

**Energy and Natural Resources
National Parks Subcommittee Hearing
October 30, 2003**

**Statement of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton
S. 241, A Bill to Establish the Kate Mullany National Historic Site**

Mr. Chairman, I want to open my remarks by extending my warmest thanks to you and to the ranking member, Senator Akaka, for including S. 1241 in today's hearing. I introduced S. 1241 in June of this year. It is wonderful to have been given this opportunity to discuss my legislation before your subcommittee just a few months later. It is important to mention the tireless efforts of representative McNulty, my colleague from New York, who has introduced this legislation in the House and has been working hard to win its passage over the course of several congresses. I know he is heartened by the decision to hold this hearing.

And I am pleased to submit with my testimony letters of support from Representative McNulty and from the Majority Leader of the New York State Senate, Joseph Bruno, whose districts encompass the site. In addition, I am submitting support letters from Representative Sweeney, Representative Boehlert, and Representative Quinn, from Denis Hughes, the President of the New York State AFL-CIO, from Thomas Hobart, the President of the New York State United Teachers, and from Mark Pattison, Mayor of Troy, New York. I request that these letters be made a part of the record.

I fully expect that you will receive more letters of support from a variety of sources, including organized labor, and other local and state officials from across the political spectrum. The letters I am submitting show that this bill is not a Democratic bill. It's not a Republican bill, or a labor bill — it is a unique bill.

Mr. Chairman, it's not surprising that there should be such a groundswell of local support for S. 1241, because the Kate Mullany National Historic Site deserves to be established in Troy, New York. Not only does this legislation honor Kate Mullany's work and her life, but it would allow the National Park System to provide the technical assistance needed to ensure the site honors the national significance of Kate Mullany.

I visited the Kate Mullany House during the summer of 1998. I was honored to be present at a ceremony commemorating the designation of the Kate Mullany House as a National Historic Landmark. It was a highlight of my time as First Lady and of my participation in the "Save America's Treasures" program.

Troy is located across the Hudson River and just north of Albany, New York. The Hudson River was a great highway of commerce the 19th century and it remains an important commercial route to this day. Situated at the junction of the Hudson and the Mohawk Rivers, Troy has a featured place in the development of the collar and cuff industry and the iron industry in the 19th century, as well as in the growth of men's and women's worker associations. Great businesses grew up, and heroic labor leaders with them.

Kate Mullany was certainly one of those leaders. In fact, she embodied the ideals of both the labor movement and the women's suffrage movement. Kate Mullany's leadership role occurred at around the same time as the increasing prominence of notable suffragists like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the women's rights movement. In fact, Kate Mullany has also been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.

Kate Mullany came to the United States as a young immigrant from Ireland and grew into a dynamic and effective labor organizer. This bill is an important tribute to her and to New York's rich history of women's rights and the individuals who fought so hard to improve the lives of women laborers and immigrants all over the country.

Like so many other women, in order to help support her family, Kate Mullany went to work washing, starching, and ironing clothes at a commercial laundry in Troy, New York. Kate worked outside the home, fourteen hours each day, for two dollars a week, under harsh conditions.

Kate had other qualities in addition to this enormous dedication and self-sacrifice. When a newspaper claimed that there weren't enough women in New York to be labor organizers, Kate Mullany said confidently: "You show me the women and I'll turn them into organizers." And she did.

In February of 1864, Kate Mullany and about 200 of her fellow female laborers organized one of the first, if not the first, sustained women's trade unions in the U.S., the "Collar Laundry Union." Together, they were a formidable force and, after striking for a week, they were able to secure a 25 percent wage increase.

The Collar Laundry Union continued as an influential force in the Troy collar and cuff industry for five years beyond its formation, which was very unusual for women's labor organizations at this time. Kate Mullany's leadership was recognized four years later, when National Labor Union President William Sylvis appointed her to the labor union's national office. This was the first time a woman had been so honored.

After the successful 1864 strike, Kate Mullany's family used some of those increased wages to buy land. A double row house was built on the land. The Mullany's lived on the top floor at 350 8th Street. Many of their neighbors labored in the collar and iron working industries. It was in this house that Kate Mullany and her family spent many more years.

Based on a variety of factors, the National Historic Landmark Theme Study on American Labor History concluded that the Kate Mullany House appears to meet the criteria of national significance, suitability, and feasibility for inclusion in the National Park System.

It is important to add that the Kate Mullany House is one piece of a larger project of the American Labor Studies Center, a not for profit corporation. Working with the Center, the New York State AFL-CIO has recently purchased the House and has made arrangements to purchase an adjacent lot. They plan to transform the lot into the Kate Mullany Park, which will honor female trade union pioneers. Understand that funding for this project is expected to come from New York State funds already set aside for the purpose. According to the Center, the technical assistance the Park Service is uniquely qualified to provide is a critical element in the full development of the site.

When the Kate Mullany project is fully completed and becomes a part of the national park system, the rich and vibrant history of the American labor movement will be featured in a wonderful location. And when people come to study this movement at the Kate Mullany site, they will know that the voices of the men, and especially the women, who led the American labor movement, have been preserved forever,

So, Mr. Chairman, I see this as the beginning of a constructive process. And I look forward to working with you and Senator Akaka to turn this legislation into a reality. Thank you.