



**National Trust for
Historic Preservation**

Save the past. Enrich the future.

April 29, 2021

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Teresa Isabel Leger Fernandez
1432 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20540

The Honorable Don Young
2314 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Heinrich, Senator Murkowski, Representative Leger Fernandez and Representative Young:

On behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, I am writing to thank you for introducing the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. This bipartisan bill would strengthen laws aimed at preventing trafficking in Native American cultural items and facilitate the voluntary return of sacred and cultural items. The National Trust strongly supports these goals and your legislation, as we supported the previous version of this legislation (S. 2165/H.R. 3846), in the last Congress.

Congress chartered the National Trust in 1949 to “facilitate public participation in historic preservation” and further the purposes of federal historic preservation laws. With headquarters in Washington, D.C., 28 historic sites, more than one million members and supporters, and a national network of partners in states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Trust works to save America’s historic places and advocates for historic preservation as a fundamental value in programs and policies at all levels of government.

Ongoing sales of Native American cultural items at overseas auctions highlight shortcomings in existing law. For example, no law explicitly prohibits exporting items obtained illegally under the Archaeological Resource Protection Act (ARPA), or the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The current lack of export prohibitions have presented significant challenges to tribes’ ability to work with foreign governments to stop sales and repatriate important cultural items.

We appreciate that the STOP Act addresses this deficiency in existing law by expressly prohibiting export of illegally obtained cultural items and creating a certification system for items obtained lawfully. The bill’s strengthened penalties under NAGPRA will also provide greater deterrence. Furthermore, we commend the STOP Act’s emphasis on facilitating voluntary return of cultural items to provide new opportunities to restore tangible cultural heritage.

The National Trust strongly supports this legislation, which we believe will enhance our nation’s commitment to respecting and protecting the tangible cultural heritage of tribes. We look forward to working with you toward enactment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Edmondson".

Paul W. Edmondson

Paul W. Edmondson | PRESIDENT & CEO

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