

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

February 29, 2008 | Volume 11 | Number 8

Making Lasting Connections: The Power of Kansas History and Grassroots Action

INTERVIEW WITH REPRESENTATIVE TODD TIAHRT (R-KS)

At the beginning of the 110th Congress, Representative Todd Tiahrt (R-KS) became the lead minority member (Ranking Member) of the House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee. Shortly after assuming his new post, Tiahrt spoke up for preservation funding. At the Subcommittee mark up for Interior programs last year, Tiahrt advocated \$10 million for Preserve America. Between fiscal years 2006 and 2007, the program awarded \$5 million to 140 projects in 40 states. In FY2008, thanks in part of Tiahrt's leadership, \$7.5 million is available for 2008 grants. Preservation Action conducted this interview on January 29th, 2008.

The Power of History

"When I was in high school, I didn't really like history, American history or world history. It just wasn't very interesting to me. But as I got older and started working and going on vacation as a family, historical sites became more and more important to me. And also, my grandfather was sort of a pioneer. We talked about the places that he'd been. I came to realize there's a connection we all can make to history and to historic places."

"When I came to Washington, it was like drinking out of a fire hydrant there was just so much to take in. Historic churches, Mount Vernon, the Smithsonian all made me realize what a great heritage we have to protect for our kids, so that they can make the connection of where we came from, why this is important, and how this is going to help us in the future. History is a big part of our lives and historic sites help tell that history."

"In Kansas, we've maintained the school that was the site of the Brown versus Board of Education case. I went by there not too long ago; it's a beautiful school. Its also a basis for how we live our lives today. We don't have segregated schools. We live in an integrated society and culture, and our kids go to integrated schools. But we need to remember where we came from to understand how much we've accomplished."

"Kansas has a long, great history. January 29, 1861 was the beginning of the Civil War, and back then it was known as bloody Kansas because people were very passionate about people being free. They were opposed to slavery. Characters like John Brown who instigated the Civil War. He was memorialized in the songs the soldiers used to sing. John Brown, from Kansas, was taken captive in West Virginia, Harpers Ferry, where he was hung. That is part of Kansas history."

"Carrie Nation chopped up hotel bars in Wichita, she was an abolitionist. The Dockum Drugstore, in downtown Wichita was the site of the first successful sit in by African Americans. This is a very important part of our history, yet it wasn't very well documented. This happened two years before (Woolworth's sit in, Greensboro, NC, February 1, 1960) in 1958."

"Kansas should be very proud of how we've been on the leading edge of political issues. We have historic sites to help us remember and support that. I'm very excited about Preserve America and that we can preserve this important heritage. This way we can capture a part of this history."

Making Decisions about Preservation Funding

"It's a matter of priorities. We're doing things that put a lot of pressure on the historical programs. The Forest Service for example, has to deal with fires every year. And in other parts of our budget, we handle fires and other emergencies, hurricanes, earthquakes or floods, through FEMA. We appropriate FEMA funds. If we fall short, we supplement with additional funding. In the Forest Service, we have to fight fires within our existing budget and occasionally we will put some extra money in. It's often the case of "too little too late." As a result, the Interior budget has to put a lot into the Forest Service budget, when we really should just have the infrastructure they need, and emergency money in some other account. What we typically do is drain money from other parts of the budget to fight fires. That should be budgeted separately."

"Programs about protecting historic significance, that preserve our culture, get shortchanged because history becomes a lower priority than emergencies. That's not the right way to do it. I've been working very closely with our chairman (Representative Norm Dicks (D-WA)). We both agree that we should set up emergency funding in a separate account so that we're not constantly putting pressure on programs like Preserve America. Cultural programs shouldn't have to compete with firefighting."

Will Increases Stand?

"I think we're going to continue to see this (increase) as far as I know but we haven't seen the President's budget yet (note: the President's FY2009 recommendation tracked with earlier years, State Historic Preservation Offices: \$35.7 mil; Tribal Historic Preservation Offices: \$3.94 mil; Save America's Treasures: \$15 mil; Preserve America: \$10 mil). He wasn't satisfied with some programs, but none of them were historic preservation programs. With historic preservation, we do too little."

"When looking at my district, preservation funds inject a little to get the ball rolling. The Dunbar Theater in downtown Wichita is one example. Federal funds injected a little bit of stimulus that's easily matched by the community -- federal government and local government work together with the private sector. Theaters have been the center of communities in small towns Kansas. Theaters don't have the same kind of meaning they used to, but the historic structures still have a purpose in our communities."

"Bill Curtis, a producer of a lot of historic programs and documentaries, has done a great deal in his home state of Kansas to preserve areas like Sedan, Kansas. He's helped preserve some of the old stores on Main Street. He's helped with historic hotels, landmarks, the places where the railroad men stayed when the railroads were so significant in Kansas. You look at a map of Kansas in 1900 -- I've got one behind me -- they didn't have any roads. Kansas was all railroads. There were no highways. So a hotel for railroad workers was a very important part of the community. That's a very significant part of Kansas that's important to sustain. Bill Curtis had great vision. He invested his money, we matched this with federal dollars, and the local community was very supportive. Visiting Sedan is a good way to see a snap shot of Kansas history. We're really excited about this."

Favorite Places

"I really like Sedan, Kansas, and the Castle Inn Riverside."

"Being near the Chisholm Trail was a huge part of why Wichita came about. We have a full Kansas "cow town." They preserved buildings and moved them to the site to recreate the cow town. The saloon has a melodrama, and there's a working blacksmith. They have dudes. The saloon occasionally serves draft beer, but most of the time it's just a soda bar. They've preserved a farmstead too, so you can see a whole cow town and get a taste of what it was like to come into town on a horse, and what it was like to have a train station there. It was a wonderful tour. When my relatives come to town, I take them there. My dad really enjoys it. It just reminds my dad of his childhood. When I was a kid I loved Westerns -- Hopalong Cassidy, the Lone Ranger, Roy Rogers. That's part of us."

Advice for Preservation Advocates

"Across the nation, there has to be an expressed interest in historical sites, and in preserving them. Most people are so busy getting their kids to school, making sure they're homes are in tact, going to church, shopping, working, they don't stop and think about preserving historic sites. Information passed from person to person has a big impact. Each community needs to have a spark of interest."

"Word of mouth is good for increasing membership and keeping involvement. I would like to see a group (of advocates) for each Congressional district who reach out to each member of Congress so they're aware of the needs in each district. When it comes time in Washington to make decisions, the more people weigh in, the greater priority an issue gets. If we want to have continued success in preserving America from one Administration to the next, the continuity needs to be at the local level where people in the community are continually reminding their elected members of the great value in our historic properties and that we need to protect them."

"Historical societies, local societies. If we can connect them so that they stir at the right time of year and contact their member of Congress, they will keep their programs and funding for historic programs consistent through the years."

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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The NCSHPO Weekly Legislative Update is available only to members of the NCSHPO. An update archive is located in the Members Only section of the NCSHPO website. You will need a user name and password to access this section; email Harbeson@sso.org for this information.