

Closing Plenary Remarks
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Those of you who have attended enough SAA meetings know that there is often a meter and a method to presidential addresses, which for convenience I would divide into five parts:

1. The presenter acknowledges his or her humility which in my case is easy since there is plenty about which to be humble
2. The audience is excoriated (well okay, sometimes when the president is of a judicious temperament, just mildly rebuked) for its failure to perceive or act upon some professional shortcoming
3. A vision is presented, preferably a vision calling for sweeping professional change, after all you only get to do this twice, at the beginning and end of your term, so why go for the bronze?
4. In a tradition going back to revivalist preachers of the 19th century, the president offers a path to redemption; a way to become a better archival professional through the transformation of your professional life, I like to call this the “come to Muller, Feith and Fruin” part of the speech.
5. The host committee for the next meeting, in this case the 2009 Austin annual meeting, always wants a plug that never really fits in-- in this case giving the whole thing a Texas Swing, which is pretty tough for a guy who’s lived most of his life in Michigan, has always considered the phrase “you all” to be two words, and doesn’t really dance.

However, not to disappoint anyone let me offer the following outline of my presentation:

- I promise to excoriate you for your shortsightedness, not settling for a judicious rebuke
- I promise to offer a vision that goes for the gold
- and I promise to put forth the path through which the vision can be achieved, thus offering redemption, redemption of course which comes at a price – this time a very real one.
- And I promise to throw in a line or two about Texas.

Turning then to humility part of the presentation, I am reminded of a quote from Harold Ramis, who, by the way, as far as I can tell has absolutely no connection to Texas, but if he knew what the host committee was planning in Austin he would certainly want one -- was that sufficiently shameless? Anyway as Harold Ramis has said:

- Came. Saw. Conquered. Had second thoughts.

I can tell you that when I received the call informing me I had won the election my first thought was shouldn't they have elected someone responsible? I've got a reputation to maintain -- maybe not a good one like Mark Greene's, but still a reputation. My second thought was to ask for a recount. After all I'd lived in Chicago for a bit and last I knew a six-pack delivered at the right time to the right people can have great weight in the values, archival or otherwise, found among the counters.

But here I am and I do indeed go forward in the next year with a great deal of humbleness. It is both an honor and in all candor scary as hell to be SAA president. I will do my best so that when I leave the office this time next year I will neither have completely dishonored myself nor dragged SAA through hell.

Well humility is a good thing but the question forming in your mind is likely when am I going to get done with the navel gazing and get on with the promised excoriation? Right now. The topic of today's jeremiad is taken from Mark's address of yesterday: not values since unlike Mark I have always been rather value-challenged, but money and power, or more properly the means to achieve both: advocacy.

- Specifically political advocacy.
- Most specifically the limited effectiveness among archivists in carrying out political advocacy and thus obtaining money and power.

Now, I expect a certain amount of resistance to this theme of political advocacy, but every preacher knows the devil has a hold on some that is hard to shake. And that old devil will make some of you think, "hey, wait a minute, we've managed to get NHPRC funded every time the Bush administration has zeroed it out. We can't be that inept." Some will even claim that the annual fight over NHPRC is effective political advocacy.

I'm here to tell you what is known the political angels and the union hacks with whom I grew up, that being zeroed out of the president's budget four years in a row makes archivists the poster children for how not to do business in Washington. That

NHPRC is funded annually should be a given, not an annual battle. Why do we get zeroed out? We get zeroed out because we lack effective political advocacy.

NHPRC funding, however, is really only one example of our political shortcomings, and to my mind not necessarily the most important one. \$5 to \$10 million in the archival collection plate certainly isn't loose change, but it also is a long way from touching the life of every archivist in the country. Other areas of government policy and regulation do affect us daily and have a tendency to make or break what we can do. Let me suggest three examples;

- copyright
- privacy
- the public's right to access public records

Copyright

It is fair to say that copyright law is a mess from the perspective of archival use and archival preservation. One reason for this mess is that although the archival community through organizations such as SAA's Intellectual Properties Working Group has defined the problems and sometimes developed very thoughtful solutions, those solutions have generally not found their way into legislative remedies. Indeed, I sometimes think we should just keep our mouths shut about copyright since it seems every time Congress addresses the topic archival problems with the law get worse.

- Copyright terms become ever longer.
- Fair use is fairly dead.
- Effective preservation technique in the digital era may well violate pre-digital copyright law.

It is certainly true that there is work afoot in Washington to address many of these problems and some of that work comes from within SAA. I applaud that work and those that have done it. But neither work afoot nor pending legislation is a law signed by the president – and as someone who learned his political faith in smoke filled rooms from some very serious union-backed politicians of the United Automobile Workers in their heyday, rule number one was always not what was proposed, but what was passed. By that hard-nosed standard we don't cut it.

Privacy

Law after law is passed guaranteeing privacy without a short sentence or two included about the long view; that is the archival view. Thus this year, almost 30 years after the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was enacted I wrote the first draft of a letter that Mark Greene would eventually sign addressed to the Dept. of Education asking them to please put into the written guidelines issued by the Department language making clear that FERPA rights, like most other privacy rights, end with the person's death. DOE will tell you that this is the case "informally" but after 30 years DOE still declines to put in its guidelines a sentence or two that would eliminate all sorts of problems for archivists who deal with student records. A friend of mine points out that SAA as an organization has never made this a high level priority – apparently before this year SAA hasn't asked DOE to change the FERPA guidelines. Perhaps true, but on the other hand my first run in with DOE about FERPA occurred in the early 1980s – and I can't believe I'm the only archivist who has ever called DOE (this goes back so far we didn't even have email!) to ask "what gives" and request DOE to clearly state that FERPA rights end when the person dies.

The Public's Right to Governmental Information

Think Executive Order 13233. John Dean described the impact of the EO far more eloquently than can I but for those of you who missed his description through this stroke of presidential penmanship signed on November 1, 2001, the Presidential Records Act was stood on its head and made to serve purposes exactly opposite its intent. The consequences? After 2006 the Democratically controlled Congress has attempted to override the executive order, but the effort has been effectively bottled up in the Senate. I am reminded that SAA has worked hard on this, indeed even played a role in organizing sufficient grassroots support to temporarily unbotle the legislation. Fair enough, and all actions I support and applaud, but equally fair to note that almost seven years after it was signed EO 13233 is still the law of the land.

And, of course, there is PAHR, or more formally Preserving the American Historical Record Act. PAHR is a \$50 million dream; a serious chunk of federal change to support archives in the same way and with more or less the same dollars as the federal government has chosen to support both libraries and museums. I doubt I have to sell this audience on why archives deserve to receive PAHR or how the money could be well spent. An order of magnitude greater than NHPRC, PAHR could put real money in the pockets of real archivists all across the country. \$50 million goes a long way, even these days.

However, given our current political track record it is hard for me to conceive of how we will get PAHR passed. Please understand that as with the other issues I have discussed and the other efforts I have noted, I have only the kindest words regarding

the people who have conceived and put forward this legislation, They have done yeoman's work on behalf of all of us and I am extremely grateful to each of them. But I am mystified that archivists believe doing political business the way we have done political business in the past can accomplish not only passing PAHR's authorizing legislation, but then winning the budget battles to actually fund the proposal. Recall some of the results of traditional archival lobbying endeavors:

- NHPRC unfunded for four years in a row in the president's budget as submitted to congress and historically underfunded when the congressional budget became law.
- Copyright legislation that is truly a mess.
- Privacy legislation that does not reflect archival concerns.
- A president who seven years ago by the stroke of a pen successfully changed what most archivists understood to be public records to become essentially private documents and who, so far at least, is getting away with it.
- And I'm not even going to bring up Dick Cheney.

But somehow, continuing to do business in this way will lead to the passage of PAHR and its annual funding. I respectfully disagree.

- If we want PAHR
- If we want reasonable copyright legislation
- If we want privacy legislation that reflects archival concerns
- If, overall, we wish our interests, archival interests, more effectively represented in Washington,

If we want this, and much more, then we need to do our political business in a new way. We need to take advocacy to a new level and play politics more effectively. We need to learn from my old mentors from the United Automobile Workers who preached two things: union solidarity and political presence. To put it slightly differently, we need our own lobbyist and we need to unite ourselves to support his or her efforts on our behalf.

I don't claim that a lobbyist will solve all of our problems overnight – or even over the course of a decade.

- The music lobby is still going to fight to copyright in seeming perpetuity every note from do to ti, and try to extend their rights back to do,

- a program officer at the Dept. of Education probably won't immediately pick up a pen and write in the language I so much would like to see regarding FERPA
- President Bush probably will not suddenly become an advocate of the public's right to know

A single lobbyist, with many vested interests speaking in opposition to his or her voice, or facing a hostile administration, will not change everything and indeed will likely fail to change some things. But a lobbyist, given a list of priorities that we create and given our united support can do many things we do poorly or cannot do at all:

- monitor daily the issues we care most about
- work regularly with the people in government that we need to work with, developing that face-to-face relationship so essential in Washington,
- speak regularly on behalf of archivists

Doing this will create a vast improvement in the likelihood of our success when compared to the current reality where we have some shared voice through the National Coalition for History and some archivists find some time to work on some issues.

In the end I suspect that no one is likely to disagree too much that better representation in Washington is an idea that has merit. Even those who believe in the capacity of the old system to succeed will likely agree with me that a lobbyist would be helpful in greasing the wheels of our older forms of political advocacy. The problem isn't that people will likely disagree much about the advantages of having a lobbyist, the problem is how to pay for a lobbyist.

Where could you find the kind the kind of money you would need to hire a lobbyist in SAA's current budget? As that budget exists today, unless you wished to sacrifice either publications or education, you can't. And I don't wish to make such a sacrifice. Those programs are critical to the needs of our members.

There is, however, another, simple and elegant solution; raise dues.

I realize the initial response to that suggestion is "fat chance," or something a bit more off color. SAA folk wisdom regarding a dues increase is that members don't like to do it, Council hates to discuss it, and a president would have to be crazy to suggest it. I don't know about the first two pieces of folk wisdom but as for the third, guilty as charged.

I may be crazy, but the crazy thing is for a relatively small amount of money per member, we collectively could make the most significant change in archival political advocacy in a generation. For what is likely less than you are going to spend on dinner this evening, SAA could engage in a variety of needed activities.

Earlier this week, at Mark Greene's request, council created a working group to assist Council conduct political advocacy.

It is my intention:

- To ask the working group to list and prioritize SAA's political agenda, for consideration by Council
- To ask the working group to also develop a short but thoughtful paper regarding the costs of implementing that prioritized agenda.
- With that agenda and with that price tag, to ask council to consider these reports prior to next year's annual meeting with my intent being to ask Council to both endorse an agenda and a mechanism to pay for it, almost certainly a dues increase proposal
- And, unless Council simply votes the idea down, or there is a really bright person out there who comes up with a better idea other than a ponzi scheme, to bring forward a resolution at the business meeting in Austin asking for a dues increase for the purpose of funding political advocacy.

Friends too kind to call all of this crazy have said this is a quixotic vision. That may be true. However, I truly believe:

- That the vision foresees a plan which offers a practical and affordable solution to a persistent and fundamental problem.
- That Council, basing its decision on a thoughtful report from the working group, will share and support the plan, including the associated financial implications
- That the membership will support the modest personal sacrifice to which they are called in order to advance our collective strategic interest in advocacy; a critical priority that represents a good for archivists, a good for the nation, and a good that can only be achieved by the national association of archivists.

I truly believe

- That students will willingly invest in their professional future.

- That retirees will willingly help finance a legacy in which they can take pride.
- And that the rest of us will act to make the day-to-day practice of the profession take place in a more accommodating political and legal environment.

I realize that what I am asking for is a deep change in the political culture of our profession generally and this organization specifically and that this change will be hard; but there is never an easy time to change.

I realize that the economy is bad and that some members are likely pinching pennies to make ends meet, but there is never a good time to ask for a dues increase.

I realize that I am asking for a great deal, but we as a profession have a great deal to give to our society, to the culture and people who trust us to document their lives and ensure that that documentation is passed to and used by the next generation. It is our job. It is our duty. It is our calling, and as a part of that job, and duty, and calling it is our responsibility to ensure that the law of the land helps us do it better. Make no mistake, in the end, involvement in the political environment is not optional – it is fundamental to what we are called to do when we decide to become an archivist. It's part of the job. It's part of the duty. It's part of the calling.

In conclusion, enjoy your evening, enjoy this lovely city, give the importance of political advocacy thought on the way home, not tonight, but later and, to paraphrase that Great Texan, Lyndon Baines Johnson, my fellow archivists, see you all in Austin.

Happy trails and thanks for thinking about it.