

TESTIMONY OF DAVID S. FERRIERO

ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

AND

THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

ON

“PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES: THEIR MISSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION”

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Chairman Mica, Chairman Issa and Members of the Committees, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on the important role of Presidential Libraries both to the Nation and to their local communities.

The Presidential Library system, with minimal federal funds and the benefits of an effective public-private partnership, serves the citizens of this country. Presidential Libraries preserve, interpret, and present the history of American democracy in the 20th and 21st centuries through the words and deeds of our government. These libraries are among the country’s finest examples of public archives offering research rooms, interactive museums and education centers to millions of researchers, students and visitors each year.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s vision for his library created a process that has been followed by each succeeding President. He established a private foundation to raise funds for the construction of the library building that was then donated to the National Archives. Each Library is supported by the federal government and in part by a Presidential foundation. The relationship between NARA’s Presidential Libraries and each of their support Foundations makes possible not only the Library facility that houses the archives and museum, but also the exhibits and the broad outreach and educational programming that constitute 61% of our museum visitors and 82% of our education and public program attendees throughout all of NARA’s facilities.

Situated around the country, Presidential Libraries reflect and enrich their local communities. They offer exceptional research facilities that are hailed for the personal service they provide to students and scholars. Each museum tells a unique story concerning the life and times of a 20th century, and soon a 21st century President and the pivotal moments in history they faced. The Libraries’ extensive outreach to teachers and students is a powerful vehicle for civic engagement. Using targeted federal funds (which I will address later) and the major contributions received from the Presidential Library foundations, the Presidential Libraries are a positive force

contributing to diverse communities, making history transparent, and strengthening the civic fiber of our nation.

As you know, one hundred percent of all initial construction funding for the Libraries, including the initial museum exhibit, comes from non-federal sources, the majority of which are private donations through the Presidential foundations or their predecessor organizations. The construction of Presidential Libraries serves as an engine of economic growth in regional areas, revitalizing communities and guaranteeing continued revenue streams from millions of national and international tourists. Local Chambers of Commerce or State Tourism Boards estimate that each visitor to the Library spends an additional \$100-\$200 (depending on the community) during their visit at local restaurants and hotels. Thus, with nearly 2 million persons visiting our museums in 2010, the support to the community is significant: \$15 million added to the economy in Abilene, Kansas; \$43 million in Boston; \$55 million in Austin.

Equally important is the educational and cultural impact Presidential Libraries have on their communities. Over 500,000 people attended cultural programming, conferences, and various speaker series at the libraries in 2010 – where the country’s finest historians, political leaders, journalists, and biographers came to locales where they would not typically speak. Moreover, the Libraries provided educational programs for 350,000 students and 5,000 teachers. At a hearing last year at which I testified, there was some concern about the use of resources for educational and cultural programs. As I said at that hearing 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 and, I would add, the 13 Presidential Libraries and 12 Regional Archives programs across the nation. The Presidential Libraries employ 172 archival FTEs (Full Time Equivalent), who spend 88% of their time on archival functions – i.e., reference, review, description, and declassification. Only 7.7% of their time is in support of our exhibit, education, and public programs. The Libraries have 59 FTE for museum and education functions. Nearly 60% of their time is devoted to collection management, while 35% is used for exhibit, education, and public programs.

Several libraries have over 90% of their collections processed. Our most significant backlogs are in the Presidential Records Act libraries (Reagan – Bush 43). In 2009, Congress appropriated funds for 25 new archival positions for the four libraries with records controlled by the Presidential Records Act. These newly hired archivists, a remarkably talented group, trained on processing Presidential records and, along with other streamlining measures, are beginning to make a real difference in the volume of records processed. We expect this year to increase our processing by at least 1.3 million additional pages and more in future years as these new archivists complete their training.

Presidential Library Foundations provide the funding for museum, education, and public programs; websites; archives support and digitization; marketing and other initiatives. Their contributions have allowed the Presidential Libraries to be leaders and innovators in the National Archives and beyond. Let me provide just a few examples:

- Presidential Libraries were among the first public archives and the first in the National Archives to develop interactive websites and on-line document based educational programming.
- The Presidential Decision Making Classroom pioneered at the Truman Library is now featured parts of the education programs in several Libraries and served as the model for our educational programs in Washington, D.C.
- The Presidential Timeline, created through support of the Johnson Foundation and in partnership with the University of Texas Technology Learning Center and all of the Presidential Libraries, is an innovative teacher and student resource for digital assets reflecting the life and administration of each of the Presidents.
- Using private source funding and partnerships, many of the Libraries have undertaken major digitization projects – Kennedy, Roosevelt, Ford, and Bush 41. In fact, the FDR Library was the first unit of the National Archives to provide digital access to the actual records.
- Because of foundation funding, the Clinton Presidential Library became the federal government's first existing building to be certified at the LEED Platinum level. The George W. Bush Library will be built to the LEED Platinum level as well.

In addition to their on-going annual support for the Libraries, the Foundations have contributed tens of millions of dollars to renovate our permanent museum exhibits. The Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and both Bush Libraries have recently completed new permanent exhibits or are in the planning stage for a new exhibit. The cost for a new permanent exhibit, which generally lasts ten to twelve years, averages \$8 to upwards of \$15 million.

The Libraries also attract additional grants and corporate and charitable funds throughout their lifespan. These have included three Save America's Treasures grants, eight Teaching America History grants, two Carnegie Foundation grants, a Department of Education grant for the Presidential Timeline, a \$1 million grant from Coca Cola to sustain educational programming at the Carter Library, New York Community Trust grants to the Roosevelt Library, and in-kind support for Library websites from the University of Texas, Texas A&M, and the Georgia Board of Regents. For 25 years the Kettering Foundation has supported National Issues Forums in the Libraries, sponsoring 76 forums over the past two years.

I am supported in this partnership by my Advisory Committee on the Presidential Library-Foundation Partnership. This Committee is made up of representatives of the various Presidential Library foundations. Through these meetings the public-private partnership can work to leverage our strengths and resources and resolve, or at least understand, how differences in our mission can sometimes strain our relationship. I meet with this Committee at least twice a year to discuss and ask their advice on the activities of the National Archives, our strategic plans and vision, collaborative activities, funding, and legal issues that can affect the public-private partnership.

There are many factors that will contribute to the long-term sustainability of the Presidential Libraries. First, and most important, is that the Foundations have demonstrated resiliency and stability as they continue to be a major factor in support of the Libraries. Second, the Libraries,

as I have noted, have been leaders and innovators in program development. Third, with the endowment rising to 60% with the next Presidential Library, a new centralized facility with no museum component would only show an average savings over 75 years of a few million dollars per year assuming this centralized facility costs \$100 million.

But we shouldn't hastily conclude that a centralized model is more cost efficient based on cost alone. Per our 2009 report on Alternative Models for Presidential Libraries, we have yet to construct an economic model and so did not demonstrate the loss to local communities and states that would otherwise host a Presidential Library. The Presidential collections are among the most vital and valuable of our Nation's historical assets. We have no more important mission than to preserve and make them accessible to those who need them. There is a higher value associated with making these collections accessible in the robust way the current Library/Foundation relationship facilitates – not only to a diverse constituency of scholars, but also to an extended audience of museum visitors, middle and secondary students, not to mention a vast number of curious citizens who visit our websites. Public conferences, museum exhibits, immersive educational experiences and content-rich websites require staff, buildings, and funding at a cost to both the government and the foundations.

The Presidency is the one office elected by all Americans. Through their geographic disbursement, the Presidential Libraries are a positive force contributing to diverse communities, making history transparent, and strengthening the civic fiber of our nation.

While I continue to believe in the importance of Presidential Libraries, it is my belief that technology will impact future Presidential Libraries. The size of the digital collections at the Clinton and Bush 43 Libraries is far greater than the paper records. In the near future, we can expect that a Presidential Library's collections will be mostly digital. Those documents acted on in a paper format will probably be digitized by the White House and only those documents of significant intrinsic value will be saved in their original format – such as documents annotated by the President, correspondence with world leaders, and decision memoranda. Long term preservation and storage of digital records is a delicate, but worthwhile option. Nonetheless, I believe Presidents in the future should continue to establish a Presidential library if they wish to do so. Some collections may well be digital, but it is the curators, archivists, and educators who work in these Libraries that make the collections accessible to all of our students and citizens.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any of your questions.