

June 16, 2010

Madam Speaker, on June 26, 2010, the Galveston Historical Foundation will celebrate its acquisition of the historic 1861 U.S. Custom House. I was pleased to help make this possible by sponsoring legislation, HR 2121, which directed the General Services Administration (GSA) to sell the Custom House to the Galveston Historical Foundation. HR 2121 passed the House by voice vote on September 9, 2009. It is therefore a great pleasure to extend my congratulations to the Galveston Historical Foundation for acquiring the U.S. Customs House.

The U.S. Custom House is the oldest non-military federal building in Galveston. The two story structure was built in 1861 and has served many important historical functions, including housing the ceremony that officially ended the Civil War in Galveston. In 1917, construction began on a federal courtroom located on the second floor of the U.S. Custom House. In 1970, the house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 1974 it was commemorated as a Historic Custom House by the U.S. Customs Service.

In 1998, the Galveston Historical Foundation entered into a public-private partnership with the federal government that allowed the Galveston Historical Foundation to lease the building from the GSA. Under this agreement, the Galveston Historical Foundation took responsibility for performing renovations on the U.S. Custom House. In 2008, the house was inundated with six feet of flood waters from Hurricane Ike. Fortunately, the Galveston Historical Foundation has been able to complete restoration of the first floor of the Custom House earlier this year.

Madam Speaker, by owning as opposed to leasing, the Galveston Historical Foundation will be able to improve this historical structure for future generations of Texans. It is difficult to think of a more appropriate owner for the U.S. Custom House than the Galveston Historical Foundation. Founded in 1954, the Galveston Historical Foundation is one of the nation's largest local preservation organizations. Over the last 56 years, this foundation has expanded its mission to encompass community redevelopment, public education, historic preservation advocacy, maritime preservation and stewardship of historic properties. Today, the Galveston Historical Foundation has over 2,000 members representing individuals, families, and businesses across Texas, the U.S., and around the world.

The Galveston Historical Foundation's accomplishments include the redevelopment of The Strand; the rescue and restoration of the 1877 iron barque the ELISSA; the revitalization of historic residential neighborhoods and creation of historic districts; and the conception of signature events including Dickens on The Strand and the Galveston Historic Homes Tour.

The Galveston Historical Foundation has received numerous awards and honors. For example, they have twice received the National Trust for Historic Preservation's prestigious Honor Award. In 1991, the Galveston Historical Foundation was the first recipient of the Governor's Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation, and in 1995, received the National Trust's first ever award for organizational excellence. The American Institute of Architects has presented the foundation a Citation of Honor for its ongoing contribution to urban design and the quality of life in Galveston. In addition, the Association for Preservation Technology International honored the Galveston Historical Foundation with a Presidential Citation in 2004.

In conclusion, Madame Speaker, I once again congratulate the Galveston Historical Foundation for acquiring the U.S. Custom House, and I extend my thanks to the Galveston Historical Foundation for all they do to preserve Galveston's rich heritage.