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State's budget crisis threatens Illinois historic sites Tourism dollars, jobs, community history, state's role in Lincoln Bicentennial impacted

Chicago, Ill.—Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich's veto of \$2.8 million from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's (IHPA) fiscal year 2009 budget has the state's 24 historic sites at immediate risk as it specifically targets the personal services line of the Historic Sites Division. More than 50-percent of the staff at these sites could be laid-off causing sites to close and negatively impacting communities across the state.

In addition, \$5 million in previously appropriated funds were eliminated from the state budget. Those monies would have assisted Illinois communities in planning and implementing Lincoln Bicentennial events and programs in 2009.

"This is very disturbing as it creates a domino effect," said Jim Peters, president and CEO of Landmarks Illinois, the state's leading voice for historic preservation. "These aren't just budget cuts, it is the removal of history that impacts education, tourism revenue, the economic viability of the state, and jobs. With high gas prices plaguing us, the State of Illinois should be encouraging short road trips to these historic sites, not shutting them down."

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“Some of these historic sites have deferred maintenance as it is,” said Peters. “Each one has its own individual history and architectural relevance. They are places of pride in the community and destinations for thousands around the state and country.”

The Historic Sites Division of IHPA oversees an array of historically significant places ranging from the earthen-mound remnants of a prehistoric Native American city at Cahokia Mounds to Springfield's Dana-Thomas House, a twentieth-century masterpiece designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Several sites celebrate Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy, while others recognize the Illinois roots of such literary figures such as Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay. Collectively, they bring more than 2.5 million visitors and \$717 million in tourism revenue to the state annually.

“While we do not know the exact sites that will be impacted, it still puzzles me that these cuts come just months before the Lincoln Bicentennial celebration in which Illinois plays a key role,” added Peters. “This is a time when the state should embrace its historic sites, market them, and get them ready for a once-in-a-lifetime tourism event. Not turn its back on them.”

Landmarks Illinois urges the public to contact their Senators and Representatives about restoration of these cuts. For a complete list of state elected officials and their contact information, visit www.Landmarks.org.

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Landmarks Illinois is the state's leading voice for historic preservation. Since its founding in 1971, the 2,500-member statewide organization has gone on to save countless architectural and historic treasures throughout Illinois. Landmarks Illinois' mission today focuses on saving buildings, facilitating preservation, and educating the public through innovative programs and promotion. For more information, visit www.Landmarks.org.

Landmarks Illinois operates and manages legendary architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House located in Plano, Illinois. The house is open to visitors weekly, Tuesday – Sunday, April through November, and is one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 29 nation-wide sites. For more information visit www.FarnsworthHouse.org.