



**SOCIETY *for*  
HISTORICAL  
ARCHAEOLOGY**

The Honorable Eric Cantor  
Majority Leader  
303 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lamar Smith  
Chairman, House Science, Space and  
Technology Committee  
2409 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

October 8, 2013

Dear Reps. Cantor and Smith:

I write on behalf of the Society for Historical Archaeology to express our concern with your article, "Rethinking Science Funding," published on Sept. 30, 2013 in *USA Today*. The article questions National Science Foundation (NSF) grants that fund social science research, including archaeological investigations. We do not question the call for fiscal sobriety, but the article does not capture the genuine economic benefits of archaeological preservation and the concrete social benefits of archaeological research in communities across the country and around the world.

The National Science Foundation, which follows a rigorous, competitive process when awarding grants of any size, has seen its funding cut severely over the past few years. Further, NSF's funding of archaeological research currently represents only 0.1 percent of NSF's budget. This amount of funding, however, has resulted in research grants for a wide range of studies of our collective past, enriching the lives of American citizens and communities throughout the country. Archaeological investigations are an essential component of heritage tourism, bringing jobs and economic benefits to states and local communities.

This year, for instance, Rep. Cantor was among those who voted for a grant program that has provided \$8.8 million to preserve more than 2,100 acres of Civil War battlefields in Central Virginia. Having grown up in the 7<sup>th</sup> District, I was privileged to spend much of my youth at many of the 30 preserved battlefields that are part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park. Those preserved spaces and others made possible by the recent legislation honor those who fought in the Civil War, just as similar preservation funding has protected Revolutionary War battlefields and a wide range of historic landscapes. We believe that honoring the many men and women who have served the nation since the 18<sup>th</sup> century—and supporting scientific research that ensures the best possible care for contemporary soldiers—should not be reduced to conflicting missions. Clearly you understand the value of preserving historic sites for research and public engagement, and the 7<sup>th</sup> District encompasses some of the most exciting historic archaeological sites in the country. Federally funded archaeological projects have had an enormous material and economic impact on heritage tourism and real estate development in Virginia and

every other state in the union; and heritage preservation and archaeological research clearly captures the American public's imagination.

I have the privilege of working with many of our neighbors who are part of archaeological projects in communities throughout the United States. I and my colleagues are grateful to the communities in which we work and to the funding agencies and taxpayers that make our research possible. Your article suggests that archaeologists may be skirting accountability to the public, but every responsible archaeologist wants to share their work with the American people. I can point to numerous projects—including many in the 7<sup>th</sup> District and Texas—that are collaborations between archaeological scholars and community partners.

The SHA is an international organization concerned with the archaeology of the modern world, and the membership includes over 2,500 professional and avocational archaeologists representing all 50 states and several nations around the world. The SHA advocates for a global perspective in the study and protection of historic and underwater cultural resources by educating the public and policy makers and promoting archaeological scholarship that examines the last 500 years. Public funding of archaeological investigations in other countries, through organizations such as NSF, provides an opportunity to build and maintain social and economic bridges between the United States and other countries. Having these close relationships beyond our borders supports the United States' international prominence in diplomatic and scholarly circles alike.

The SHA's members and our many community partners are working to preserve our historic past throughout the country, and we are fortunate that much of this support has come from federal agencies such as the NSF. We are grateful that many archaeologists have been supported by state and federal funding, and I and my colleagues have been exceptionally fortunate to conduct archaeological projects alongside taxpayers who make such scholarship possible and are the most important audiences and partners for that work. The nation is very fortunate that several generations of preservationists, concerned citizens, legislators, and archaeologists have banded together to save so much of the historical fabric for our descendants. I hope you will join us in continuing this tradition and support historical archaeological preservation, scholarship, and community education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul R. Mullins". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Paul R. Mullins  
President