

“I find comfort in knowing that in times of great upheaval, the value of our history and our places united us, and when pressed, our colleagues worked together – not against each other – to succeed”



2025 Historic Preservation Advocacy Week

The following is a transcript of Erik Hein’s remarks during 2025 Advocacy Week, which is being provided as a result of numerous requests.

At the time this message was delivered, several issues concerning historic preservation policy & practice were being rolled out, analyzed or had yet to be announced – including substantial cuts at the National Park Service, General Services Administration, the IMLS, the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund & the overall implications for funding and Section 106.

The intention, though, remains still the same – to unite a field of preservationists, encourage them to support each other and work together, recognizing that many different approaches and perspectives, in a divided country, are both valid and necessary.

Good morning everyone,

I’m pleased to see so many familiar faces - as well as many new ones today as we gather at what is a remarkable time in Washington. Of course, I have to say, in recent memory, it seems that every year I get up here and say it is a “remarkable” one. I hesitate to say more – for fear that we may somehow raise the bar yet again for next year.

Notice I say remarkable – but I don’t say unprecedented.

Let us go back in time, shall we? It is 1980, Mt. St. Helens erupts, the Empire Strikes Back, Pac-Man is released, the Phillies won the World Series, and someone shot J.R. Ewing. At least that is what my 8-year-old self remembers. But perhaps more akin to our work today, a new Administration was in place – determined to cut government, red tape and spending. It was the Reagan Revolution – and our national historic preservation program was caught in the crosshairs – and NCSHPO, like today, had a Board President from Maryland, and fought with our partners to make sure HPF funding was not eliminated and that the entire Section 106 regulations were not gutted. At that time, the Secretary of Interior was openly hostile towards our historic preservation program, and he worked each appropriations cycle to try to eliminate HPF funding – and the first year, he managed to claw back yet to be obligated state funds for four states – nearly killing their entire state programs.

But in response, in a remarkable show of solidarity, the Maryland SHPO, Rodney Little, called each of the remaining states and territories and convinced them to voluntarily surrender a portion of their HPF appropriation to make those states whole. All of this while the disastrous Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (yes, known to many as Hookers), which was a short-lived Carter administration agency that housed all of the preservation and conservation programs, was being criticized by some for being hyper focused on energy savings and civil rights, and was thus being dismantled and the programs redistributed back within the National Park Service – causing mass disruption.

Most of us (with a few exceptions) were not present for all of that. And certainly, past performance is no guarantee of future results. But I do find some comfort in knowing that in times of great upheaval, the value of our history and our places united us, and when pressed, our colleagues worked together – not against each other – to succeed. Doing the work necessary isn’t easy. It takes a number of approaches and all sorts of people – sometimes with very different perspectives. Some are very vocal and are motivated by many broad societal issues.

Some are quiet and specific and are concerned only about particular interests. Some rail against an “unjust” system. Some try to change it from within. All of these approaches are valid – some work in certain circumstances and some work in others. But for them to work, I can guarantee you what should NOT be happening is a circular firing squad of people with a common goal berating each other or calling them reckless for not taking their preferred path.

PLEASE... FOR THE SAKE OF OUR HISTORIC PLACES, AND OUR FIELD, LET'S RESIST THAT TEMPTATION

Listen....there is a lot we need to be concerned about. In this room I know there are people worried about their jobs. There are people concerned that history is being erased or that we could lose Section 106. There are also people who believe that our government is fundamentally broken. That bureaucracy is out of control. It is, believe it or not, possible for all of these things to be true – to exist simultaneously and in the same room – yet still collectively unified in the goal to save our historic places.

This multitude of perspectives, set against a backdrop of disruption and discord in Washington, is precisely why our focus this year remains fundamentally the same as it usually is – assuring we have the funding necessary to do the work of protecting our historic places, the incentives available to do it smartly, and that we have the support of members of Congress to do it. Because if we don't continue to advocate for these basic things – who will?

This does not mean we are not concerned about other issues. But it should come as no surprise to you that we are seeing things change almost daily. It is difficult to focus on numerous individual actions that seemingly change shape before one can even respond. Particularly when, from what we keep hearing, and seeing, there are always more things coming.

So, I ask you, as you think today about what you will say tomorrow, to remain focused. You can express concern over job cuts – but provide specific examples of how they will impact your community. You can express concern about the push to bypass regulatory protections but provide specific examples of what this would mean to our historic places. You can focus on consequences, but make sure the core of our message is clear – we need funding to protect our historic places and to make projects move smoothly. We need incentives to ensure historic rehabilitations continue to provide a net economic gain to the American people. We need people to do the work. And we need Congress to care.



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