

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 4, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
18th and C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The National Park Service (NPS) has informed the Department of Energy that the Solar Decathlon may not be held on the National Mall this year due to conflicts with implementation of the National Mall Plan. This decision is short-sighted and should be reversed.

The National Mall Plan is a model of civic engagement, land use planning and resource conservation. As Americans, the National Mall is figuratively our front yard and as Members of Congress it is literally our front yard; we share your deep commitment to restoring this iconic public space.

We are also enthusiastic supporters of the Solar Decathlon which has been held on the National Mall every two years, beginning in 2002. Responding to the President's call to "win the future" requires organizing the most creative minds in the country to tackle our most serious challenges. The Solar Decathlon does exactly that by inspiring young innovators to move us toward a clean, renewable, energy future.

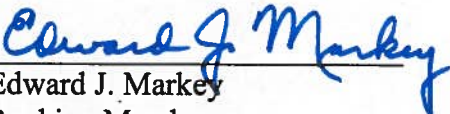
When Decathlon organizers approached the National Park Service last September for a permit, it may have appeared that holding the event on the Mall this year was at odds with restoring the turf as outlined in the Mall Plan but recent developments make clear no conflict exists. According to NPS, restoration of the turf will not begin until well after the Decathlon is scheduled to take place. As a result, the Decathlon can go forward on the Mall without delaying turf restoration and any damage caused by the event would be remedied by the restoration plan.

The decision to move the Decathlon from the Mall may also have been based on the assumption that a suitable alternative location could be identified in time for this year's event; that has not happened. Part of the Decathlon's allure is that it takes place in our nation's capitol and no other city would allow participation by the administrators and policy-makers charged with implementing our national energy policy. If the event takes place on the Mall this year, organizers would have almost three years to find a suitable alternative site here in Washington.

Hosting the Solar Decathlon on the Mall this year will allow the Department of Energy to continue building on the success of this fantastic event while also providing the NPS an opportunity to document the challenges of managing the Mall and highlight the innovative strategies included in the Mall Plan to a large audience interested in sustainability.

In the end, reversing the initial decision to remove this event from the Mall will benefit all involved. We stand ready to assist you and Secretary Chu in achieving both full implementation of the National Mall Plan and a successful Solar Decathlon.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources



