

NEIL ABERCROMBIE

1ST DISTRICT, HAWAII

WHIP-AT-LARGE



COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON
RESOURCES

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

July 31, 2009

Mr. Daniel N. Wenk
Acting Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Acting Director Wenk:

I am writing to express my concerns about the Hawaii State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) and its ability to carry out its federal responsibilities. I respectfully request the attention of the National Park Service on this matter and ask for your active intervention.

In the last several years, SHPD has had a number of difficulties related to management and staff vacancies. Some efforts were made to address the situation, however, many problems persist. It has recently come to my attention that the problems concerning this office may be more pervasive and damaging than I initially understood.

As you know, the state historic preservation offices are responsible for reviewing a wide variety of federal projects. In Hawaii, these range from the expansion and modernization of Pearl Harbor Shipyard to transportation improvements to our state's roadways, harbors and our new rapid transit system. It is my understanding that SHPD is not able to perform its section 106 functions in a timely manner which has the effect of stalling projects under consideration. This problem extends to projects funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act which were intended to be implemented in an expedient manner in order to help the state and national economy.

In addition, the Hawaii SHPD has significant responsibilities under state law to review proposed projects, certify properties for state tax benefits, and to work closely with Native Hawaiians and other communities to protect our shared heritage. These responsibilities are also being compromised due to lack of funding and staffing, therefore posing additional threats to our local economy.

I am concerned about this disruption, not only because the delay of these projects would have a huge and rippling effect upon our economy, but also because there is the danger that our cultural and historical resources are not being adequately protected.

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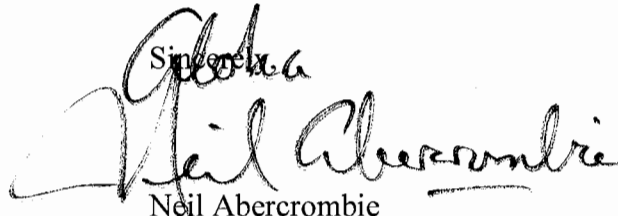
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As you know, the National Park Service has recently evaluated SHPD's compliance with federal mandates under the National Historic Preservation Act and is writing a report on its findings. Given the importance to the State of Hawaii, I am requesting that this report be written and approved as rapidly as possible. It is in everyone's interests that SHPD be an effective and fully functioning office.

I would appreciate any update you have on this matter and am very grateful for your attention to it. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Amy Asselbayer, my Chief-of-Staff (808-541-2570, amy.asselbayer@mail.house.gov) or Wendy Clerinx, my Legislative Director (202-225-0007, wendy.clerinx@mail.house.gov).


Neil Abercrombie
Member of Congress

cc: Laura Thielen, Chairperson, Hawaii State Department of Land and Natural Resources