

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 11 & 13, 2026
Online**

**Humanities Advocacy Day, March 8-10, 2026
(Submitted by Bryan Whitledge)**

Humanities Advocacy Day (HAD) 2026 was organized and put on by the National Humanities Alliance (NHA) from March 8-10 in Washington, DC. HAD comprises two distinct components: 1) a day of orientation, training, exchanging ideas, and networking, and 2) a day of advocacy visits to legislative offices on Capitol Hill. The goal is to prepare humanities advocates, including archives advocates, to connect with Congressional offices to advocate for the federal programs that support humanities efforts. These programs include the National Endowment for Humanities, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and Title VI and Fulbright-Hays (international education).

This report is broken down to cover the two components of HAD.

HAD Part I: Orientation and Making Connections

The first part of Humanities Advocacy Day is highlighted by training and education sessions related to uplifting humanities and preparing advocates for their Hill office visits. One of these sessions, “Advocating for the National Archives on Capitol Hill,” was a panel moderated by Alexandra Klein of NHA, and included Joy Banks (Executive Director of the Council of State Archivists (CoSA)), Sarah Weicksel (Executive Director, American Historical Association),

and Bryan Whitledge (representing SAA). This was the sixth consecutive year that NHA hosted a NARA/NHPRC-specific training session that featured representatives of SAA and CoSA.

In the lead up to HAD, the panelists met with Ms. Klein about how to approach advocacy in light of the multitude of developments stemming from the White House's proclivity to operate based on personal whims. During these discussions, Whitledge gained insights from Ms. Klein, Ms. Banks, and Dr. Weicksel about fears among members of the humanities profession and the archives world related to the candidate nominated by the White House for the Archivist of the United States (AOTUS) position. These insights, although not related to the goal of HAD of increased funding for NARA and other agencies that support the work of archivists, were useful in developing a strategy for how to address the AOTUS nomination as well as how the larger humanities advocacy community might think about policies involved NARA.

Considering the year of difficulty for NARA and all government agencies, especially in light of the longest total government shutdown in US history, the panelists and Ms. Klein developed a series of talking points that focused on NARA's role in federal records management and in national security, particularly declassification and information security oversight. This was in addition to talking points from previous years related to access to historical records for teachers, students, scholars, genealogists, veterans, business owners, and the general public. This preparation also included the panelists developing concrete evidence for talking points that advocates could use, such as the information about the upcoming mandatory declassification of records related to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and subsequent US military operations.

The training session was attended by roughly 55 people, including SAA member Phillip Stone. Via informal feedback to Whitledge, attendees learned a lot and felt well-prepared with the multiple examples of concrete evidence and talking points

that the panel shared. Additionally, Whitledge, Stone, and Banks were visible throughout the training day and engaged with many HAD attendees to make connections. In short, archivists were well-represented at Humanities Advocacy Day.

HAD Part II: Congressional Office Visits

Tuesday, March 10 was a full day of legislative advocacy for Stone and Whitledge. Stone joined the South Carolina delegation as a constituent and Whitledge was with the Michigan delegation as a constituent. Whitledge also joined the state groups for Arkansas, Mississippi, and Arkansas for single meetings with each. This is because these groups had meetings with offices of House members who serve on the Financial Services and General Government subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, which is the subcommittee that is tasked with NARA and NHPRC funding. As experienced public policy-minded archives advocates Stone and Whitledge had talking points prepared about the value of federal granting programs that support archives—NEH, IMLS, and NHPRC.

This year, legislative staffers from both sides of the aisle on Capitol Hill made it clear that the budget process from last year did not work well. As a reminder, that process involved the White House suggesting drastic cuts to federal programs, the House majority using those suggestions as a starting point, the more pragmatic Senate realizing that bipartisanship would require compromising on the drastic cuts, and all of that resulting in a failure to come to an agreement, which led to the longest total government shutdown in history. And, after that shutdown, the budget that ultimately passed was one closer to the Senate's suggestion. Indeed, one staffer from a fiscally conservative representative in Michigan, who is also on the Appropriations Committee, told Whitledge's group that the White House's budget suggestions are merely their opinion, and the House appropriators would develop their own budget proposals. It is highly unusual for the majority party in the House, when the President is of the same party, to suggest in public discourse that the President's budget is not going to be taken seriously by the House.

In addition to his NHA-arranged meetings, Whitledge scheduled a separate meeting with Emily Manna, a staff member of Sen. Peters (Mich.) who works with the Senate's

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (HSGAC). Ms. Manna told Whitledge how SAA could submit a letter and questions for the AOTUS confirmation hearing. She also told Whitledge that the national security of NARA's duties, one of the talking points developed by the archives panel for HAD, is one that the HSGAC has found persuasive with both sides of the aisle.

Conclusion re Humanities Advocacy Day

Despite the continued troubling policy and budget developments over the past year for archives and archivists, HAD 2026 had many upsides that built upon previous advocacy efforts.

The talking points we crafted for this year's program were created in support of the ongoing efforts for long-term robust archives funding, and we presented a unified message for humanities advocates to that end. The talking points can be incorporated into future SAA advocacy mobilization efforts as negotiations for the FY 2027 budget take shape.

Finally, the Society of American Archivists continues to be a trustworthy partner for the National Humanities Alliance. The NHA staff's programming and reliance on Whitledge as an SAA member, along with fellow archivists in attendance at HAD is evidence of their positive evaluation of SAA. Continuing this relationship will be key to securing robust federal legislative support for archives in the future, and SAA will benefit from continued participation of multiple SAA members in HAD. Individuals to be considered to attend include the Executive Director (or designated staff member), Council or Executive Committee member(s), and COPP, COPA, and the Issues & Advocacy Section member(s).