

Weekly Legislative Update for State Historic Preservation Offices

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Issues

**Appropriations: Senate Mark Ups for Interior Spending Bill Postponed Indefinitely
House Passes Bridge Safety Bill with Rehabilitation Amendment
Authorizations: Preserve America and Save America's Treasures Bill Not Included in Latest
Omnibus**

Updated Congressional Report Card

1. Appropriations: Senate Mark Ups for Interior Spending Bill Postponed Indefinitely

On Capitol Hill this week, Congress and their staff worked diligently to complete key tasks before breaking for the summer. Debates about oil lease expansion, related to our nation's energy crisis, took significant time and delayed indefinitely the official consideration of the FY2009 Interior and Related Agencies spending bill.

The Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee was due to mark up their draft of recommendations on Wednesday, July 23. The full Committee was scheduled to mark these recommendations up the next day.

The Appropriations committee had also scheduled a mark up of the second supplemental bill to support relief efforts in the Midwest. This was scrapped as well, with no rescheduled date for consideration.

Arguments about expanding offshore oil leases are partisan. Republicans are supporting opening waters off the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and the Gulf of Mexico, to oil drilling. Democrats oppose this idea. The price of gas in this country is fueling heated debate that will likely last beyond the August recess.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has approved nine of its 12 fiscal 2009 bills. The Interior bill, along with the Defense and Legislative Branch bills remain to be considered.

The House of Representatives Interior Appropriations Subcommittee marked up its spending recommendations on June 11. These include increases for State Historic Preservation Offices and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, and basically maintain funding levels for Preserve America and Save America's Treasures grant programs.

(Note: Scroll to the end of this report for an updated Congressional Report Card)

2. House Passes Bridge Bill with Rehabilitation Amendment

On July 24, the House of Representatives passed the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act of 2008 that includes encouragement for repair of historic bridges. Representative James Oberstar (D-MN) introduced the legislation on October 30, 2007 in response to the collapse of I-35W outside of Minneapolis, MN on August 1 of last year.

Oberstar, a behind-the-scenes champion of historic preservation, has been shepherding this legislation through the House since last year's tragedy. The legislation includes an inventory of all bridges on all federally-aided highways.

The bill also proscribes that a given state may inventory bridges, on and off federal highways, for historic significance as a part of the federal program. Representative Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH) amended Oberstar's bill with clarification of the term "historic bridge." For the purposes of this program, "historic" means any bridge that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The bill directs inventories to identify bridges that are structurally deficient and functionally obsolete. The bill calls for analysis of replacement costs versus rehabilitating bridges. The legislation includes authorization of \$1,000,000,000 in FY2009 for this program.

The bill passed 367 – 55.

3. Authorizations: Preserve America and Save America's Treasures Bill Not Included in Latest Omnibus

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is now preparing an omnibus bill with a number of bills from many committees. His bill will help move along a number of noncontroversial pieces of legislation. The Preserve America and Save America's Treasures authorization legislation, and a number of other preservation-related pieces remain in another omnibus, H.R. 3213. This bill is not moving now, but according to Senate Energy Committee staff is "still available for action if Reid decides to take it up."

Here's an overview of preservation legislation within H.R.3213:

Preserve America authorization

Save America's Treasures authorization

American Battlefield Protection Program

National Heritage Areas Program Authorization

National Heritage Area Designations, including: Sangre de Cristo NHA (CO); Cache la Poudre River NHA (CO); South Park NHA (CO); Northern Plains NHA (ND); Baltimore NHA (MD); Freedom's Way NHA (MA and NH); Mississippi Hills NHA (MS); Mississippi Delta NHA (MS) Muscle Shoals NHA (AL); Santa Cruz Valley NHA (AZ)

3. Latest Congressional Report Card

<http://www.preservationaction.org/states/7.25.2008report%20card.htm>