



Senator Feinstein Urges Preservation of California's Historic Missions
March 9, 2004

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today urged passage of legislation that would authorize \$10 million in Federal matching grants to help restore and preserve California's 21 historic missions.

***"The California Missions are state treasures and they are on the verge of being lost to us forever. We must make restoration and protection of the missions a priority,"** Senator Feinstein said in support of the California Missions Preservation Act, which she cosponsored with Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.)*

In testimony submitted to members of the Senate Energy & Natural Resource's Subcommittee on Public Lands, Senator Feinstein noted that many of the 21 California Missions, built over 225 years ago, are in disrepair due to poor maintenance, earthquakes and erosion.

The California Missions bill, however, would inject needed funding for the Missions by authorizing the Interior Secretary to provide \$10 million in matching grants over five years to the California Missions Foundation. The bill requires a state, private or local match for all federal funding, ensuring that there is enough local support for restoration and preservation efforts.

The full text of Senator Feinstein's statement follows:

"I want to thank you for holding a hearing on this bill, S. 1306, the California Missions Preservations Act, which is so important to me and to the people of California. This bill will support the efforts of the California Missions Foundation as they work to rehabilitate the 21 California Missions which house valuable Spanish colonial artifacts and represent the pioneering spirit of the Old West.

I am pleased to join Senator Boxer in cosponsoring this bill and applaud her leadership in introducing this legislation. I would also like to recognize the California delegation in the House, particularly Congressman Sam Farr for introducing the House version of this bill and seeing to it that it passed the other Chamber.

Built over 225 years ago by Spanish settlers and Native Americans, the California Missions and its artifacts represent the rich cultural and architectural history of our country. The chain of 21 missions along California's El Camino Real ("The Royal Highway") represent the first arrival of non-Native Americans to California. Every one of the California missions tell a story about the history of California.

And yet, many of the missions are in states of serious disrepair.

They are, in some cases, termite infested, and experiencing structural deterioration and water damage—their artifacts cracked, broken or lacking their original luster. Last October, for instance, at Mission San Gabriel Arcangel a wooden beam fell from the ceiling and crushed some of the 197 year old artifacts—thankfully, injuring no one.

And in December, after an earthquake hit central California, Mission San Miguel Arcangel, experienced a one-inch crack on one wall from floor to ceiling. It also suffered major cracks on five pillars, and lost an original American Indian mural.

Because of the extent of the damage, the decision was made to close the Mission indefinitely and some now question whether the building will ever be reopened. This is particularly disheartening knowing that it is the only mission in California that had all its original interior paint.

Mr. Chairman, this is just one example of the state of the Missions. I don't want to stand by and watch more California treasures deteriorate beyond repair. This bill authorizes the Interior Secretary to provide \$10 million in matching grants over five years to the California Missions Foundation, a non-profit organization charged with raising money to restore the missions. The Foundation will use the grants to restore the buildings, artwork, and artifacts associated with the Missions. To ensure that the vast amount of state support is reflected, the bill requires a state, private or local match.

The Foundation has been working overtime to raise private funds to match the \$2 million per year over the 5 years so that the Missions can be saved. They have been leading a statewide fundraising drive to solicit local money and it is my understanding that they are well on their way to reaching their goals.

The California missions are the most visited historic attractions in the State, drawing more than 5 million tourists a year. They serve an important role in educating children and adults alike about the history and the early settlement in California.

The California Missions are state treasures and they are on the verge of being lost to us forever. We must make restoration and protection of the missions a priority.

We do not believe that time is our side. And I look forward to working with Senator Boxer and this Committee to get this done.”

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