Washington Insider

Bill to "Preserve America's Historical Record" Introduced

On May 5, 2009, the Preserving the American Historical Record Act (PAHR) (H.R. 2256) was introduced by congressmen Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and John McHugh (R-NY). The PAHR legislation would establish a new federal program of formula grants to the states and territories to support archives and historical records at the state and local level. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) would administer the Preserving the American Historical Records program. The legislation authorizes $50 million a year for five years for the initiative to preserve and provide access to historical records by supporting: the creation of a wide variety of access tools, including archival finding aids, documentary editions, indexes, and images of key records online; preservation actions to protect historical records from harm, prolong their life, and preserve them for public use, including digitization projects, electronic records initiatives, and disaster preparedness and recovery; initiatives to use historical records in new and creative ways to convey the importance of state, territorial, and community history, including the development of teaching materials for K–12 and college students, active participation in National History Day, and support for life-long learning opportunities; and programs to provide education and training to archivists and others who care for historical records, ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfill their important responsibilities. Base funding would be provided to each state or territory, with the remainder of funding distributed using a population/area-based formula. A 50% match for any funding awards would be required of state and local partners.

Library Of Congress, UNESCO, and Partners Launch World Digital Library

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and 32 partner institutions recently launched the World Digital Library, a Web site that features unique cultural materials from libraries and archives from around the world. The site is located at http://www.wdl.org/en/ and includes manuscripts, maps, rare books, films, sound recordings, prints, and photographs. It provides unrestricted public access, free of charge, to this material. Librarian of Congress, James Billington, first proposed the creation of a World Digital Library (WDL) to UNESCO in 2005, remarking that such a project could "have the salutary effect of bringing people together by celebrating the depth and uniqueness of different cultures in a single global undertaking." In addition to promoting international understanding, the project aims to expand the volume and variety of cultural content on the Internet; provide resources for educators, scholars, and general audiences; and narrow the digital divide within and between countries by building capacity in partner countries. The WDL functions in seven languages—Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish—and includes content in more than 40 languages. Additional information about the project is available at: http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2009/09-082.html.

NARA Signs Agreement to Preserve Millions of Immigration Files

On June 3, 2009, the National Archives and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services signed an agreement to designate as permanent the immigration files created on the millions of aliens residing in the United States beginning in 1944 until the present day. This represents the first step in the preservation of the 32 million records that were originally scheduled for disposal.These Alien Case Files are commonly referred to as "A-files." The new agreement authorizes the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services/Department of Homeland Security to send A-files to the National Archives when 100 years have passed since the birth date of the subject of a file. The National Archives expects to receive the first transfer of A-files later this year, and will store the files at National Archives facilities in San Francisco and Kansas City. Researchers will be able to access the files at these two sites, or request copies of files. An index will be available to support research use. The A-files include information such as photographs, personal correspondence, birth certificates, health records, interview transcripts, visas, applications, and other information on all non-naturalized alien residents, both legal and illegal. The files are of particular interest to the Asian American community because many A-files supplement information in Chinese Exclusion Act era case files (1882–1943) that are already housed at the National Archives.

NHA and CIE Request Increased Funds for International Education Programs

The National Humanities Alliance joined other members of the Coalition for International Education (CIE) in requesting a $58 million increase for international education programs within the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. The coalition requested total funding of $176.8 million for FY 2010, including: $153.8 million for international education and foreign language training programs authorized under Title VI of the Higher Education Act (a $51.5 million increase), $19.8 million for the Fulbright-Hays Program (a $5.1 million increase), and $3.2 million for the Institute for International Public Policy (a $1.4 million increase). CIE also urged support for growth in both comprehensive and international consortia competitive programs within the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). They recommended $31.3 million in funding for the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP), a $5 million increase. The full text of the memo and funding requests are available at http://www.nhalliance.org/bm ~doc/fy2010funding_intl-ed.pdf.

Sources were the Consortium of Social Science Associations's Washington Update and the National Humanities Alliance's NHA-Announce.

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