

Remarks to the Expert Panel
Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary of the Interior
May 8, 2008

Good afternoon. I know John Nau thanked you earlier today. I, too, would like to thank you for your time and for agreeing to serve on this expert panel. This panel is performing a critical role as follow-up to the Preserve America Summit.

Your role will be to explore key questions about historic preservation institutions and infrastructure: “How can this nation fulfill historic preservation goals?” Specifically, “Do we have the right tools, organizations, institutions, programs, structures, and delivery mechanisms to advance historic preservation in this 21st century?”

As champions of historic preservation and historic preservation professionals, each of you appreciates the linkage between past and present. Those linkages are as important in governance as in architecture, culture, art, communities, cityscapes, landscapes, and communities.

Reflect, for a moment, on the half-century nexus between preservation and public action or governance. The National Historic Preservation Act was not the beginning of preservation. Rather, as with many federal actions, it affirmed the importance of historic preservation values deeply rooted in America’s communities. The Act also recognized the emergent challenges in post-World War II America associated with enormous economic growth and urban development.

The Act put in place mechanisms to assure historic buildings, places, and artifacts were given deliberate consideration as we build roads, reconfigure cities, and transform landscapes. The National Historic Preservation Act affirms such efforts, although it is only one feature that assists with historic preservation. Other governing tools and actions preceded it and new features are continuously emerging.

Historic preservation has many components. As I ponder historic preservation in concept and action, I perceive at least seven components. These include:

- Regulatory functions through which actions that might impact historic assets are governed to limit adverse affects and foster preservation;
- Informational, including inventorying, activities through which to generate and maintain records and other data on historic assets;
- Celebratory programs, including programs of recognition, to acknowledge and highlight historic properties through historic registries, landmark status, awards, and related actions;
- Educational programs;
- Economic programs, including those that promote heritage tourism, with a focus on linking historic assets to economic opportunity;
- Motivational programs that stimulate a nation of preservation stewards through economic incentives, such as tax incentives.
- Restoration-focused programs that apply financial investments and technical tools to restoring, maintaining, and preserving historic assets.

These components are both linked and distinctive.

The Federal structure, in some ways, reflects this differentiation in the broad range of historic preservation components. The National Park System, for 100 years, has restored, preserved, and told stories of nationally notable historic sites. As a system, it makes possible a network of interrelated sites. As a system, it increases and enhances such networks, as in the Underground Railroad Network, which includes both publically and privately managed sites.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation provides cross-agency, federal, state, and tribal coordination and uniformity, especially on regulatory matters. Save America's Treasures provides a framework for partnerships in restoration and rehabilitation of physical structures and collections. Preserve America provides for partnerships in heritage tourism and education. National Heritage Areas assist in creating a linkage of history, economy, and communities, to name a few.

We need to inventory the array of Federal programs and structures and examine the working parts of this network of programs and actions. The structures and programs are diverse and extensive. And, of course, the federal infrastructure is part of a much larger whole. We all appreciate the significant and long-standing leadership role in preservation played by citizen stewards across this nation. Communities, tribes, states, and nonprofit organizations, along with the private sector, all advance historic preservation in myriad ways.

As we think about the future, the temptation is often to dwell on imperfections and seek their antidotes. Yet, infrastructure evaluation, to be holistic, should consider the working parts as well as the challenges. The history of governance in general is often a history of swinging pendulums. That history often includes the identification of shortcomings with a corresponding reaction that generates structural or other changes as a response. Yet these changes themselves then often give rise to new and different problems—and, thus, the pendulum swings as new responses to these new problems emerge.

I suggest, therefore, as you go about your deliberations, it may be fruitful to consider the operational characteristics you are striving to achieve. You may wish to take a sort of “first things first” framework of basic governing characteristics, and then review infrastructure within that framework. You will shape your own deliberations, of course. I merely offer some general thoughts. As John Nau said, there are no constraints on your deliberations.

However, I'd like to offer some thoughts on governance and governing qualities.

As you deliberate, it may be useful to consider the context and current challenges. I see three primary challenges.

First, preservation takes place in a context of many participants and programs. There is virtue in letting “a thousand flowers bloom”. This perspective affirms the diversity, dispersion, and breadth of programs and preservation penetration into communities. A central challenge this 21st

century is how we might best coordinate and integrate these many efforts so the whole is greater than the sum of parts. Note, however, that coordination is not the same as centralization.

Second, preservation takes place in a context of constrained resources. There is nothing new in this constraint. Our imaginations always outstrip resources available to pursue our many ideas. A central question, thus, is how to generate resources for preservation and assure their effective use?

Third, as noted earlier, preservation unfolds in a context of diverse mission elements and priorities. A key challenge is, thus, how to strengthen linkages among these many elements.

These three contextual elements shape deliberations: many participants, constrained resources, and diverse missions and goals.

Now let me turn, for a moment, to governing characteristics. I'd like to offer a few thoughts on six governing qualities of successful institutions, all of which transcend the realm of historic preservation:

First is the importance of finding ways to achieve *coordination*. Coordination fosters efficiency, reduces duplication, and improves effectiveness by assuring that agencies find synergies among programs, leverage resources, and identify shared priorities.

Second is the importance of *sustainability*. If preservation is a priority, it is important to sustain investment in preservation successes over time. There is, of course, no single model of successfully assuring sustained program funding. Success can reside in both concentration and dispersion of preservation programs, authorities, and responsibilities. Concentration of programs in a single place creates program visibility and can facilitate budget discussions with the Congress. On the other hand, program dispersion can enhance resilience such that, at any point in time, at least some program investments may achieve support. Program dispersion can also help provide individual program focus.

A third characteristic is the importance of *innovation and flexibility*. What structures nurture innovation – in technology, management, and restoration, for example?

Fourth is the importance of *continuity and stability*. How can we strike the right balance between innovation and stability? On the one hand, the ability to develop new institutions, structures, and programs to address changing needs and circumstances is important to program effectiveness. On the other hand, maintaining program stability and continuity of governing infrastructure is also important to efficiency, effectiveness, and public transparency regarding process.

A fifth governing feature is *accountability*. What are the mechanisms through which the preservation community and agencies can articulate goals, measure results, and adjust actions to improve those results?

Finally, we need governing institutions that foster public *engagement*. We need institutions that inspire a nation of stewards and that engage partners in preservation.

There is no single governing infrastructure that achieves these characteristics—and all arrangements involve some trade offs. I look forward to your deliberations as you consider the infrastructure through which we deliver historic preservation goals.

In closing, I know that all of you gathered today and for the next several months may have different views and aspirations for how the governing infrastructure for historic preservation should be shaped and ought to function. I know you all also share a passion for the history, architecture, cultures, and identity of this nation. I thank you for your leadership and look forward to the progress of the panel.