

Statement of Hon. Brad Miller, Member of Congress from the State of North Carolina  
Before the Committee on the Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
United State House of Representatives  
April 24, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee about the “Preserve America and Save America’s Treasures Act”, H.R. 3981, a bipartisan and bicameral historic preservation bill that will authorize two programs critical to the future of America’s historic communities and treasures.

I always enjoy talking about protecting our nation’s historic buildings and how that in turn leads to community revitalization. When historic buildings and neighborhoods are allowed to deteriorate, we lose a part of our past forever.

That is one of the many reasons I started the Congressional Historic Preservation Caucus with my colleague from Ohio, Mike Turner. We have managed to create a successful bipartisan caucus with nearly 120 members. The caucus serves as a forum for Members to discuss ways to protect and revitalize America’s historic places and structures and this past October, I had the privilege of introducing the “Preserve America and Save America’s Treasures Act” in my capacity as the Historic Preservation Caucus co-chair.

The introduction and consideration of this bill is an important moment for the historic preservation community. The Save America’s Treasures program was started as part of the White House Millennium Council and chaired by then First Lady Hillary Clinton. This program has provided much needed “bricks and mortar” support and has gone beyond anyone’s expectations, funding America’s most threatened cultural treasures for almost 10 years. More recently, the current administration, under the leadership of First Lady Laura Bush, created the Preserve America program to support communities in their efforts to preserve cultural and natural heritage by providing funding for heritage tourism and preservation planning. Each program fulfills a unique purpose and together, they provide a holistic approach to comprehensive preservation and community revitalization.

We introduced the “Preserve America and Save America's Treasures" Act in the Sewall-Belmont House, which was designated a National Historic Landmark for its significance in American history. It was there that the National Woman's Party, led by Alice Paul, headquartered their movement to battle for a woman’s right to vote. It’s hard to imagine that this national symbol of women’s suffrage was once threatened by a leaking roof and structural damage. The Sewall-Belmont House was the first building to receive funding as a “Save America’s Treasures” project. In my own district, Save America’s Treasures funding has been used to help preserve the F.W. Woolworth Building in Greensboro, North Carolina, where, on February 1, 1960, four students from North Carolina A&T sat down at a lunch counter and refused to leave until they were treated the same as white customers. Within two months, the sit-in at the Woolworth’s counter had sparked 15 similar demonstrations in nine other states and became a pivotal moment in the civil

rights movement. The F.W. Woolworth Building and its lunch counter are important symbols of the civil rights movement, and should be preserved for future generations.

In addition to Save America's Treasures, this bill will authorize the Preserve America program, which has designated more than 500 neighborhoods, cities, and towns throughout the United States as "Preserve America Communities" and has awarded grant money since 2006. Earlier this month, the Department of Interior made its first round of 2008 grants of \$2.9 million to 43 projects in 25 states. This September they will award an additional \$4.3 million in grants. These projects allow us to explore and preserve our past by supporting heritage tourism, the commercial revitalization of forgotten downtowns, and the re-use of historic properties. I realize that America's historic places deserve our care and stewardship, but it is often difficult to convince others of preservation's role in government. What I find so compelling about historic preservation is not only what it teaches us about our history, but also what it promises for our future. The Preserve America program, through its grant opportunities and community designations, ensures that our notable communities and neighborhoods will survive for future generations.

Historic preservation is a powerful tool in revitalizing cities, towns, and rural areas nationwide where dramatic population shifts, outdated planning, and the loss of manufacturing jobs have made market-driven reinvestment impossible without assistance. Our past and future are integrally linked and we have a duty to make sure that we preserve historic places for generations to come. Vacant and underutilized historic structures and collections are in need of rehabilitation and can serve as catalysts for attracting new investment in growing communities. Whether it is preserving main streets of forgotten downtowns, or re-using historic properties as affordable housing, preservation makes history come alive in communities around our country.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that the committee will learn more about these two important programs from the leaders in the historic preservation community who will testify today. I look forward to the time when these important programs have been authorized and Congress affirms its commitment to saving our heritage and revitalizing our communities. Once again, I thank you for inviting me to testify in support of the "Preserve America and Save America's Treasures Act".