Mr. Speaker, for over a century now the Statue of Liberty has symbolized the freedom which all Americans enjoy. I consider the imposition of a fee at the entrance of this national shrine inappropriate and cheapening.

The American public has contributed generously to renovate and restore the Statue of Liberty. It now stands in the forefront of our country's national symbols as a place truly belonging to all our nation's citizens. Generations of Americans, countless immigrants and millions of newcomers to our shores have embraced this monument to the opportunity which our land possesses. There is indeed a part of every American in this statue.

It is inappropriate to put a pricetag on Liberty, and impose a fee at this focal point of national consciousness. Last month an entrance charge of one dollar was imposed on each visitor to the Statue. Mr. Speaker, this is a slap in the face to all those who reached into their pockets to support the Centennial Commission's plans to renovate Lady Liberty.

I am not now taking issue with the establishment of entrance fees at other national parks. The 1987 appropriations bill made it clear that there is a need to generate revenue for the upkeep of large non-urban parkland. The Statue of Liberty is distinctly a National Park Service facility in one of the most densely populated urban areas of the United States. The public should not be restricted from visiting this monument which provides residents in this great metropolitan area with needed recreational space.

In addition, the Statue of Liberty should represent the bounty which our nation makes available to all its citizens. This gift from France was intended to commend our nation's founders for their perpetual commitment to the principles of freedom. Any restrictions on public access to this place simply will not do.

Today I am joined by my colleagues from both sides of the aisle and both sides of the Hudson River in introducing legislation which will prohibit the collection of an entrance fee at the Statue of Liberty. We recognize that the Statue of Liberty holds a unique place among the sites held in trust by the National Park Service. As a gift commemorating our founding father's commitment to the principles of freedom, as a symbol of the bounty which America offers to its people and as a prominent park in our nation's largest urban area, we oppose any restriction on admission to the Statue of Liberty. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully urge my colleagues' support of this worthy legislation.