

**Testimony of
The Honorable John B. Larson
Member, U.S. House of Representatives**

**Before the Information Policy, Census, and National Archives Subcommittee
of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee**

**“Strengthening the National Historical Publications and Records
Commission.”**

**Wednesday, June 09, 2010
2154 Rayburn HOB
2:00 p.m.**

Thank you, Chairman Clay for holding this critical hearing and for inviting me to speak on behalf of the Commission.

As a member of the Commission since 2008, I have seen firsthand the incredible work the National Archives and National Historical Publications and Records Commission have done to document this nation’s democracy.

From preserving the papers of our founding fathers, to those of great American pioneers like Isabella Beecher Hooker and global visionaries like John F. Kennedy, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission has provided invaluable grants to preserve and document our past. And it is only by preserving this heritage and promoting its accessibility, can future generations increase their understanding of our history and culture.

As a former history teacher, I can’t stress enough the important role that understanding the past plays in shaping the successful future of this country, which relies on an educated and engaged populous.

The mission of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission promotes exactly that. There is no shortage of examples of projects that grants from the Commission have funded.

In fact, the demand across the country for grants is much higher than that of the Commission's budget, which as you know is only authorized at \$10 million and has rarely been appropriated at that level.

If the Commission could have funded every eligible and qualified project in 2009, over \$22 million would have been awarded.

Since the first grants were awarded in 1964 until now, a total of a \$200 million dollars have been awarded.

This is quite a contrast to the annual budget of National Endowment of the Humanities which was appropriated \$167 million last year.

I'm not in favor of cutting NEH's budget, instead I highlight it only as an example of demonstrated federal interest in supporting non-federal efforts to preserve and make available our documentary heritage.

Increasing the National Historical Publications and Records Commission's budget even a small amount would reap huge benefits.

I am a cosponsor of Chairman Clay's legislation to increase the appropriation level of the Commission to \$20 million. Funding levels for the Commission have remained flat since 1988, yet since there has been a significant increase in the creation and use of electronic records and severe cutbacks from state and local governments for preservation and access.

At the same time, more and more people have made requests for records like evidence of birth, education, marriage, divorce, and property owned, which are held at the state and local level.

While the National Historical Publications and Records Commission most prominent work is in preserving documents of famous historical figures, it also provides grants to states that document individual records.

Instead of fighting attempts to zero out funding for the Commission, we should be supporting the full funding of the Commission, 90% of which creates or saves jobs.

The Commission acts as source of seed funding to states and local municipalities across the country, helping them leverage funding from private sources and develop plans for preservation and archival services.

We must reauthorize this important program and fund it appropriately. Our futures depend on it.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify. I look forward to working with the Committee to ensure passage of the Chairman's bill to reauthorize the Commission.