

# The American Legion

★ WASHINGTON OFFICE ★ 1608 K STREET, N. W. ★ WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006 ★



OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMANDER

February 10, 1995

Honorable William F. Clinger, Jr., Chairman  
 House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight  
 2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

While The American Legion agrees that Mr. I. Michael Heyman, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, should be permitted sufficient time to complete his internal management review, it is our opinion that the problems at the National Air and Space Museum (NASM), indicated by the current controversy, go beyond mere management deficiencies. We adamantly believe the interests of the American people, as well as the Institution's long term welfare, lies with Congress proceeding with hearings.

Throughout line by line review of the Enola Gay Script with the curators of the NASM, we asked many questions which were ignored and never answered.

We believe only Congressional hearings can elicit the needed answers from Institution principals. All previous attempts by The American Legion, the Air Force Association, members of the 509th Composite Bomb Group and interested members of the Smithsonian Institution, have failed to yield complete responses. Such questions include:

1. To what extent does the exhibit conform to the charge of the Smithsonian Institution, as stated in 20 USC, Ch. 3 Para #80, Subpara 80a?
2. To what extent did the municipal museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki enter into a prior agreement with NASM concerning the now-canceled exhibit?
3. How often, when, and why did NASM Curators travel to Nagasaki and Hiroshima in connection with this exhibit?
4. What is the significance, if any, to NASM Director Martin Harwit's travel to the Netherlands in early December 1994?

5. Why did NASM fund the exhibit totally from non-appropriated funds?
6. Were there specific donors for the exhibit? What is the source of the non-appropriated funds?

The American Legion believes that hiring and assignment decisions must also be investigated. At a minimum, Congress should inquire as to:

1. Why was Michael Neufeld, a Canadian National, hired by NASM? What are his philosophical and political underpinnings?
2. Why was Tom Crouch, an early aviation history specialist, assigned as curator? Why was he assigned to curate the American History museum exhibit on the Constitution, which focuses on the internment of Japanese American Citizens? Why is there language in the American History exhibit that is verbatim that which is contained in NASM's now-canceled exhibit?
3. Why does Martin Harwit maintain an astrophysics laboratory in NASM, devoting sums and personnel to that endeavor, and dispatching staffer to Europe on related business?
4. Have the military veterans who are on staff as historical consultants and acknowledged military historians in their own rights been systematically excluded from decision making on such exhibits as the one at issue?
5. Why did curators rely on historians only from the revisionist school, such as Bird, Alperovitz, Bernstein, and why did curators not contact established experts in the era and the key people involved?
6. Why did Harwit fire docent Frank Rabbit, for speaking about the exhibit? Can you "fire" a volunteer? Do NASM volunteers check their constitutional guarantees at the door when they punch in? Why did 12 docents sign a petition condemning Harwit and demanding Rabbit's re-instatement?
7. Has it been Harwit's intent since his hiring to "radicalize" and "redirect" NASM? Does such revision conform to the charge and intent of Congress?

Congress should also determine if the exhibit has a life of its own, by asking the following questions:

1. What comprises the exhibit now touring Japan, entitled "The Smithsonian's America"?
2. What is the status of the companion volume on the now canceled exhibit? How does Secretary Heyman intend to stop this? What will happen to the 10,000 copies said by an unidentified spokesperson at the Press to exist? Do they? If so, have they been distributed to anyone? How will they be recalled?

3. Does Secretary Heyman intend to honor his promise to cancel all related materials? More important, is he positioned properly to effectively control the actions of NASM personnel?

The American Legion recommends that Congress should look into viability of future funding for the Institution. The American Legion is under the impression that Secretary Heyman was brought into this Institution for this primary purpose. Such questions should include:


1. Has corporate fund-raising dried up?
2. Why does one major corporate donor insist on anonymity, despite the Institution's offer of on-exhibit acknowledgments to all donors?
3. How many subscribers have withdrawn their membership and financial support? What is the extent of the loss? Will Congress be asked to make up the shortages in appropriate funds?
4. Are the safeguards and oversight sufficient to ensure the Smithsonian Institution uses taxpayer dollars in the way that Congress intends?
5. Why did the Institution send all complaining members a "form letter" that falsely implied no problem with the Enola Gay exhibit?

Finally, we are concerned that the postponement of scheduled exhibits and special events is a direct result of the controversy. If so, Congress should inquire as to the extent of damage that this controversy has inflicted on the Institution and its mission as the National Museum.

The American Legion is prepared to assist the Committee and your office on this critical issue.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM M. DETWEILER  
National Commander