

Castle: Underground Railroad 'Network to Freedom' Program Will Continue -- July 23, 2007

Washington D.C. -- Delaware

Congressman Mike Castle, a lead sponsor of H.R. 1239, "The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Reauthorization Act of 2007," hails passage of the legislation today in the U.S. House of Representatives for this National Parks Service program. Rep. Castle testified before the Natural Resources Committee in May and has been pushing this legislation, which cleared the Committee in June, all year.

National Park Service financial projections have shown the Network to Freedom budget in jeopardy-- reducing by 72 percent by the year 2011. Without continued and adequate funding, efforts to disseminate this critical history and build on the program's successes will be greatly diminished. H.R. 1239 extends the "National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act" by increasing funding and the availability of grants to support Underground Railroad preservation and interpretative projects throughout the United States.

"With nine Network to Freedom sites throughout Delaware and reports that more passengers came through Wilmington on the Underground Railroad than any other place, this program has a real local significance. By playing a critical role in helping local communities to effectively share the stories of the men and women who resisted slavery through escape and flight in the Underground Railroad, this program highlights the rich history of Delaware and many other states in the Underground Railroad and is an asset to our National Parks System. Promoting programs and partnerships to commemorate this time in history and educating the public about the historical significance of the Underground Railroad is vital and I remain committed to seeing this legislation signed into law and to funding the program through the appropriations process," said Congressman Castle.

Underground Railroad

stations were operated by a few very effective people throughout Delaware in Blackbird, Camden, Middletown, New Castle, Hockessin and Wilmington. Thomas Garrett, for example, is known as Delaware's greatest station master. Spending the greater part of his lifetime working in the Underground Railroad, Thomas Garrett is credited with helping 2,700 slaves reach freedom.

The nine participating Network to Freedom sites in Delaware include: the Delaware Statehouse; Star Hill Historical Society Museum; The Rocks-Fort Christina State Park; New Castle Courthouse; Historical Society of Delaware; Long Road to Freedom education program; Thomas Garrett Home; Tubman-Garrett Riverfront Park and Market Street Bridge; Wilmington Friends Meeting House and Cemetery.

Established in 1998, the Network to Freedom encompasses over 250 programs, sites, and partners in over 27 states and the District of Columbia, and is the only national program dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of Underground Railroad history.

###