

Presidential Sites Improvement Act (S. 1748)

Using America's Historic Sites to Teach America's History

Status:

On October 16, 2003, Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH) introduced the Presidential Sites Improvement Act, S. 1748. The bill establishes a program to award grants to improve and maintain sites honoring Presidents of the United States. In his introductory remarks Senator DeWine asserted "We often forget that the best learning tool is that which a child can touch, see, and relate ... These Presidential Sites are far too important to let them slowly decay." Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and George Voinovich (R-OH) are original cosponsors of the measure. A companion bill will be introduced in the House of Representatives by Paul Gillmore (R-OH) and Mike Ross (D-AR).

The Need:

Hundreds of sites honoring American Presidents are located throughout the United States and include birthplaces, homes, museums, burial sites and tombs. Most are owned, operated and maintained by non-federal entities such as State and local agencies, family foundations, colleges and universities, libraries, historical societies, historic preservation organizations and other non-profits organizations. Although such sites are integral to understanding the history of the United States, many are in desperate need of capital, technological, and interpretive improvements. This bill extends much needed matching funds to assist the stewards of these sites to ensure that they remain viable, attractive and accessible places for education and commemoration.

The Program:

1. Funds will be made available for repairs and capital improvements, the installation or repair of heating or conditioning systems, security systems or electric service, modifications that achieve compliance with the American with Disabilities Act, and interpretive improvements to enhance public understanding and enjoyment of the site.
2. Of the annual funds appropriated, 15% shall be used for emergency projects as determined by the Secretary of the Interior; 65 % shall be used for Presidential sites with a 3-year average annual operating budget of less than \$700,000; and 20% shall be used for grants to Presidential sites with a 3-year average annual operating budget of more than \$700,000.
3. All grants shall be matched 50%.
4. The Act creates a Presidential Sites Grant Commission to review applications and recommend to the Secretary of the Interior projects for which grants should be awarded. The Commission will be made up of the Director of the National Parks Service, four members appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, a State Historic Preservation Officer, a representative of the National Trust and two representatives from Presidential sites.