Special Section: Archaeopolitics

Preserving and Strengthening our National Archaeological Program

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Introduction

Although the SAA's annual meeting in Minneapolis was one of the most successful and vigorous ever, there was a strong current of foreboding and even fear, as facts and rumors circulated regarding what Congress and various federal agencies might or might not do to the laws, regulations, and programs that today affect most aspects of American archaeology. Those members working in the resource management sector saw themselves as especially vulnerable, but academicians and museum specialists were also concerned about the funding prospects for important grant programs. Accompanying articles by Judy Bense, Donald Craib, and Ralph Johnson detail various aspects of what has happened and what might happen in Congress, and how SAA and other organizations are responding to these actions.

The good news is that so far (I write this in mid-August), the programs that most concern us have weathered the fiscal year 1996 appropriations process, with only "average" levels of cuts (though the National Endowment for the Humanities appears to be facing substantial downsizing). In general, "our" programs have fared better than those in many other areas, such as environmental and energy research and regulation, and social services. The article by Donald Craib and Ralph Johnson details the amounts appropriated by the House and Senate for programs of special interest to us.

My sense is that support for archaeology and historic preservation is fairly broadly distributed across both parties in this Congress, but that it does not appear to be very deep. Our programs are a minuscule part of the federal budget, and most members of Congress and their staffs know little about them (which provides us with an opportunity to educate them). Except for NEH, these programs do not appear to be ideologically targeted for attack. On the other hand, we still
are not fully through the appropriations process, and differences between the Senate and House bills must still be resolved in conference this fall. If President Clinton vetoes appropriations bills that are important to us, funds will be shifted in the mad scramble at the end of the fiscal year to come up with something that will be veto-proof. So we could still have further losses or gains in the appropriations process.

Furthermore, as Loretta Neumann notes in her article, Congress has yet to complete work on a number of other bills that could dramatically affect archaeology and historic preservation. Some of these have moved through the House, but the Senate is taking a much more deliberative look at them. And, as Judy Bense points out, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation may get "another look" from Congress, both because its funding is up for reauthorization, and because it may be the subject of oversight hearings. Furthermore, if Congress is truly serious about reducing the growth of the federal deficit--and as citizens, I think most of us hope it is--the squeeze on the discretionary portion of the federal budget will be even greater in future years. And, as federal agency budgets are constrained, small programs that are considered peripheral to the principal agency mission may be disproportionately reduced. Unfortunately, cultural resource management is not (yet) seen as a core responsibility by many agencies.

What are we to do? One approach is to wring our hands, expect the worst, and assume that we are powerless to save or strengthen programs that we care about. The other approach--which the SAA leadership and many members have adopted--is to work hard to educate Congress and the agencies about the contributions that archaeology and history make to the nation, and about the need for national programs in this area. I think the components of a successful approach are: 1) having a strong, clear, message; 2) maintaining a strong lobbying effort in Washington; 3) carrying out effective grassroots efforts to convince legislators and agency managers of archaeology's importance; 4) being willing to initiate adaptive changes in public archaeology.

**What is our message?**

I think it is this: Archaeological sites are the record--and often the only record--of more than 12,000 years of human occupation in North America. When they are destroyed without study, a part of that record is forever lost. The National Historic Preservation Act provides a time-tested system for ensuring that federal agencies "look before they bulldoze" when they carry out or facilitate projects that might damage sites. This system may need changes that make it more efficient, but we must have such a system to ensure that federal programs do not destroy irreplaceable parts of America's heritage. In addition, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act has proven to be a valuable tool for fighting archaeological looting and vandalism on public lands, when the land-managing agencies have the resources and commitment to employ it effectively. The small funds devoted to archaeology by the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities are enormously important stimulators of innovative basic research and new archaeological methods. We don't apologize for the several ways in which American archaeology relies on federal laws and programs; it is entirely appropriate that preserving and understanding America's archaeological heritage be a national concern.

**What can be done in Washington?**
The keys here are Capitol Hill lobbying, developing alliances with other organizations, and providing information for the members. Donald Craib, SAA government affairs manager, and Ralph Johnson, SAA executive director, are fully engaged in these tasks. Judy Bense, chair of the SAA Government Affairs Committee, is in constant touch with the SAA office regarding "inside the beltway efforts," as am I. On visits to congressional offices, Donald and I find that we generally get a positive reception to our message. Legislators know little about how federal laws and agency programs affect archaeology, but they are receptive to learning. Frequently, our visit is the first one they have had on these topics. Donald is spending as much time as he can on the Hill, getting to know legislators' staffs and getting the message across. When SAA members are in Washington, he can help set up meetings at Congressional or agency offices--these help enormously. Donald and Ralph have actively promoted SAA alliances with other organizations in D.C.--e.g., SHA, ACRA, SOPA, Preservation Action, the National Trust, the National Council of SHPOs--to find common ground and develop coordinated strategies. The SAA office is increasingly gearing up to provide information on government affairs to the members, and also for Congress and the agencies.

Grassroots efforts are essential

Archaeology has a long history of effective grassroots lobbying, as does the historic preservation community in general. Now is the time to redouble these efforts; this is the most important and effective way to get our message across. We can't afford to leave it just to the SAA staff, officers, and Government Affairs Committee. Members of Congress respond first to constituents, so we must have strong voices for archaeology in every state, and if possible, in every congressional district. Calls, letters, and visits from constituents are the most important factors in influencing Congress. Legislators' local offices are also important points for grass-roots contacts. Legislators need to hear about exciting archaeological projects in their state and district, and we need to urge the many lay people who support archaeology in our areas to make that support known. SAA's government affairs network (GAN) now includes more than 130 members committed to actively working for archaeology in their areas, and Judy Bense is recruiting state representatives to take on special responsibilities for the network in each state.

We must be prepared to change

Congress's concerns for deregulation and budgetary constraints are forcing change in public and even academic archaeology, but other forces are at work as well. These include the emergence of Native American communities as partners in making decisions that affect archaeology, and the unprecedented growth of public interest in archaeology, as manifested by the rising circulation of the *Archaeology and Public Education* newsletter and the success of Passports in Time. In Minneapolis, provocative suggestions for change were energetically discussed during the forum on restructuring archaeology and in other sessions as well. In Wyoming, BLM managers met recently with archaeologists and representatives of industry to "reinvent Section 106," and the New Mexico deputy SHPO has called upon archaeologists to work together to do the same. Congress and powerful interest groups are asking not only that public programs (including public archaeology) grow less rapidly, but that they be less intrusive, less bureaucratic, and more friendly to business. These trends provide American archaeology with both challenges and opportunities. In this environment, we have a chance to develop research and resource
management programs that not only use public funds more efficiently, but that are more effective in meeting our two national mandates--to protect the material record of the past, and to learn from it so that the American people can better understand the full cultural heritage of their nation.