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OPINION: The Star Spangled Trail Would Help Commemorate The War Of 1812

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By Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

The War of 1812 was a pivotal event in our nation's early history, an event that many historians often refer to as our "Second War of Independence." In 1814, the military campaign in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. turned the direction of the war and remains the only combined naval and land attack in our nation's history.

I recently joined with U.S. Rep. John Sarbanes (D-3rd) in introducing two pieces of legislation to commemorate the War of 1812. The first bill would establish the "Star Spangled Banner Trail" in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia as a National Historic Trail. The National Historic Trails system commemorates major routes of historic travel and events that have shaped American history.

Currently, there are 19 National Historic Trails, including the Lewis and Clark, the Pony Express, Selma to Montgomery and the Trail of Tears. To be designated a National Historic Trail, a proposed route must meet three criteria: it must be nationally significant, have a documented route through maps or journals and provide recreational opportunities.

Sites along the Star Spangled Banner Trail would mark some of the most important events of the War of 1812. The trail begins with the June 1814 battle between the British Navy and the American Chesapeake Flotilla in St. Leonard's Creek in Calvert County, follows the British landing at Benedict on the Patuxent River, and then moves on to the British march into Washington, D.C., which was sacked and burned.

From Washington, the Trail follows the British campaign to the Battle of North Point and on to Baltimore, which at the time was considered a much more important city than Washington. The Trail ends at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, site of the defeat of the British and where Francis Scott Key composed our National Anthem.

The bicentennial of this Second War of Independence should receive broad, national recognition. To help plan a national celebration honoring the War of 1812, Rep. Sarbanes and I also have introduced legislation to establish the Star Spangled Banner War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission to help plan, and coordinate the 200th anniversary celebration.

As Marylanders, we are all proud of the role our state has played in our nation's history. The creation of the Trail will help all Americans gain a better appreciation of what it took to preserve our nation.