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The Uniform Act Still Rules

Setting the stage for land policy
around the world

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You may have seen me carrying around a coffee stained, raggedy pile of papers that, while probably appearing like trash to most people, is actually a valuable resource recognizable to a large portion of our IRWA membership. These well worn and seriously dog-eared pages are held together with a big black binder clip and positively festooned with dozens of multi-colored, equally dog-eared sticky notes peeking out between the pages saying things like, “Definitions,” “Low value-high bulk,” “Displaced persons” and “No duplication of payment.”

That, as most of my fellow Uniform Act zealots have already guessed, is my treasured copy of 49 CFR Part 24, final rule—the regulatory bible for any right of way practitioner who works on projects that receive federal assistance and involve the acquisition of real estate and/or the displacement of businesses, families or personal property. We love our regs, and for good reason.

The creation, by Congress, of the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (URA), was at least partially a result of missteps and mistakes made by many during the decades-long land acquisition process for the United States’ Interstate Highway system. The positive result, however, was the development of a very effective land use policy that has been in place and working extraordinarily well (notwithstanding a tweak or two here and there) for 45 years.

One of the most exciting things I have found in my presidential year to date is the degree to which the lessons we learned from the mistakes made while developing federal-aid land use policy in the U.S. now resonate with our partners and friends around the world.

Many countries are just now struggling to address their very similar needs and issues around global infrastructure real estate, and they are actively engaged in the creation of their own, individualized laws and policies.

IRWA has recognized the power of these policies and regulations from a global perspective, and with our help, others are beginning to recognize that, too. The URA is now being used as both a model and a jumping off place to help shape land policy around the world. That is another strong example of how IRWA is putting our tagline “Building a better world, together” into action, and I feel incredibly fortunate to carry that message at home and abroad throughout my term.

Speaking of tweaks to the law itself, some of the more significant changes to the URA in the last 20 years are the recent amendments contained in Section 1521 of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). Effective October 1, 2014, these changes effect relocation eligibility requirements and statutory relocation payment caps, and I am pleased to report

that each of IRWA’s applicable courses have now been updated to reflect the current requirements.

One interesting and enjoyable opportunity that the need for making these curriculum changes afforded me was a chance to instruct IRWA’s first live video-captured production of the newly updated Course 105 - The Uniform Act Executive Summary. We had an amazing time with great class participants and outstanding contributions from our talented and dedicated IRWA Staff, most notably Vice President of Professional Development Deidre Alves, M. Ed., who was with me every step of the way. Please read on in this issue to learn more about this exciting project in her article on page 13.

Last but not least, IRWA and the Federal Highway Administration have recently launched a new Uniform Act Discussion Group that is available as part of our IRWA Member Network. That will give anyone who is interested a place to find resources, ask questions and basically debate and discuss all things URA. Watch for upcoming details, and I look forward to seeing you all there soon. ☺

