

Supporting Historic Preservation through a Legislative Caucus

NATIONAL TRUST FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION®

A Chapter from the *Advocacy Training Manual*
Produced by the Center for State and Local Policy



National Trust President Richard Moe testifies with preservation experts before the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census under the chairmanship of Rep. Mike Turner (R-OH). Turner and his colleague, Rep. Brad Miller (D-NC) founded and lead the Congressional Historic Preservation Caucus. Photo courtesy of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Concerned about the future of historic resources, elected officials are using legislative caucuses to promote beneficial policies and educate their associates. From the Congressional Historic Preservation Caucus started in 2003 by Congressman Mike Turner of Ohio and Congressman Brad Miller of North Carolina, to Hawaii's Cultural Heritage Caucus (2006), Illinois' Historic Preservation Caucus (2005), and Washington's Heritage Caucus (1989), officials are uniting across party lines to tackle preservation issues.

WHAT IS A LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

A caucus is a group of individuals within a legislative body that promotes a specific issue or political party. Non-party caucuses either share characteristics, such as ideology, race, ethnicity, and gender for example, or legislative interests, such as historic preservation. Legislators often participate in more than one caucus and join either

because of their personal interests or because constituents have asked them to represent them in an issue-based caucus.

Legislators frequently use caucuses to review bills and budgets that affect certain issues and to recommend strategies to support passage of key legislation. A historic preservation caucus, for example, allows elected officials to:

- strategize ways to meet preservation needs;
- educate other officials and government agencies about value of heritage and preservation implications of their decisions;
- float proposals and gain consensus;
- gauge political support;
- find bill sponsors;
- elevate preservation issues within the legislature;
- indoctrinate new members;

- stay informed about actions that might affect historic resources;
- become educated about the state's history and historic resources; and
- show their constituents that they care about their local history.

WHAT STATES HAVE A PRESERVATION CAUCUS?

Legislators in three states — Illinois, Hawaii, and Washington — have developed an issue-based caucus to support preservation. Although varied in structure, each caucus is committed to preserving its state's heritage.

The Washington State Heritage Caucus is a loosely-knit organization of state legislators and other elected officials; state heritage, cultural, and lands agencies; and nonprofit organizations that supports the protection of Washington's historical and cultural legacy. The caucus evolved from several successful legislative efforts including support for the state's Centennial celebration in 1989 and a new state history museum. The caucus supports the budgets of the state historic preservation office, the state historical society, the Office of Tourism, the Heritage Corridors Program of WSDOT, State Archives, and the State Oral History Program.

The possibility of a historic preservation caucus in the Illinois legislature was first discussed between Representative Thomas Holbrook (D-Bellefonte) and Illinois Landmarks President David Bahlman after the list of Ten Most Endangered Places in Illinois was announced in 2005. Both men felt that a legislative caucus would help promote, preserve, and protect Illinois structures and sites. At their first meeting on October 26, 2005, the Illinois Historic Preservation Caucus voted Senator Deanna Demuzio (D-Carlinville) and Representative Richard Brauer (R-Petersburg) as co-chairs.

In January 2006, Representative Corinne W.L. Ching (Nuuanu- Liliha) and Representative Cindy Evans (North Kona-South Kohala) announced the creation of new heritage caucus to protect Hawaii's distinctive cultural heritage and promote traditional art forms. Members hope to raise awareness of preservation, foster a sense of community, and preserve Hawaii's culturally significant and historic sites.

In Hawaii, the legislators use their caucus mainly as an educational tool and work with Historic Hawai'i Foundation to organize the Historic Preservation Awareness Day each spring. Illinois caucus co-chairs have introduced specific preservation legislation (for example, the joint House-Senate Barn Preservation Resolution and a bill that would improve operational hours for state-owned historic sites). Washington's long-running caucus has celebrated many policy successes (see sidebar).

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A PRESERVATION CAUCUS?

In addition to preservation-specific measures, the relationships formed through the caucus are probably one of the most immediate and long-lasting results of a legislative caucus. A legislative caucus allows elected officials "to form personal and professional relationships that lead to stronger programs and better coordination of interests," explains Mary Thompson, a National Trust trustee from Washington who helped the caucus evolve into its current configuration.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN A PRESERVATION CAUCUS?

When setting up issue-based caucuses, most legislators usually share leadership between a member from the House and a member from the Senate, representing different parties.

Recognizing the need for broad support, the Washington Heritage Caucus is open to any elected official, staff person, or organization that wishes to participate, meaning that between 12 to 15 agency personnel or representatives of various organizations regularly join the meetings. This has included representatives from the governor's office,

A FUNDING SUCCESS FOR THE WASHINGTON STATE HERITAGE CAUCUS

The Washington State Heritage Caucus was successful in increasing the budgets for several heritage programs during the spring 2008 legislative session. Through the efforts of the caucus the state historic preservation office was budgeted to receive funding for an additional archeologist position; \$250,000 in GIS support; \$200,000 to support HistoryLink, the online encyclopedia of Washington history; more than \$120,000 to support internet technology; and \$60,000 to conduct a survey of historic barns.

The caucus also ensured that 501(c)(3) organizations have access to distributions of local hotel/motel tax funds and that the barn bill mandated a study of how the state tax incentive and current building codes affect the rehabilitation of barns. However, its biggest success was securing the following funding in the capital budget:

- \$10 million for the Heritage Capital Projects Fund, which represents a \$5 million increase from the last biennium and includes \$83,000 toward rehabilitation of the Stimson-Green Mansion, headquarters of the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation;
- \$12 million for "Building for the Arts" fund which supports performing arts facilities, many of which are historic;
- \$7.1 million for historic preservation projects in state parks;
- \$5 million for historic courthouses (to be administered by the SHPO and the Washington Trust);
- \$2 million for renovation of Spokane's historic Fox Theater;
- \$500,000 for a new historic barns program (to be administered by the SHPO and the Washington Trust);
- \$400,000 for the preservation of Spokane's Campbell House;
- \$200,000 for Women's History Preservation Grants;
- \$150,000 for a survey of historic theaters; and
- \$85,000 for the acquisition of one of the state's few covered bridges.

In 2005, the National Trust for Historic Preservation recognized the Washington State Heritage Caucus with the John H. Chafee Trustee's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Public Policy.

state historic preservation office, tourism office, Department of Transportation, Arts Commission, state parks, General Administration, state historical societies, the Washington Trust, Historic Seattle, and Maritime Heritage. Similarly, the Illinois legislators invite representatives from several organizations including the state historic preservation office, Illinois Landmarks, National Trust Midwest Office, and Illinois Main

Street. Hawaii legislators currently do not invite agency representatives or other organizations to participate in their deliberations, but instead hold community meetings to get input from constituents.

Illinois' caucus now has 84 members, making it the largest issue-based caucus in the Illinois legislature. Because of its large size, organizers are looking at developing

subcommittees as a way to engage caucus members further.

In all three states, approximately seven to ten legislators or members of their staffs attend caucus meetings. In Washington State, the secretary of state and Senate Capital Budget Committee chair regularly attend the meetings, and while attendance is strong in the beginning of the session (20 to 30 people), attendance declines as bill deadlines come and go and proposals die.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Hawaii legislators specifically chose the name "Heritage Caucus" to reflect their interest preserving in all things cultural (e.g., traditional arts, historic buildings, etc.), while the Illinois Historic Preservation Caucus chooses to focus mainly on the built environment.

WHEN AND WHERE TO MEET?

In Washington State meetings are held weekly during the legislative session at 7:00 a.m., before committee hearings begin. In Illinois and Hawaii, the meetings are held on an ad hoc basis during the session. The Washington State Heritage Caucus credits the regularity of the meeting date, time, and location as one reason for its long-term success.

WHAT ABOUT CONGRESS?

Created in 2003 to advance preservation legislation on Capitol Hill by Representatives Brad Miller (NC-13) and Michael Turner (OH-03), the Congressional Historic Preservation Caucus has garnered the support of 113 members of Congress since its inception. The caucus serves as a forum for members to discuss ways to protect and revitalize America's historic places and structures, as well as to focus on historic preservation's important role in economic development and neighborhood revitalization.

The caucus is supported by Preservation Action, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, and the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions. For a listing of members, visit <http://www.preservationnation.org/advocacy/>.

WHO STAFFS THE CAUCUS?

In Washington, the caucus is staffed by the State Historical Society, while in Hawaii, the legislative aides and office personnel of the legislative co-chairs staff the caucus.

HOW ARE MEMBERS ASKED TO JOIN?

In all three states, the caucus members are asked to join either by their colleagues or constituents. In some instances, legislators learn about the existence of the caucus through lobbyists or agency staff. In Illinois, enthusiastic caucus co-chairs quickly signed up more than 60 colleagues interested in historic preservation in its first year, specifically targeting legislators with state-owned historic sites in their districts.

IS THERE A FORMAL AGENDA?

The Washington State caucus does not advance a formal agenda. Its weekly meetings typically include a presentation by a group seeking legislative support, a status report on bill activity and an alert to members about issues in the upcoming week. The agenda changes throughout the session as different groups make presentations and as legislators sift through the various proposals.



(L to R) IL State Representative Ruth Munson (R-Elgin), member of the Illinois Historic Preservation Legislative Caucus, Elgin Mayor Ed Schock, and Gifford Park Association President Fran Cella holding Landmarks Illinois' Driehaus Preservation Award for the Elgin neighborhood association's long commitment to historic preservation. Photo courtesy of Landmarks Illinois.

WHEN DOES A CAUCUS GET INVOLVED IN AN ISSUE?

Legislators bring forth proposals for the group's consideration either at the request of their constituents or through their own initiative. The caucus then decides on priorities and strategies based on an evaluation of the possible opportunities and probable obstacles. For example, the Washington State caucus originally supported legislation brought to it by various constituent groups, but now proactively proposes specific legislation developed by the members themselves. The caucus also sponsors legislative studies on key issues and brings items to the attention of the governor and the legislative leadership.

WORKING WITH A CAUCUS

A heritage caucus gives preservationists another opportunity to bring policy needs to the attention of their legislators. Since caucus members count on their constituents for accurate and timely information and input into the legislative process, it is critical for preservationists to express their



Washington State Governor Christine Gregoire signs SB 5707 into law. The Washington Heritage Caucus was instrumental in the success of the legislation. Photo courtesy of the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation.

opinions to their elected officials (see *Communicating with Elected Officials* available for download at www.preservationnation.org/advocacy).

A caucus also provides a quick way to identify legislators who have at least a token interest in history. Preservation organizations use the list to send officials informational newsletters and to issue invitations to upcoming tours, events, and grand openings of rehabilitated buildings.

When Illinois Landmarks announces its Ten Most Endangered Places in Illinois, it involves caucus members and local officials from their districts. Landmarks also asks caucus members if there are any preservation projects within their district where Landmarks might be able to help. Finally, when writing letters of support for local preservation efforts, Illinois Landmarks sends a copy to the district's caucus members. Having the caucus "has been a means of opening a dialogue with elected officials," says Lisa DiChiera, director of Advocacy for Illinois Landmarks.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

A caucus is most effective when there is an identified need for legislators to tackle, when there is a shared sense of purpose, and when members have a sense of urgency that keeps momentum going. In addition, a caucus should have a deliberate bipartisan nature; regularly scheduled meetings; good staffing by legislative aides or others; and a system to track issues when the legislature is not in session.

A successful preservation caucus also has a core group of legislators who are sincerely interested in history and historic preservation. Legislators should be energetic and committed to spending time on the issue; experienced in the legislative process; have credibility with their colleagues; be able to bring new members to the fold; and most importantly, be there for the votes when it counts.

CONCLUSION

Through appropriations, authorization, and oversight activities, state legislatures

exercise great influence over a state's cultural heritage. While a legislative caucus can effectively bring together preservation interests, it cannot ensure the preservation of historic sites on its own. Like other advocacy tools, a legislative caucus boils down to effective relationship-building between elected officials, governmental agencies, preservation organizations, and the constituents they represent. ■

Renee Kuhlman directs special projects for the National Trust Center for State and Local Policy.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

Landmark Illinois website,
http://www.landmarks.org/how_fed_issues.htm

Communicating with Elected Officials
National Trust for Historic Preservation,
www.preservationnation.org/advocacy

A Blueprint for Lobbying by Susan West Montgomery, National Trust for Historic Preservation, www.preservationbooks.org

The National Trust Center for State and Local Policy is helping preservationists influence policy-makers in their own communities, through training, technical assistance, and promotion of effective advocacy tools. This publication is part of the Center's *Advocacy Training Manual*. To get assistance with your policy issue, the latest information about advocacy techniques, or to order additional copies of this chapter of the manual, e-mail the National Trust Center for State and Local Policy at policy@nthp.org, call (202) 588-6167, or visit www.preservationnation.org/take-action/advocacy-center. This project is made possible in part through the generous support of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund.