

TESTIMONY OF DAVID S. FERRIERO
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INFORMATION POLICY, CENSUS AND NATIONAL ARCHIVES
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
ON
“HISTORY MUSEUM OR RECORDS ACCESS AGENCY? DEFINING AND
FULFILLING THE MISSION OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS
ADMINISTRATION”

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Chairman Clay, Ranking Member McHenry, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the United States. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the mission of the National Archives and Records Administration. I would also like to thank you for affording me the opportunity to appear at this hearing, which is my first as Archivist, alongside the Librarian of Congress, Dr. James Billington, and the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Dr. Wayne Clough. I am looking forward to the benefit of their wisdom as heads of major national institutions that, like the National Archives, preserve and make the historical and cultural treasures of our country accessible in many different ways to millions of people, ranging from PhD candidates to busloads of school children.

It has been just over one month since I was confirmed as the 10th Archivist of the United States; however, although I am new to the Archives and Washington, DC, I am not new to the challenges of leading complex organizations that exist to serve a diversity of constituents. I have spent my entire career in service to people seeking access to information, and particularly those engaged with the rigor of academic or professional research. I would like to take this opportunity to share with this Subcommittee some details about my background that I think are relevant to the challenges I face.

My work experience has provided me with a set of professional credentials that I believe to be of particular value to NARA. At Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I started shelving books in 1965 and left 31 years later having served as Acting Co-Director of Libraries. I was the University Librarian at Duke University, where I created the first

Records Management Program and learned the importance of fundraising. Most recently, I served as the Andrew W. Mellon Director of Libraries at the New York Public Library, where I was responsible for collection strategy, conservation, digital experience, reference and research services, and education, programming, and exhibitions. I believe that one of my greatest contributions there was that I was able to bring together a diverse collection of individual units into one library experience.

In all these settings, I have had preservation and conservation experience. Most importantly, however, I have experienced and managed aspects of technological transformation in all three institutions. As the new Archivist of the United States, and the first librarian to serve in this capacity, I admit that I have much to learn in the weeks and months to come. At the same time, I am confident that my past experiences will serve me well and I am looking forward to a close working relationship with this Subcommittee as I begin this most humbling appointment.

NARA's Mission

NARA's current strategic plan articulates our mission as serving American democracy by safeguarding and preserving the records of our Government, ensuring that the people can discover, use, and learn from this documentary heritage. We ensure continuing access to the essential documentation of the rights of American citizens and the actions of their government. We support democracy, promote civic education, and facilitate historical understanding of our national experience.

Our mission is rooted in the Federal Records Act (FRA) and related legislation codified principally under Chapters 21-33 of Title 44 of the United States Code. The authority given to the Archivist of the United States in this legislation includes providing guidance and assistance to Federal officials on the management of federal records; determining the retention and disposition of records; storing federal records in records centers from which agencies can retrieve them; and receiving, preserving, and making accessible permanently valuable Federal and Presidential records. This last clause about making permanently valuable records accessible is further explicated in sections 2109 and 2114 of the FRA as embracing both research access and exhibition.

The National Archives exists for access and I firmly believe that every component of the agency is in service to that fundamental mission. We do this in records management by ensuring that agencies create and maintain records of their activities for future access; we do this in preservation by safeguarding the long-term viability of the records in our custody so they can be accessed; we do this in reference services by responding to requests for access to specific records; and we do this in our museum programs in Washington, DC, and the Presidential Libraries by making records available to visitors.

My intent is to make sure that every part of our agency - including our flagship building on the National Mall – continues to be a place where records are explored, whether by tenured university professors or family genealogists or simply curious school children, with a desire to know more about the documents that comprise their American history.

The grandmother who comes to the National Archives to pull together her family tree is no less important to us than the lawyer who needs to pull together a case for trial. The school child who is inspired by seeing the Constitution is no less vital than the scholar writing a book about the Constitution. I believe our charter demands that we responsibly and responsively make the records of the American government available to the American people. At the same time, serving such a varied constituency requires a proper balance of resources and priorities to meet the different needs and expectations of the tens of thousands of researchers who visit our research rooms and the millions of visitors who line up to view our exhibitions. I want every one of them to have the rich experience that they deserve from their National Archives and I do not see their needs as competing interests.

Challenges and Opportunities

In my letter of invitation to this hearing, you have outlined issues that this Subcommittee has recently examined. Since I have only just begun my job as Archivist, I must respectfully ask for the Subcommittee's patience as I develop plans to more fully address these and other priority issues in the months to come. Thankfully, I have the recent work of this Subcommittee, the diligent efforts of NARA's Inspector General and the expert views of the Government Accountability Office, to help me get started. As I move forward I would like the members of this Subcommittee to know that you have my personal commitment to an open dialog from me and my leadership team.

Today, I would like to briefly comment on the issues you raised because I believe them to be deeply important:

Agency security, including information technology as well as physical security:

Agency security, both for information technology and our physical holdings, is high on my list of priorities for NARA. We absolutely must be able to ensure that NARA is able to safeguard the documentary heritage of our nation. I know from personal experience that security is an issue that every research library and archives deals with on a daily basis – the tension between protecting and providing access to primary materials is great, and the balance is a difficult one to perfect.

I am pleased to tell you that on December 7th, I announced the creation of the National Archives and Records Administration Holdings Protection Program. This program will serve as an agency-wide resource, developing and administering policies to enhance holdings protection of original records regardless of their format to reduce the loss of and aid in the recovery of holdings while ensuring ready access for research. I have appointed Mr. Eric Peterson as the team leader. Mr. Peterson was most recently the Special Security Officer for the Naval Information Operations Command in Suitland, Maryland, where he was responsible for loss prevention and classified programs.

This new program is only a start to improving security. As this Subcommittee knows, NARA's Inspector General has conducted extensive investigations and research on

NARA's security shortcomings. I am especially looking forward to his guidance, along with that of those who are on the front lines of NARA security.

Records management, including but not limited to the Electronic Records Archives and other kinds of records:

As new Archivist, I bring with me archival and records management experience. The records management programs at MIT, Duke, and the New York Public Library were created under my watch and are among the best in the nation.

Regarding government-wide records management and electronic records management, NARA's strategic plan states:

Promoting and ensuring effective records and information management across the Federal Government is the foundation on which the long-term success of NARA's mission depends. We carry out this foundational work by ensuring that—

Federal agencies can economically and effectively create and manage records necessary to meet business needs

Records are kept long enough to protect rights and assure accountability, and

Records of archival value are preserved and made available for future generations.

Our responsibilities—and the records and information responsibilities of the Congress, the Courts, the President, and the Federal agencies—are grounded in law and regulation. However, our mandate goes beyond compliance, especially during this period of rapid technological change. I believe that we can do a much better job in this area. We can and should be more proactive and, frankly, more aggressive with compliance and audits. In the past 18 months, the National Archives devised an agency self-assessment program that will support NARA's reinvigorated records management evaluation and inspection program. This self-assessment tool will identify agencies most in need of assistance. I see this as a good first step, but only a step.

While I believe NARA has built a good records management foundation, the agency faces serious challenges when it comes to electronic records.

Several of the challenges include:

- (1) The continuing proliferation in volume and number of formats in which Federal records are created or received, with general, large-scale challenges associated with email and web records management across the Federal government.

- (2) The particular challenges associated with agencies creating Federal records in multi-agency work environments (e.g., the Intelligence Community; Natural Resources community with fire records; etc), as well as the new collaborative, web 2.0 technologies that agencies increasingly use to carry out their work, to create or receive records, and to make records and other information available.
- (3) The mixed nature of the Federal Government recordkeeping environment, where agencies still create both paper and electronic records, with an increasing expectation within and outside of Government that records and information will be created electronically, and that these electronic records will be managed and made available electronically.

We must also continue laying out the marker as to what our job is in an electronic government. As you know, NARA is currently developing the Electronic Records Archives, or ERA, a system designed to preserve and provide long-term access to the permanent electronic records that NARA receives from agencies and presidential administrations. ERA met some critical milestones this past year, enabling NARA to ingest and store unclassified electronic records of the Executive Office of the President that were transferred to us at the end of the George W. Bush Administration.

But our responsibility in regard to electronic records is not just to build ERA. It is also to ensure that agencies are able to manage the electronic records they create and to identify permanently valuable electronic records wherever they are, capture them, and make them available in a usable form as quickly as the law allows. We must therefore be committed to maintaining an electronic records management program that is responsive to the federal agencies that create the records as well as to our customers who expect continuing access to our government's records, whether those records are paper or digital.

Exhibits, civic education and other public programs, including but not limited to the presidential libraries and the current discussions over expanding museum and public visitor space and redesigning researcher areas at the National Archives Building in Washington:

When the National Archives Building was constructed in 1934, it was built with an exhibit hall we now refer to as the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom. We have been inviting the public to see records in exhibits at the National Archives for our entire 75 year history. We have been leaders in encouraging the use of primary sources in history and civics education since at least the 1970s. Our partnership with the National Council for Social Studies, for example, has been instrumental in the growing use of records as teaching tools in the classroom.

The last decade has brought substantial growth in our engagement in exhibits and education. First, under Governor John Carlin's leadership, NARA launched the National Archives Experience in 2004, a more fully developed museum program in Washington, DC. Governor Carlin insisted that expanded museum programs had to be covered by private fundraising. Today, the Foundation for the National Archives and the Presidential

Library foundations raise millions of dollars to fund museum and education programs here in Washington and at locations across the nation.

Under Professor Allen Weinstein's leadership, NARA's mission of access through education programs was specifically highlighted. Recently, NARA has been improving visitor facilities and extending our national touring exhibit programs.

I think it is important to point out that these activities within the National Archives are not happening in isolation. I know for a fact that the library community has been moving to increase its educational engagement for at least two decades. At the New York Public Library, archives and special collections had been generally the territory of faculty only. In recent years, there has been an access priority shift to include students and the general public. Three years after NARA opened the National Archives Experience, the Library of Congress Experience opened its doors. And, of course, Congress has just opened its Capitol Visitors Center (CVC) to provide similar educational and museum services to its visitors. NARA's Center for Legislative Archives was proud to provide significant assistance and documents to the CVC.

Why such an uptick in interest in the educational value of records? I can't speak for the dozens of leaders who have pulled us in this direction, but I can give you my own assessment: 1) the problem of civic literacy is real; 2) access to public records is a part of the solution to the problem; and 3) no one is better positioned to provide access to public records than institutions like the National Archives.

We are much encouraged by this success but believe we can do better. We are studying ways to better utilize our visitor and research spaces because we have found that there are three major gaps in our overall museum program: (1) Our exhibit program is not inclusive of all Americans, particularly minorities and women; (2) the ground level entry to the building remains a source of continuing confusion to our visitors; and, (3) security concerns require segregation of visitors and researchers, preventing our visitors from getting a taste of the research experience.

My predecessor decided more than a year ago to look into ways that we could provide these needed visitor services while not diminishing the service that we provide to researchers. The significant drop in microfilm usage over the years presented the National Archives with an opportunity to make modifications that would benefit both of our constituencies. By reducing the size of the microfilm reading room to the number of stations that are actually in demand, we could expand the exhibit space without diminishing our researcher services.

An aspect of the planning that my new colleagues readily admit was unfortunate was the way in which the plan came to be communicated to research staff and researchers affected by these changes. Management understood that we would need to consolidate space to make room for these changes on the exhibit side of the building. Confident of their ability to accommodate all of the functionality of the current research space in a

smaller envelope, management did a poor job of talking with research staff and researchers and engaging them in solutions to the problem.

In recent weeks there has been a great deal of consternation expressed by some of our researchers about the changes under discussion for the research areas. I am happy to say that we have now brought researchers and staff into our discussions about how to design and equip the research areas. Not surprisingly, both groups had great ideas – not just about how to reallocate space but how to update equipment and systems so that researchers receive more value from every square foot. We are very grateful for their contributions and hope that this will be the beginning of a long-term improvement in communications.

We will also be holding a public forum tomorrow to discuss several alternative proposals. I'm looking forward to participating in the forum so I can learn first-hand what our researchers believe their National Archives should be. I am attending this not only as the Archivist of the United States, but, perhaps more importantly, as one who has spent four decades as a research librarian and has an intimate appreciation of the needs of researchers.

I am committed to improving and extending our communication and outreach efforts with our stakeholders. As one federal agency the National Archives does not stand alone, but exists as part of a complex web of agencies created to carry out the laws passed by Congress and subject to the rulings of the courts. As an archives, we do not stand alone, but exist as part of an intellectual community of archivists and historians. It is our responsibility, our mission, to be a responsible member of those communities, contributing where we can, and adopting the ideas of others when they prove superior.

Every day, thousands of people walk through the doors of the facilities of the National Archives. As the Archivist of the United States, I am committed to the best experience for those who come to research our holdings, and for those who come to visit our exhibits. To achieve that world-class service, we must listen to the communities of scholars and practitioners who are our colleagues. Only through that dialogue will we achieve our mission and our goals.

NARA management culture, which seems to focus more on establishing high-level policies than actually managing and implementing them to affect successful outcomes:

I am certainly aware of this Subcommittee's concerns with NARA's management culture and all I can do today is assure you that I share your concerns and I am looking forward to righting the ship. I will keep an open ear to the ideas that others in the agency would like to put forward.

It seems to me that the area most ripe for reexamination and reform may be the culture's readiness for the digital age. In my previous jobs, I was on the front line as the rapid evolution of information technology redefined the ways in which libraries had operated for generations. My experiences over the past many years have taught me that in order to

successfully embrace and bring about change – and this is particularly true at old, venerable institutions – you have to begin by inspiring a willingness to change the workplace culture.

As I deal with management improvements, I will do it in tandem with my immediate goal of addressing the unacceptably poor survey results we have received in terms of employee job satisfaction. As someone who began his career shelving books, I am committed to creating career opportunities and choices at NARA. All NARA employees, from those operating the forklifts in record storage centers to the most senior archivists, are equally important to the success of our mission. We are not going to build a successful management culture by dealing with managers alone.

Employee job satisfaction is my very highest priority and I am fully committed to investing in NARA's most valuable resource – our staff. Through our Strategic Human Capital Plan, I will be looking at new strategies to recruit, develop and strengthen, and retain the diverse and highly skilled workforce we need to execute the mission that is vital to our Government.

In my experience, the most important factor in improving employee engagement and job satisfaction is commitment “from the top”. I am committed to tackling this challenge, and to holding myself and the senior leadership of the National Archives accountable for taking the necessary steps to improve employee engagement and job satisfaction at the National Archives.

Several efforts are already underway in this area, consistent with an agency-wide action plan that was developed this past summer with input from 28 staff focus groups held in NARA locations stretching from California to Massachusetts. Our plan identifies 36 action strategies that we will undertake between now and Fiscal Year 2011 to address four key areas for improvement: 1) Better communication at all levels; 2) Leadership that makes clear the agency’s goals and priorities; 3) More diversity in the workplace; and 4) Training for staff to improve their skills and increase their potential.

We are already making progress against this plan. I’d like to highlight a few examples for you:

- We’ve conducted an all-hands Office of Regional Records Services webinar, with 1000+ employees participating. Employees were able to ask questions directly to the Assistant Archivist for Regional Records Services through a web chat feature. We are posting all of the questions and responses online for all staff to view.
- We’re updating our intranet site to incorporate social media tools such as employee blogs to share knowledge across the agency, become more transparent and provide employees with a way to voice their concerns.

- We've sponsored training to managers in the Office of Regional Records Services on how to build and maintain a high performance culture that emphasizes teaming, ongoing operational improvement, and leadership at all levels.
- To evaluate our efforts, we have implemented a quarterly review process that I will use to identify and address any potential barriers to our progress. In addition, we are maintaining our action plan and status updates online for all staff to see what is being done in response to the Federal Human Capital Survey results.

Related to this, we are also striving to enhance our health and wellness programs to improve employee well-being and morale. I value every employee, and we will continue to encourage and support these efforts to make all of NARA a better place to work.

Conclusion

In my very short time as Archivist of the United States, I have become keenly aware of the skill, talent, and spirit that have shaped this unique organization for its first 75 years. I have also become aware of the many challenges that face this agency and, in that regard, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of this Subcommittee for the fair and honest oversight you provide.

The work done by the National Archives reflects the faith of our fellow citizens that the records of our government shall continue to tell the stories of the people and events that shape our nation . . . and that anyone who wishes should have access to these records.

I would be happy to answer any questions.