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LETTER TO THE EDITOR: National parks, an American heritage

Your article "National Park sites lift local economies" (Page 1, Monday) raises one of my long-standing pet peeves.

No American and no American child should ever be denied access to a national park because he or his family cannot afford an entrance fee. Admission to national parks is not cheap. Fees vary; they can range from \$6 a person to \$25 per car. For instance, a family of four visiting Fort McHenry will easily spend more than \$20 just to get in, and as the above-mentioned article makes clear, there are the additional expenses of gas, food and sometimes lodging.

The reason people want to visit is because they see the value of our national parks. They want to see and experience these national treasures with their children and grandchildren. They want their children to have the opportunity to deepen their appreciation and understanding of our heritage and what it means to be an American. They want to share the experience of seeing and enjoying some of the most spectacular scenery on the planet.

Do we really want to turn a child away from visiting Gettysburg, the Grand Canyon, Yosemite or the Skyline Drive or any other park because their family can't afford it? The only thing an American citizen should need to enter a park is a driver's license or a parent. Period.

If we can afford a government that has no problem squandering taxpayer money every single day, then that government can very well afford to fully support our national park system. The U.S. government has an obligation to make our national treasures accessible to every citizen. Visiting a national park should not be based on the ability to pay.

MIKE TURNER

LaPlata, Md.