

Good evening.

It is a pleasure to join you all tonight at the beautiful Union Depot here in St. Paul's Lowertown. Let me start by thanking Bonnie McDonald for the invitation to be here. Bonnie, along with the staff and board of directors of the Preservation Alliance, are to be commended and thanked for all of your hard work and dedication.

The work you do helps to strengthen the fabric of our community. There could be no better location for the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota to meet. The Union Depot is a shining example of how preserving the past creates opportunities for the future.

In just two years, this nearly 90-year old train depot will be transformed into a 21st century multimodal transportation hub. Soon, these spaces will be bustling with passengers coming and going. They will arrive on buses and taxis and bicycles. They will step off the new Central Corridor Light Rail Line. They will pass through these halls to catch the Amtrak to Seattle, commuter rail to Wisconsin and high-speed rail to Chicago.

When it opens again for business, this building will inject energy and vitality into the heart of St. Paul. Its rebirth will boost our local economy, connect our region, and provide our community with another tremendous preservation success.

There are too few structures like Union Depot left in America. Dozens, even hundreds of grand structures fell prey to the wrecking ball during the urban renewal of the last century.

This Depot will show that investments in multi-modal transportation create jobs, modernize the economy and chart a course toward environmental sustainability. And we won't need to wait for the benefits of this project. The next two years of construction and renovation will create as many as 3,000 jobs at a time when our community needs them greatly!

Re-interpreting our Depot for a new century may seem like an obvious idea today. It was not obvious when planning started over 15 years ago. It took real foresight and many years of hard work by many who are in the room tonight.

I want to commend the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority for their commitment. On both the Union Depot and the Central Corridor, I have fantastic partners on the Ramsey County Board who share my enthusiasm for these projects. Other partners include our business community, organized labor, and our state and local government partners - especially the City of St. Paul.

Over the past ten years I have worked with Mayors Norm Coleman, Randy Kelly, and Chris Coleman - all have shared the vision for Union Depot's success. I'm pleased that the Obama Administration and my colleagues in Congress have supported our efforts. Congress has provided investments at critical moments for the Union Depot project, including \$50 million from the 2005 federal transportation authorization and \$35 million from the 2009 *Recovery Act*.

The Union Depot is a project of national and regional significance. Most historic preservation efforts are smaller - but can feel just as important.

Some of you may be familiar with the Sokol Hall - or Czech Hall - down on West Seventh Street. Since 1879, the Sokol Hall has served as a community center for Czech and Slovak immigrants in St. Paul. It is the oldest Czech-Slovak cultural center in the entire United States.

Last year, I worked with Joe Landsberger at the Sokol Hall on a federal grant to help cover the cost of sprinklers and other safety upgrades for this historic treasure. The federal contribution to this effort - \$150,000 - was matched 100 percent. Sokol received additional funding from the City of St. Paul, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Czech government and Minnesota's Legacy Act.

The week the federal grant was announced, the Sokol Hall in Wilson, Kansas burned to the ground. A dozen Sokol Halls across the country have been lost to fire. This is the lesson of historic preservation - we always need to be thinking about tomorrow, today.

This year, I am working on another project through the National Park Service's Save America's Treasures program called "the Renaissance Box". This renovation of the O'Donnell Shoe factory just down the street in Lowertown will create apartments for low and moderate income individuals.

Historic preservation is about people as much as it is about places. Without the skilled labor to maintain, repair, and renovate our historic buildings we will lose them. Working with Bonnie and local labor unions, we identified an opportunity to establish a training program to for skilled crafts and trades men and women with expertise in historic preservation. The result of Bonnie's input is the Historic Building Trades Job Training and Mentoring Program.

We secured \$100,000 in the Fiscal Year 2011 House appropriations bill for this workforce training opportunity.

Our goal is to facilitate the training of a new generation of workers in appropriate construction, repair, and maintenance skills required for historic structures. By pairing trainees with skilled mentors, this program will ensure that techniques are passed on to the next generation of trades and craftsmen and women who will restore and rebuild our historic treasures.

These projects demonstrate how the federal government can be a partner. We know that federal funds - even in relatively modest amounts - can be what's needed to transform a great idea into a tangible success.

Now, this country is facing a historic budget crisis - at the state and federal level.

Some of my colleagues in Congress point to local historic projects as "wasteful spending." They think the \$25 million Save America's Treasures Grant Program should be eliminated even though it leverages tens of millions of private dollars across the country. Some of these Members sent a letter to Speaker Pelosi last week urging her to eliminate all funding this year for Congressionally-directed projects. In Minnesota that would mean the loss of millions of dollars, including the \$45 million in the budget for the Central Corridor light rail. The Historic Building Trades Job Training and Mentoring Program - and many other local projects - would be eliminated.

Eliminating earmarks for high impact community investments across America will reduce spending by \$3 billion or zero - point - one - seven - percent of the federal budget.

Unfortunately, many of the Members of Congress who signed this letter refuse to discuss cuts to the \$680 billion Department of Defense Budget. Or the \$1.1 Trillion the federal government spends on special tax credits every year. Or the \$3.7 Trillion cost of extending all the Bush-era tax cuts.

We will solve the budget challenge ONLY by putting everything on the table: spending cuts, revenue increases, entitlement reform and an end to unaffordable tax breaks.

Let's be honest - federal contributions to historic preservation are not the reason this country is in a budget crisis.

I stand by these investments, and you have my commitment that I'll continue to invest in our community, in our historic treasures and in our future, because I know these investments yield dividends. As cuts are made, I will work to protect the investments our communities need to grow. Because starving communities of federal funding will never return America to broad-based prosperity and opportunity.

I am working with the President and leaders in Congress to re-build this economy block by block, community by community. That is how America became the strongest, most prosperous country in the world.

I am going to continue working in Congress to strengthen this community. And continue working with you here at home to preserve the best of the past.

Once again, thank you for all you do for to advocate for the preservation of Minnesota's historic resources.