

APPENDIX II

STATEMENT OF

THE NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of this committee:

I am Evan S. Baker, president of the Navy League of the United States, a patriotic organization dedicated to educating the American people about the importance of sea power, both naval and commercial, and about the continuing need for a strong national defense program across the board. I thank you, on behalf of the Navy League and its more than 68,000 members throughout the United States and overseas, for inviting the Navy League to submit a written statement during these important hearings.

My statement reflects my personal views. But I am convinced, from correspondence received at our national headquarters, and from conversations I have had with several past national presidents, most of our current national officers, and numerous Navy League council presidents, that it accurately reflects the views of the vast majority of our members as well.

From the beginning, those members have been concerned, as I have been, with the way in which the Smithsonian Institution handled the Enola Gay exhibit--which, as originally planned, was not only an insult to the dignity and honor of the many brave American and Allied servicemen who fought and died in the war with Japan, but also an affront to truth. Fortunately, this abortive attempt to distort truth and make it more politically correct was quickly recognized for what it was--a covert attempt by a small group of revisionist intellectuals to rewrite history to fit their own preconceived and devoutly held political agendas.

Thanks to the alertness and public-spirited efforts of such patriotic organizations as the Air Force Association and the American Legion, these intellectuals eventually failed in this effort. It is nonetheless instructive to consider in detail what they were trying to do. By virtually ignoring the fact that Japan had started the war by a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, and by playing down both the Japanese record of atrocities throughout occupied Asia and the Japanese military's suicidal use of its own troops in last-ditch defenses of Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and other islands, they gave undeserved and disproportionate prominence to a number of revisionist theories and suppositions about supposed U.S. "responsibility" for the war in the Pacific and about President Truman's courageous decision to use the atomic bomb as perhaps the only way to end the war quickly, thus saving many hundreds of thousands of Japanese as well as American lives.

There were numerous other distortions in the planned exhibit of what really happened during the war--and even more errors of omission. Following are but a few examples: The portraying of Japan's actions, particularly toward the end of the war, as simply a reaction to American "imperialism"; the glossing over of Japan's brutal attack on China, and other nations in the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere"; the outright murder of hundreds of thousands of Chinese and other Asian civilians, many of them women and children, both before U.S. entry into the war and on an even more massive scale during the war; the previously mentioned surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, a date that will remain in infamy; the prominent display of the anguished victims of the Hiroshima bomb--but no parallel display of the thousands of military prisoners tortured, mutilated, and killed--often by beheading--by the Japanese, or of the estimated tens of thousands of Asian women and teenage girls forced to serve the Japanese military as "comfort girls".

I commend the Senate for its unanimous passage, on 23 September 1994, of the Sense of the Senate Resolution introduced by Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.), and I concur wholeheartedly in the Resolution language that describes the revised Enola Gay script as being, even with some minor cosmetic changes included, "revisionist, unbalanced, and offensive." And I commend the members of this committee for seeking to determine not only what happened, and why, but also what corrective actions might need to be taken to protect the public interest in any similar situations that might occur in the future.

And there is a very real, extremely significant public interest involved in what has become known as the Enola Gay controversy. The Smithsonian Institution receives 77 percent of its funding from the federal government and, while it operates with a remarkable degree of autonomy, is ultimately accountable to Congress and, through Congress, to the American people. Millions of Americans, and hundreds of thousands of foreign visitors, visit the Smithsonian each year. They have a right to expect that the exhibits they see, and the information they are provided--whether in print, visual, or graphic form--be both accurate in its content and balanced in its context. Neither the original Enola Gay script nor any of the several revisions drafted under the pressure of public outrage could reasonably be described as either objective or balanced.

The decision made by the Smithsonian's senior officials to abandon any further attempts to revise the script and to scale down

the exhibit to a simple presentation, virtually without commentary, of a few artifacts, including part of the Enola Gay fuselage, may have defused the controversy to some extent, but it also, in my opinion, introduces an error of another kind. Rather than distorting history, it seeks to avoid history, insofar as possible.

This policy is in my mind almost as reprehensible as the Smithsonian's earlier Enola Gay policy and once again perverts truth in the name of diplomacy and in the end will do much more harm than good. It is one thing simply to ignore the lessons of history--and we as a nation have done just that, many times in the past. It is another and much more serious matter to deliberately conceal history from ourselves and our posterity.

Americans, and foreign visitors to our nation's capital, traditionally have regarded the Smithsonian's Museums as the storehouse of our nation's history. They do not expect the Smithsonian to allow itself to be corrupted by politically correct revisionists who seek to further their own preferred political or social agendas by distorting the presentation of historical events or eras.

But that is what has happened with distressing frequency--and specifically at the Smithsonian, which in recent years has allowed itself to be used numerous times by special interest groups, and which has displaced some of its major traditional displays for others of less historical significance, but which are deemed by the Institution's anonymous arbiters to be more socially or politically fashionable.

But even that is not the worst aspect of the Enola Gay controversy. Danger to the institution aside, the real danger of this attempt to manipulate history is that it undermines the people's confidence in, and respect for, all public institutions. The Enola Gay issue is but one instance of what seems to be a continuing trend along these lines. Two other instances that immediately come to mind are the President's Pearl Harbor Commemoration announcement that made no mention of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the more recent White House statement that the term "V-J Day" would not be used in U.S. observances commemorating the end of World War II in the Pacific.

It has been reported numerous times that Americans are

frustrated and disillusioned with their institutions and government. If they are, it is at least partially because of the disrespect, bordering on contempt, for public opinion that is demonstrated by misguided and ill-advised attempts, such as those enumerated here, to manipulate and distort history.

The American people have a right to insist that, if their tax dollars are going to be used to provide financial support for institutions like the Smithsonian, those institutions display American history in a way that reflects mainstream American views. That is not what happened in this instance. Instead, Smithsonian officials seem to have decided, in planning the original Enola Gay exhibit, that concerns over the sensitivities of the Japanese government outweigh the scholarly need for accuracy and the moral obligation to portray American decision makers of the WWII era fairly and in context.

Today, Japan is an ally and friend of the United States. But it was not always so. History must reflect what was, not what certain intellectual elites think should have been, or what they would have liked it to be. This precept is desirable, if not legally enforceable, in privately funded museums; it is mandatory in museums, such as the Smithsonian, funded by taxpayer dollars.

On behalf of the Navy League of the United States, I thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important public issue.