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TESTIMONY OF R. E. SMITH, NATIONAL PRESIDENT, AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen. I am Gene Smith, national president of the Air Force Association and I appreciate the opportunity to give you the Air Force Association's view on the controversy at the National Air and Space Museum.

AFA was the first major group to challenge the museum and its parent organization, the Smithsonian Institution, on their plans for the exhibition of the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. AFA has also been the source for much of the data that has been cited in the course of this debate. We would like to submit for inclusion in the record of this hearing a compendium that we have assembled of relevant reports, memos, letters, statements, and other documents. I believe this material will help you determine the facts of what happened.

[The materials are maintained in the committee's files.]

AFA's involvement dates back to August 1993 when our staff began checking up on reports from a small group of B-29 veterans who told us the Air and Space Museum was going wrong with its plans for exhibition of the *Enola Gay*. We discovered that the B-29 veterans were right. The museum was working up an exhibit that was blatantly biased and severely lacking in balance and historical context.

For the next several months we tried talking and reasoning with the museum director and the curators. But like others before us, we found that our comments did not count for much. We decided that the only way to get change was to take our case to the public, which we did beginning in March of 1994. We did this first in a report and then in a condensed version in our monthly journal, *Air Force Magazine*.

You will hear it said that we jumped prematurely on a raw first draft of the exhibition plan and that the curators would have fixed it themselves if we had let them alone. In fact, the script we exposed was the fourth planning document, not the first. It flowed directly from, and picked up the worst features of, the three concept plans that went before. Museum officials showed no inclination to change. To the contrary. They fought change until the pressure from public opinion and Congress became too great to bear.

In April 1994, at the request of a congressional subcommittee we did our first detailed content analysis of the *Enola Gay* script. We have done similar analyses of every script the museum has produced. These analyses have supplied many of the statistics that have been cited in the news. I will mention two examples for the benefit of those who have not been through the documents package.

We reported, for example, that an earlier script had 49 photos of Japanese casualties but only 3 photos of American casualties, demonstrating the emphasis the curators put on Japanese suffering. Analyzing a revised script found that the curators had given less than 1 text page out of a total of 295 text pages to Japanese military activity prior to 1945. That was the extent of the context in their plan on Japan's 15-year war of atrocity and aggression, Pearl Harbor, the Bataan Death March, the torture and killing of POW's, and all the rest.

Our position, which we began stating early in the debate, was that the exhibition would not be acceptable if it continued to emphasize any of the following themes that were apparent in the first script: one, that the Japanese were victims in World War II, defending their nation and culture against western aggression; two, that the Americans were ruthless invaders, driven by racism, revenge, and blood lust; three, that the death, suffering and horrors of war were borne unilaterally or unfairly by a passive Japan; and four, that the roles of Japan and the United States in World War II were morally equivalent.

At no time did AFA seek to dictate the exact details of the script, and we consistently declined to be part of line-by-line negotiating on the script. Our standards were balance, context, and fairness.

The issue caught fire in August 1994 when about 30 members of Congress issued statements saying that the exhibit planned was biased. The Smithsonian took a more direct hand in the matter after I. Michael Heyman became secretary in September. The salvage effort broke down in January. Mr. Heyman cancelled the exhibition that was planned. He said that the museum would show the forward fuselage of the *Enola Gay* in a simpler, straightforward display that he would oversee personally. We have not seen the details of that exhibit but we are hoping for the best.

Despite that, we are concerned. The question does not end with the *Enola Gay* exhibit. What about the next exhibit and the one after that? We would like to see the museum putting its main effort on its primary mission which is to collect, preserve, and display historic aircraft, spacecraft, and aeronautical artifacts.

There are most certainly indications of change; the main one being the resignation of the director of the Air and Space Museum. It was unfortunate that matters came to that, but it was probably inevitable. We welcome new leadership at the museum and the chance the museum now has to learn from the lessons of the past and rebuild for the future. It is important, though, to be sure that the Smithsonian and the museum learn the right lessons from this experience.

When Secretary Heyman cancelled the problem exhibit he said, "I have taken this action for one overriding reason: I have concluded that we made a basic error in attempting to couple a historic treatment of the use of atomic weapons with the 50th

anniversary commemoration of the end of the war." In our opinion, Secretary Heyman made the right decision for the wrong reason. The problem was not the coupling of history with commemoration. It was that history had been given a counter-cultural spin. The problem was not that the exhibit was analytical. The problem was that the analysis was distorted.

The theme of "history versus nostalgia" has been picked up and elevated to extreme levels by activists in the academic community. They use language like "historical cleansing" and "censorship." They would have you believe that the issue is a contest between honest scholarship and blind patriotism. That is simply not true. Our concerns from the start have always centered around balance and context.

It is rare that we find ourselves on the same side of the issue as *The Washington Post*, so it is worth noting that the editorial for January 20, 1995 reaches the same conclusion we do in this regard. The *Post* said that the earlier drafts of the *Enola Gay* script were "incredibly propagandistic and intellectually shabby." It also said that the curators had repeatedly made the controversy worse by their "misplaced condescension and refusal to see their criticisms as anything but the carping of the insufficiently sophisticated." The problem with the *Enola Gay* exhibit in many ways was the result of refusal by the curators to accept constructive criticism from a wide range of experts, including but not limited to military historians and scholars, who put forth a mainstream view of the circumstances surrounding President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Instead they put great reliance and undue weight on the radical scholarships and assessments that are, to put it mildly, not universally shared by those who are well informed on the subject.

As we pointed out in our very first report on the *Enola Gay*, this is not the first flawed exhibit at the Air and Space Museum or within the Smithsonian complex. We believe that actions should be taken to ensure that curators in our national museums have the benefit of review and comment by a full range of recognized experts and that mechanisms be put into place to ensure that this happens. Only then will the American public be assured that our national museums reflect the broad scholarship that might reasonably be expected.

We applaud the efforts taken to date by Secretary Heyman. He has initiated a management review of the Air and Space Museum and has shown himself willing to hear advice. As we see it, a consensus is developing that says curators need to pay particular attention to their audiences.

Finally, let me say that we, like most Americans, regard the Smithsonian as a national treasure. As you might imagine, our highest regard has traditionally been for the National Air and Space Museum. For those of us in the aerospace community this museum is special beyond compare. Our natural position is to be

in strong support of the Air and Space Museum, not fighting with it. We sincerely hope that a new era is about to begin at Air and Space, and with it a rededication to the principles and purposes that will allow us to once again become an advocate for the museum, not its adversary.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Our next witness is Mr. Bob Manhan, who is the assistant director of the National Legislative Service for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Mr. Manhan?

TESTIMONY OF BOB MANHAN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOR- EIGN WARS

Mr. MANHAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for inviting Veterans of Foreign Wars to appear here this morning.

Of our 2.1 million members, approximately half of them are veterans of World War II. While all of them did not necessarily see service in the Asiatic-Pacific theater of operation, our entire membership unanimously agrees that President Truman on the 14th of June 1945 made the correct political, strategic decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan. The facts that were available to President Truman then are still well-documented today. In essence it boils down to the fact that Imperial Japan was not ready to unconditionally surrender and that a physical land invasion of Japan would cause horrifying American casualties.

My own qualification for being here this morning is the fact that I participated in reviewing four of the Smithsonian's scripts, I participated in a working luncheon one-on-one with Dr. Martin Harwit, and I attended three working sessions at the Smithsonian headquarters. In addition, about 2 months after Dr. Heyman cancelled the exhibit I did attend the jointly sponsored symposium at the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan wherein Dr. Heyman conducted a post-mortem study on what went wrong with this exhibit.

Having said that, and having the opportunity now to be the last one up at the plate, I want you to know that the VFW agrees with everything that my predecessors have said up until this point. This allows me to touch on our own very brief seven-page written testimony that we submitted. It is structured, as you have already seen, to provide you with four basic managerial questions that you may consider asking next week when the Smithsonian tells their side of the story.

Our first question is: How could scholars and technicians at the Smithsonian have offered their flawed initial broad-based concept without receiving any peer group pressure or review? And once it was obvious that they were controversial, why weren't managerial corrections made sooner?