

## Federal Cuts Threaten Archives That Preserve America's Political History

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Across the United States, universities safeguard the papers of members of Congress records that show how laws are made and how government decisions have shaped the country. But these important collections are at risk as proposed federal budget cuts target the agencies that fund their preservation.

Universities like Mississippi State, the University of Georgia, and Kansas University have built large archives of letters, speeches, photos, and campaign materials. At Mississippi State, the papers of Sen. John C. Stennis have helped researchers study topics ranging

from military spending to civil rights. The Richard B. Russell Library in Georgia holds more than 600 collections and a large oral history project capturing firsthand accounts of political events.

Preserving these records takes specialized skills, equipment, and time. Archivists must protect fragile documents in acid-free boxes, repair old film reels, and catalog thousands of items. Today's archives also include digital files like emails and social media, which require advanced technology and data security.

For decades, federal grants have been essential to this work. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the Institute of Museum and Library Services have provided funds for everything from storage materials to digitization projects. West Virginia University, for example, has received over \$400,000 to build an online portal where the public can access congressional records.

These collections are more than historical artifacts. They play a role in public life today. Ahead of the 2020 election, Mississippi State's archives helped journalists research Joe Biden's early relationships with segregationist senators. University programs inspired by these papers teach students how government functions and encourage public service.

If federal funding is cut, much of this work could stop. Boxes of papers may remain unprocessed and inaccessible, and delicate materials could decay beyond repair. While members of Congress are not legally required to donate their records, many have chosen to do so as a way to return their history to the people they served.

Without support, these archives and the insights they hold may be lost. At stake is not only the preservation of the past but also the ability of Americans to learn from it, hold leaders accountable, and strengthen democracy for the future.