitor experience by creating a vibrant brand image and sponsoring professional develop opportunities for local sites and organizations. Crossroads’s executive director Janice Selinger will be able to talk more about these efforts and the economic impact of heritage tourism in New Jersey.

So what role should a private partner play as we lead up to this momentous milestone? While the private partner should assist in the coordination and marketing of commemorative events – which for New Jersey will actually run from 2024 to 2033 – the private partner’s main focus should be on creating a lasting legacy of historical – and specifically heritage tourism – infrastructure that will benefit local communities for generations to come. And by infrastructure, I don’t just mean buildings, but personnel and other visitor services as well.

With the assistance of initial public funding to seed the effort, the non-profit partner should spur private investment for the resources necessary to position New Jersey as THE place to visit when you want to immerse yourself in the Rev War experience. This is akin to the model Virginia used in the 1950s in the lead-up to the centenary of the Civil War. Now Civil War buffs flock to that state for the full range visitor experience of that era.

The private partner should create a cohesive brand strategy for the American Revolution, assess strengths and weaknesses of the current visitor experience, create itineraries that link multiple sites and communities, and spearhead the creation of a visitor center entry point or points.

Let me give you a few examples of how this vision may play out.

Imagine a branded week-long self-tour around the Battle of Monmouth – the largest land artillery engagement of the entire war. You could follow the British forces as they evacuated Philadelphia, stopping at Indian King Tavern in Haddonfield as you traverse your way along the quaint river towns of Burlington County. Or you could follow the Continental line by starting your journey in Lambertville. As you head across the middle of the state you could stop at a winery or other agritourism opportunity. After visiting the magnificent battlefield state park and surrounding sites, you could follow the British retreat and dip your toes in the water at Sandy Hook. Or follow the Americans to the banks of the Raritan River and the wealth of visitor opportunities in New Brunswick and Piscataway, where George Washington ordered the first official July 4th celebration in 1778. To top it off, you can emulate the General by continuing your journey north to enjoy a picnic by the Great Falls – and maybe get just as inspired as Hamilton did when he, Lafayette, and Washington did the same.

And all those community economic opportunities can be promoted around a unifying theme based on a single event that happened in New Jersey.

A more compact venture could entail spending a long weekend exploring the Ten Crucial Days story in Trenton and Princeton. Or an annual Road to Morristown bike ride that winds its way along the D&R Canal from Somerset County and on up to the National Park in Jockey Hollow. Or a Retreat Across the Jersey’s itinerary that takes in Fort Lee and New Bridge Landing. And when this is all branded under New Jersey’s Crossroads of the American Revolution umbrella it will lend cachet to more remote sites, such as Hancock’s Bridge, Chestnut Neck, or Shippen Manor.

Moreover, such an itinerary provides the opportunity to introduce visitors to other New Jersey’s cultural offerings. I’ve already mentioned agritourism and the industrial heritage commemorated in Paterson. Suffrage, civil rights, theater, art, recreation – these worlds can all be tied into New Jersey’s American Revolution experience.

In order to make this all a reality, though, there must be a comprehensive planning process. It is good that we are starting this process now.

The first step for the private partner should be to utilize the public seed funding to engage consultants to undertake a wide-ranging needs assessment. Some of this work has already been done – documenting some property repair and maintenance needs as well as signage planning. But there also needs to be an assessment of visitor readiness – including staffing levels, quality of interpretive experience offered, and visitor services available including ADA accessibility. The assessment should also include both short-term and long-term recommendations for how visitor services can most effectively be enhanced, from adding on-site interpretive staff with requisite funding and training or offering alternative interpretive experiences through the use of technology ranging from cell phone tours to augmented reality apps. This process should also develop touring itineraries that link related sites.

Furthermore, this assessment should examine the optimal siting, size and content for a New Jersey American Revolution visitor center, including the potential for satellite centers. Rather than be designed as a standard museum, this facility should serve as a hub that encourages exploration of Rev War resources throughout the entire state in a way that complements rather than competes with existing sites (including the American Revolution Center in Philadelphia). This process will also encompass necessary site planning and architectural services.

This is where the private partner’s fundraising responsibility comes in. A multi-million dollar capital campaign will be necessary to install signage, make infrastructure upgrades, develop touring itineraries, enhance staffing and training, provide mini-grants for local projects, implement technological upgrades, and of course construct a visitor center. As planning progresses, the private partner should also work closely with the Historical Commission and other stakeholders to coordinate and promote a full program of commemorative activities.

The world will be on our doorstep in July 2026 – quite literally, since Met Life Stadium is certain to host a number of World Cup tournament games and maybe even the final match. Furthermore, preliminary plans for the national celebration based in Philadelphia will stretch across the river to Camden and also includes a “node” at Washington Crossing.

New Jersey has an unprecedented opportunity to inspire visitors with what the American Revolution means – not just for the generals and soldiers but for common citizens like them who were caught in the crossfire of a tumultuous time. Importantly, we can spark their imaginations with a visitor experience that will keep them coming back for more – creating a lasting economic legacy for our state and local communities. Our message will be, if you want to experience the American Revolution, you have to start at the crossroad. And that is found in only one place: New Jersey.

Thank you.