



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

May 27, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) expresses its serious concerns with the Executive Order issued May 19 titled “Regulatory Relief to Support Economic Recovery.” The impact of this Order could not only result in the diminution of legal protections for important heritage sites and other cultural resources, but could also be counter-productive in advancing infrastructure project delivery and in providing economic growth and job creation.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was enacted with, and continues to enjoy, bipartisan support. Its Section 106 review process plays a key role in the construction and rehabilitation of the nation's infrastructure. By requiring planners of federally-sponsored projects to identify and evaluate historic and cultural resources that could be impacted by their projects, and mitigate any such impacts on the resources, the NHPA ensures that such assets are preserved for present and future generations. Contrary to some beliefs, NHPA reviews do not delay project completions. In fact, they enhance them by ensuring that any impacts to historic or cultural resources will be dealt with ahead of time, as part of the design process to avoid delays during construction. In addition, the small businesses that carry out these reviews create thousands of jobs and generate economic growth in the states and localities where the undertakings are conducted.

We are fully aware of the enormous economic damage brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the response to it and the need for a rapid economic and jobs expansion. Nevertheless, suspending compliance with important federal statutes such as the NHPA—and their implementing regulations—as this Executive Order seems to promote, would result in an outcome not only contrary to the economic recovery that we all desire, but will have far-reaching impacts on the shared heritage we all have.

The SAA urges you to continue to enforce the NHPA and other important statutes, and to work with all stakeholders to revive the economy while protecting our nation’s most vulnerable and irreplaceable assets. Far from being mutually exclusive, these two goals actually complement one another.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Watkins".

Joe E. Watkins, Ph.D., RPA
President