



## Office of Representative Heath Shuler

Representing North Carolina's Eleventh Congressional District

**For Immediate Release**

**March 28, 2007**

Contact: Andrew Whalen, Communications Director  
office: (202) 225-6401 / cell: (202) 731-5116

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### **Shuler Calls for an End to the Road to Nowhere**

#### ***Bipartisan, Bicameral, Two-State Coalition Letter to Interior Department Asks for Swain County Settlement***

*Washington, D.C.* – U.S. Representative Heath Shuler (D-NC) today joined with Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Senators and Representatives from North Carolina and Tennessee to announce a letter they have written to the Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne concerning the future of the Road to Nowhere within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Swain County, North Carolina.

The letter calls for cash settlement between the federal government and the residents of Swain County rather than further construction of the road.

“As a Swain County native, I have a deep, personal understanding of the issues and emotions surrounding the Road to Nowhere. The people of Swain County have waited over 60 years for a resolution to this issue, and the federal government should not delay that resolution one more day,” said Rep. Shuler.

“This letter asks for a reasonable settlement which will maintain the undisturbed wilderness of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and save the American taxpayers millions of dollars.”

“I am honored to be working with Senator Alexander and members from North Carolina and Tennessee on both sides of the aisle to resolve this issue.”

The United States made a commitment to Swain County in 1943, when it flooded a highway in connection with the creation of the Fontana Dam, to build a new road through what had become the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, held in 1946 that there is no legal obligation to satisfy that commitment by building another road

The full text of the letter is below.

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March 28, 2007

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Considering the significant environmental and economic costs associated with building the North Shore Road—or the so-called “Road to Nowhere” through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park—we ask that you begin immediately to work with us to provide a cash settlement to the citizens of Swain County, North Carolina, rather than further constructing the road.

We recommend these three steps:

First, within the next 90 days, the National Park Service's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should endorse a cash settlement to Swain County instead of any further construction on the North Shore Road.

Second, upon completion of the EIS, the Administration should support legislation that will be introduced in Congress to reprogram the funds remaining from those originally appropriated for the EIS, currently about \$6 million, and give those funds to Swain County as the first installment of the settlement.

Third, in January 2008, as a part of its fiscal year 2009 budget request to Congress, the Administration should include in its budget the next installment of the full cash settlement to Swain County. This funding should come from outside the National Park Service budget in the form of a special request.

The United States made a commitment to Swain County in 1943, when it flooded a highway in connection with the creation of the Fontana Dam, to build a new road through what had become the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, held in 1946 that there is no legal obligation to satisfy that commitment by building another road. A cash settlement instead of a road is precisely the kind of "common sense adjustment" that the Supreme Court envisioned.

A road through the Park would damage the largest and most pristine wilderness area in the eastern United States. Such a road would cost at least \$600 million, more than 75 times the annual roads budget of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In addition, a good highway now exists outside the Park between Bryson City and Fontana.

This sort of settlement has been recommended by the elected Swain County Commission and the governors of North Carolina and Tennessee, and is supported by the undersigned members of the North Carolina and Tennessee congressional delegations.

After over 60 years of controversy, it is time to bring this matter to a close. The solution we are endorsing will protect America's most visited national park, save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, and fulfill a promise to the citizens of Swain County, North Carolina.

Sincerely,

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Lamar Alexander  
United States Senator

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Elizabeth Dole  
United States Senator

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Bob Corker  
United States Senator

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Heath Shuler  
Member of Congress

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David Davis  
Member of Congress

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G.K Butterfield  
Member of Congress

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Zach Wamp  
Member of Congress

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Bob Etheridge  
Member of Congress

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Lincoln Davis  
Member of Congress

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Walter Jones  
Member of Congress

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Bart Gordon  
Member of Congress

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Mike McIntyre  
Member of Congress

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Jim Cooper  
Member of Congress

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Brad Miller  
Member of Congress

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John Tanner  
Member of Congress

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David Price  
Member of Congress

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Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Mary Bomar  
Director, National Park Service