

# The American Legion

★ NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS ★ P. O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46206 ★  
(317) 635-8411 ★



OFFICE OF THE  
NATIONAL COMMANDER

August 12, 1994

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In May of this year, The American Legion went on record in opposition to the use of the historic aircraft, the *Enola Gay*, in the Smithsonian Institution's planned exhibit on the role of atomic weapons in ending World War II. Since that time, the focus of veterans' concerns has shifted from the aircraft to the content and apparent bias of the exhibit itself.

Throughout the summer, we restrained our public comment and maintained an open dialogue with officials of the Smithsonian and its National Air and Space Museum. During that same period, NASM officials reviewed and revised the script and we carefully evaluated the revisions.

Although there has been movement in the general direction of fairness and accuracy, it is our opinion that the exhibit as now proposed falls far short of the mark. With a 1995 opening scheduled to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Allied victory in World War II, the exhibit remains an affront to an entire generation of Americans.

Smithsonian officials have argued, not disingenuously, that nowhere does the exhibit explicitly state an anti-American bias. That is true. But the preponderance of visual material, personal perspectives and descriptive narrative, taken as a whole, prompts the unmistakable conclusion that America's enemy in the latter days of World War II was defeated and demoralized, ultimately the victim of racism and revenge, rather than a ruthless aggressor whose expansionist aims and war fervor yielded more than a decade of horror and death for millions of the world's people.

As a visual experience, the potential of the exhibit to engender a revised view of history will be even more powerful, and render a serious disservice to the post-World War II generations -- of both sides. The American Legion stands unalterably opposed to the exhibit and to the use of the *Enola Gay* in it as presently envisioned.

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton  
President of the United States  
August 12, 1994  
Page 2

Yet, to remove the Enola Gay from the exhibit would not answer the fundamental concerns of those who believe the morality and courage of those who participated in the last act of World War II is called into doubt by the exhibit. To do so would further distance the exhibit from the proper role assigned to the National Air and Space Museum by the American people. That to remove the aircraft fuselage from the exhibit has not been openly considered by Smithsonian officials suggests that the Enola Gay's primary role is to justify the exhibit's inclusion among NASM exhibits.

SAC MAY 4, 1994

I have enclosed a copy of American Legion Res. #22 (May 1994, National Executive Committee) setting forth the basis for our objections to the exhibit. Your help in seeing this exhibit fundamentally corrected, or eliminated, will be an act of courage and solidarity with America's veterans, and will defuse potential conflict and confrontation which many veterans, despite our efforts to dissuade them, are determined to carry out.

Sincerely,

*Bruce Thiesen*

Bruce Thiesen  
National Commander