

Supporters Rally for Solutions to Proposed Parks Funding Cuts

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"Interpretive and education programs have been reduced. Paint is peeling, roofs are leaking, stairways are rotting, and the island's dramatic and beautiful views of the Straits of Mackinac are overgrown with vegetation," he testified. "If we defer maintenance much longer we will begin to lose our precious historic and natural resources and turn away our visitors."

For budget year 2006, Governor Granholm has suggested the \$1.5 million state appropriation be replaced by new fees and other funding.

Mr. Porter said the elimination of the \$1.5 million would result in the following changes: "We will lose most of our janitorial positions and have to close all of our public restrooms except those within our historic sites. We will lose the services of our park rangers and no longer be able to patrol our parks and enforce rules and regulations. We will deeply cut our grounds keeping staff and be left with unsightly, overgrown grass, untrimmed trees, and neglected gardens. We will reduce staffing at the Mackinac Island airport, resulting in less service to the public and increasing the likelihood of uncollected fees. We will reduce the operation of our landing barge and dray services, which will delay trash removal and transportation of necessary supplies and materials. We will eliminate many carpentry, painting, and restoration projects and, thereby, threaten the continued preservation of some of Michigan's most historic buildings. We will eliminate positions on our archaeology, interpretation, and education staffs, which will dramatically impact the quality of public programming at our historic sites. We will eliminate collections staff, which will reduce our ability to properly care for and professionally manage our one million archaeological artifacts, historic objects, and rare and priceless manuscripts. We will eliminate our 40-year-old publications program,

which has produced over 70 titles and allowed us to share the rich history of Mackinac with the public. We will eliminate marketing and sales positions, which will result in less staff supervision and decreased opportunities to promote our sites. We will reduce administrative and business staff, limiting our ability to respond to public inquiries and professionally manage our accounting activities. We will eliminate all overtime, which would mean no coverage on holidays and no emergency snow plowing, creating a potential public safety risk. We will cut our Motor Vehicle Fleet by 50 percent, which will reduce our ability to provide in-classroom education programs for students across the State of Michigan. We will, if all this comes to pass, be a tarnished 'crown jewel of Michigan.'"

The standing-room only crowd that gathered to address the panel included business owners of the Island and the Straits area. Sitting with Mrs. Amos were Senator Jason Allen (R- Traverse City), and Representatives Howard Walker (R- Traverse City), Kevin Elsenheimer (R- Bellaire), and Gary McDowell (D- Rudyard). Also attending the meeting was the entire park commission board, including Chairman Dennis Cawthorne, Vice-chairman Karen Karam, and Commissioners Frank Kelley, Joan Porteous, Audrey Jaggi, Richard Manoogian, and Laurie Stupak.

Comments made during the meeting:

"Mackinac Island was the second national park in America behind Yellowstone and it was only turned over to the state in the late 1800s. The reason Mackinac Island was the second national park was because of our help in the creation of the American identity."

— Mary McGuire Slevin,
director Mackinac Island
Tourism Bureau

"I argue this is absolutely the wrong time to decrease funding, rather the opposite. Our industry (tourism) is now the second largest is on the rise. I think we should look at what's bearing fruit and nurture and help it now, and not prune it."

— Dan Musser III,
President, Grand Hotel

"In a sense, what has been proposed in Lansing in the executive budget is not a cut in funding to the Island, but rather a shift. The \$1.5 million would be eliminated and those who have advocated this elimination have said the answer's simple. There needs to be a shift to be placed on people to pay through fees or taxes the \$1.5 million. The problem is that I have yet to hear anybody in Lansing to come forth with a viable proposal for what that shift would be."

— Dennis Cawthorne, chair
of Mackinac State Park
Commission

"Mackinac State Historic Parks is for Michigan what the Smithsonian Institution is for our nation."

— Marilyn McFarland,
Mackinaw City Area Visitors
Bureau

"Cutting the budget for real history necessarily increases our dependence on simulations. Learning from real history that was unpredictable until it happened, provides a stronger educational framework for the future."

— Peter Olson, representing
Families United for Mackinac,
and member of Mackinac
Associates

"This is a no-brainer. It's called post Labor Day school opening."

— Bill Shepler, owner of
Shepler's Mackinac
Island Ferry

"I recognized the state has significant financial problems. We also must recognize that the cuts that are coming forward have to be balanced. I, for one, believe that if we're going to reduce the budgets we also need to make sure that institutions in southeast Michigan or sporting activities as diverse as the All Star Game and the Super Bowl should be reduced as far as the budget items."

— Senator Jason Allen

"I am very, very much aware of the importance of Mackinac Island. I believe this is a bipartisan effort."

— Representative Gary McDowell

"It's time that the state realizes how important tourism is. It is really the main industry, especially of the Upper Peninsula. I think we all have to work together to make sure the funding is there for the state park, which not only affects the state park, but this entire region."

— Margaret Doud,
Mackinac Island mayor

"I want to talk about the buildings. Most of these buildings date back to the American Revolution, pre-American revolution. We cannot delay the maintenance on these buildings."

— Frank Pompa, Island
summer resident.

Additionally, Mr. Pompa suggested the state consider a bond program that would be used for the restoration of buildings across the state.

"Last year the bridge fare was raised from \$1.50 to \$2.50. Overnight guests in St. Ignace were down 11 percent. In Mackinaw City, they were up three percent. Increased fees hurt everyone around."

— Ron Dufina,
area business owner

It's more than an economic question. It's the state's responsibility to protect what we have."

— Trish Martin, Island bed
and breakfast owner

"We all want our children to be better and have a better life than we did. I submit that a day spent here studying history of the state and the history of this place is much better than a day at Disney World."

— Commissioner Frank
Kelly

"This is important information that we are going to hear today and we are excited to bring that information back to other legislators in Lansing so that we can convince them, if need be, of the importance of this park system."

— Representative Kevin
Elsenheimer

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who needs assistance in any way.

Most Appreciatively,
Karen Lennard, City Clerk

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