

Legislative Update

for State Historic Preservation Officers



PRESERVATION LEGISLATION

H.R. 1043/S.584

Community Restoration and Revitalization Act

For a list of co-sponsors, go to:

www.preservationaction.org/07lobbying/tax.htm

HPF APPROPRIATIONS

Continuing Resolution in effect until November 16.

To access legislative information including bill text, summary, and status, go to THOMAS at: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

HISTORIC PRESERVATION CAUCUS

For a list of members, go to: www.preservationaction.org/caucus/caucus07.htm

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PRESIDENT'S BUDGET AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The President's February 4 release of his FY2009 budget proposal has met with serious objections from the Congressional majority. Immediately upon release of his budget, House of Representatives Appropriations Committee Chair David Obey (D-MN) asserted "the President's budget is a dreary and irresponsible re-run of those we have seen for the past eight years." Obey cites a number of objectionable cuts, including a 22.4% reduction in funding for the Community Development Block Grant program and a zero funding for the Brownfields Economic Development Initiative. The President's budget is characterized as a host of "missed opportunities, misplaced priorities, and fiscal fairytales."

The Senate's response tracked with the House's, though was slightly more incendiary. Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee called the President's plan "a budget tale of deficits, deception, and demagoguery." Domestic priorities, he noted, are shortchanged in the President's plan, and too much is being funneled into "the President's disastrous war."

The President has re-upped his threat to veto should Congress opt to disregard his budget direction. So begins this Congressional session.

Preservation in the Budget

The President's recommendations for preservation programs track with levels set earlier in his Administration. The budget proscribes \$66,658,000, total, for Historic Preservation Fund programs, in contrast to the \$78,275,000 appropriated last year. State Historic Preservation Offices are proposed to receive \$35,717,000, plus \$2,000,000 for survey. They were appropriated \$39,376,000 last year. Tribal Historic Preservation Offices are proposed for \$3,941,000, though they received \$6,399,000 last year. The number of THPOs has increased substantially since the budget level now being used as the baseline for this program. As each new THPO is added, each office gets less. The President has proposed \$15,000,000 for Save America's Treasures; this program received \$25,000,000 last year. Preserve America was proposed to receive \$10,000,000. This program received \$7,500,000 last year from the National Preservation and Recreation Fund.

Cultural programs within the National Park Service are either cut or flat-lined. National Heritage Areas, which are estimated to receive \$15 million in FY2008 are recommended to receive only \$7 million in FY2009. Cultural programs including maintenance of the National Register for Historic Places receive flat funding – which has been the case for many years. Given the rising costs of doing business, health care, and cost of living increases, the flat line is taking its toll. Cultural programs within the NPS are managing the increasing flow of tax credit applications, grants, and other signs of the growing success of the federal program with no commensurate funding increase.

The Centennial Initiative, a ten-year plan to raise funds for our national park system with a \$100 million federal complement, receives no funding in the President's proposal. The Administration seeks authorization for mandatory Centennial Initiative spending before committing any more federal funding to the program. Last year the initiative received \$25 million.

The overall budget would cut the department's discretionary funding to \$10.6 billion, from \$11.3 billion in FY2008.

2) HPF APPROPRIATIONS FY 2008

Historic Preservation Fund appropriations for the current fiscal year remained stalled in Congress. While a continuing resolution keeps the government operating through November 16, the full Senate has not acted on the Interior appropriations bill. A date for Senate action is not known. The President has indicated he may veto appropriations that exceed his budget requests. Talk continues on Capitol Hill of folding several appropriations bill into an omnibus bill. SHPOs message to Representatives is to "hold tight" to the \$45 million for States approved by the full House. SHPOs should ask Senators to support the House figure.

2) FOLLOW UP: VACANT BUILDING BILL OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGEMENT

In last week's legislative update, Preservation Action reported on the **Neighborhood Reclamation and Revitalization Program Act of 2007** introduced by Representative Brian Higgins (D-NY) in the House of Representatives and Senators Harry Reid (D-NV) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY). The bill seeks to remedy the problems caused by vacant housing in depopulated urban areas, and grew from Representative Higgins' experience in Buffalo, NY. Many of the bill's initial cosponsors, including the former First Lady, are preservation advocates. Preservation Action looked into the thinking and leadership behind the bill, and we're now working with Representative Higgins' office and other groups on development of the underlying pro-preservation idea: sorting out how to revitalize neighborhoods with extensive vacant housing stock. Our opportunity is huge: bill leadership wants to work with the preservation community to come up with legislation to solve the problem. And within our membership, we've got many groups already working with cities to revitalize urban neighborhoods by rehabilitating urban housing stock.

Now is a good time to pool our examples of effective pro-preservation vacant housing programs to aid in improving the vacant housing bill. It's also a good time to work with your local press on publicizing success stories of vacant housing revitalization.

(On October 10, 2007, Baltimore Mayor Shelia Dixon announced a land banking program to expedite the transfer of vacant housing for re-use.)

Who is considering the bill:

House cosponsors: Rep. Michael Arcuri (D-NY), Rep. Michael Doyle (D-PA, and on the Historic Preservation Caucus), Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY, HP Caucus member), Rep. Tim Holden (D-PA), Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick (D-MI), Rep. Michael McNulty (D-NY), Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI), Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN), Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH), Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-CA), Rep. Betty Sutton (D-OH).

Reconciling Differences

What's to be made of this? The elections this year, and the potential for a significant change in Administration figure into Congress's response to the President's skimpy budget. Some have threatened to disregard the budget until the next Administration and simply continue the spending levels set in FY2008. Over the next few months, Congress will be holding a number of hearings about spending, including a March 12th "public witness" hearing within the House Interior Appropriations Committee. This is just one of a number of opportunities, including Preservation Advocacy Day, and district lobbying events that can help maintain momentum for historic preservation programs built last year.

IMPORTANT DATES:

Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, March 1-5, 2008

Board of Directors Meeting, Wisconsin, July 2008

General Membership Meeting at NTHP Conference, Tulsa, October 2008

Board of Directors Meeting, Arkansas, November 2008

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers is the professional association of State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) who carry out the national historic preservation program as delegates of the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. Membership in the NCSHPO is limited to states and territories.

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