

Letter from Dennis Reidenbach, Director Northeast Region, National Park Service (former Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park), to Senator Arlen Specter, January 16, 2007. Note that Reidenbach said:

“I am committed to working equally with all commercial tour operators in the historic area to make visiting Philadelphia a wonderful experience for our visitors, but I am not willing to open more space in the IVC [Independence Visitor Center] to solicitation and ticket sales.”

However, within months of Superintendent Reidenbach’s January 16, 2007 letter to Senator Specter, Mr. Reidenbach did in fact open up more space in the Independence Visitor Center to solicitation and ticket sales. On or about June 14, 2007, Philadelphia Trolley Works and Big Bus Company opened their new prominent dedicated ticket sales booth adjacent to Ride the Ducks’ ticket sales booth, even as the same opportunity was denied to The Constitutional.



IN REPLY REFER TO:

A38(INDE)

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
143 S. 3rd Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106



JAN 16 2007

Honorable Arlen Specter
United States Senate
SH-711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-3802

Dear Senator Specter:

I am writing in response to your letter of December 7, 2006, regarding the operational concerns of the Constitutional Walking Tour of Philadelphia (the Constitutional). As always, I greatly appreciate your interest in the park and our activities. Thank you for taking the time to inquire about this issue and to suggest a proposal for moving forward. I agree with your position that it would benefit the park and our visitors to reach a final solution on this issue in time for the Spring 2007 tourist season, and I hope that we will be able to reach such an agreement. I have therefore carefully reviewed your proposal to create three designated spots for tour operators to solicit visitors inside the main south entrance to the Independence Visitor Center (IVC).

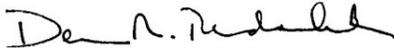
Since the IVC opened in 2001, the building has become the most visited site within Independence National Historical Park. In 2005, the center had 2.3 million visitors, which even exceeded the total number of people who visited the Liberty Bell Center. Because of high daily visitation and an increasing number of commercial tour operators, it is imperative that we better manage program access within the IVC. National Park Service policy on solicitation in parks is carefully designed to prevent aggressive solicitation that can impair the visitor experience. I feel strongly that IVC visitors should be provided with an unencumbered opportunity to reach the main information desk before being approached by sales people, so they can freely make informed program choices. While this has always been the park’s policy, we began enforcing this policy more stringently in May 2006, requiring all tour operators to remain in the north half of the IVC for purposes of solicitation and meeting points for tours. To accomplish that goal, all commercial operations are restricted to the north side of the IVC.

In order to create an open zone for visitor enjoyment and education, beginning in May 2006 all commercial tour operators were told to gather their groups in the area just north of the main information desk, next to the busy Pennsylvania Café and entrance to the underground parking garage. A large colorful banner that says “*All Tours Begin Here*” prominently marks the location. This is the same location where the motorized tour “Ride the Ducks” has a ticket booth and also the location of the photo concession booth. Because the location has proved successful for these other operators, I believe it can also be effective for the Constitutional.

I have had numerous discussions and meetings with representatives of the Constitutional over the past year to address these issues. I offered them opportunities to personally introduce their program to our park rangers. The IVC main desk continues to sell the Constitutional tour tickets and approved their CD for sale in the Independence Bookstore. During the 2006 summer season, the Constitutional had three separate program listings in the park's newspaper (Gazette) and their brochure is offered at the IVC main information desk. If you or your staff has other ideas for how the park can address the concerns of the Constitutional without violating our policy for no solicitation in the southern half of the IVC, I would be happy to consider them.

I am committed to working equally with all commercial tour operators in the historic area to make visiting Philadelphia a wonderful experience for our visitors, but I am not willing to open more space in the IVC to solicitation and ticket sales. I hope that we can find a way forward that satisfies all parties while maintaining the exceptional services visitors expect from their national parks.

Sincerely,



Dennis R. Reidenbach
Superintendent
Independence National Historical Park