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Preserving America's Heritage

Congress Authorizes ACHP Full-Time Chairman and Reauthorizes Historic Preservation Fund

Washington, D.C.—On December 9, the National Park Service Centennial Act passed the Senate, the last piece of legislation from the 114th Congress. The bill had been passed by the House previously and contains amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) had been pursuing for several years. These include the conversion of the ACHP chairman to a full-time position, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, and the addition of the General Chairman of the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) as a voting member of the ACHP. The President signed the bill into law on December 16.

The chairman provisions would take effect on January 20, 2017, commencing a four-year term for that position. The current chairman will serve until the full-time chairman is appointed and confirmed. The NATHPO provision takes effect now that the President signed the bill into law.

The idea for converting the ACHP chairman from its current part-time status to full-time emerged from the 2006 Preserve America Summit. The sense was that the voice of the ACHP within the executive branch would be greatly enhanced by having full-time political leadership, and this in turn would raise the visibility and effectiveness of the historic preservation program. The ACHP membership as a whole endorsed the concept in 2009. A task force comprised of the national preservation organizations in 2011 also advanced the idea as part of a comprehensive proposal to improve the leadership of the national historic preservation program.

The General Chairman of NATHPO currently serves as an invited observer on the ACHP, meaning he or she is not a voting member. The 1992 amendments to the NHPA authorized Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs), and the number has grown over the years to 170. THPOs serve as counterparts to State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) on Indian reservations and have an important role in the Section 106 process.

ACHP Chairman Wayne Donaldson has been the primary advocate for formal membership for NATHPO, which will provide the organization with equal status on the ACHP with the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO). The President of NCSHPO was added to the ACHP membership in 1980.

The National Park Service Centennial Act also extended authorization of the Historic Preservation Fund through 2023. This fund is the source of essential support for the activities of SHPOs and THPOs in carrying out provisions of the NHPA. The authorization for allocating monies to the fund from the proceeds of Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas leases had expired in 2015. The amendments were enacted as the preservation community celebrates the 50th anniversary of the NHPA, as well as the establishment of the ACHP.

About the ACHP: *An independent federal agency, the ACHP promotes the economic, educational, environmental, sustainability, and cultural values of historic preservation and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy. It also influences federal activities, programs, and policies that affect historic and cultural properties. See www.achp.gov for more information.*

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