

## SENATE HOLDS HEARING ON PRESIDENTIAL SITES BILL

November 18, 2005 - On November 15th, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks held a hearing on several proposed bills including the Presidential Sites Improvement Act (S. 431). The bill was introduced on February 17, 2005 by Senators Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Richard Durbin (D-IL).

The legislation addresses the need of capital, technological, and interpretive improvements to sites relating to Presidential heritage. The bill provides funds on a match basis for repairs and capital improvements, the installation or repair of heating or conditioning systems, security systems or electric service, modifications that achieve compliance with the American with Disabilities Act, and interpretive improvements to enhance public understanding and enjoyment of the site. Importantly, the bill specifies that of funds appropriated, 15% shall be used for emergency projects as determined by the Secretary of the Interior; 65 % shall be used for Presidential sites with a 3-year average annual operating budget of less than \$700,000; and 20% shall be used for grants to Presidential sites with a 3-year average annual operating budget of more than \$700,000.

Emily Wadhams, Vice President for Public Policy at the National Trust for Historic Preservation testified in support of the legislation. Ms. Wadhams stated: “[G]ood preservation and proper interpretation are integral to our responsibility for the stewardship of cultural resources. Arguably, nowhere is this more important than caring for America’s Presidential legacy.” Ms. Wadhams also stressed that the bill is more important than ever as funding for historic preservation has been cut to bare bones, giving several examples to illustrate budget cuts to State Historic Preservation Offices and the affect on historic sites.

A companion bill, H.R. 927, was introduced in the House by Representatives Paul Gillmor (R-OH) and Mike Ross (D-AR). No action has been taken on the bill.