

Opening Statement

Prof. Allen Weinstein

Hearing on His Nomination to be Archivist of the United States

U.S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

Thursday, July 22, 2004, 3:30 p.m.

Room 342, Dirksen Senate Office Building

Chairman Collins, Senator Lieberman, Senators on the Governmental Affairs Committee, Senator Lugar, Committee staff, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am honored and humbled by the President's nomination of me to become the next Archivist of the United States. Should this Committee and the full Senate confirm the nomination, I will devote all of my effort and energy to addressing the range of responsibilities assigned to the Archivist as the head of the National Archives and Records Administration.

I want to thank Senator Lugar, a friend and mentor, for having introduced me to the Committee. I want to thank you, Chairman Collins, and all of the Senators on the Committee, along with your able staffs; no nominee could have been treated with greater fairness. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Members and staff of this Committee in a completely cooperative manner.

The Archivist of the United States essentially works for the American people across partisan lines and not, regardless of which Administration nominates the person, for a particular President or political party. Thus, the Archivist must display at all times scrupulous independence and a devotion to the laws and principles which govern the responsibilities of the office. It should be of some help in this connection that for two decades, in this city and throughout this country and the world, I have led an independent, bipartisan existence while developing a range of programs and initiatives with Members of Congress, their staffs, and Administration officials of both parties. I would continue that independent and bipartisan approach to my work as Archivist of the United States, the designated custodian of America's essential government "records that defy the tooth of time." I note with special pride The Center for Democracy's bipartisan Board of Directors which, at various times, was honored to include Senators Kay Bailey

Hutchison, John Kerry, Joseph Lieberman, Richard Lugar, Sam Nunn, Charles Robb, and former-Senator William Brock.

With the Committee's indulgence, I would like to spend a moment reviewing in summary my qualifications for the post of Archivist. My answers to the Committee's biographical and policy questionnaires—which you already have—expand on these comments.

\*First, I believe that my several careers—as a teacher and scholar of American history, a global democracy activist for two decades, and an NGO administrator for that same period—constitute a varied yet significant professional background, one capable of assuming quickly and effectively the Archivist's roles and responsibilities.

\*Second, my specific activities over four decades as an educator, historian and writer should be noted: as the holder of three long-term professorships (Smith College, Georgetown, and Boston University); author or co-author of six books well-received by reviewers, of eight edited collections, and of dozens of articles; user of and advisor to various research archives; and an award-winning recipient of prestigious fellowships and lectureships.

\*Third, having witnessed over almost two decades as President of The Center for Democracy in dozens of dictatorships or transitional nations the destructive impact of non-democratic habits of mind, history and political behavior, I am keenly aware of the priceless constitutional heritage enjoyed by Americans. This awareness instills a fierce desire to protect that heritage and—in doing so—to educate Americans in the meaning and importance of our pivotal documents. In short, the Archivist's role in preserving and

disseminating our nation's "essential evidence" is one for which both the global and American aspects of my past experiences have prepared me.

\*Fourth and finally, the bipartisan background of my international work during the past twenty years, first in developing The National Endowment for Democracy and then in creating and managing The Center for Democracy, working closely in those decades with the U.S. Congress and Administrations of both parties, has provided a useful context for assuming leadership and supervision of NARA's various components.

The Committee's policy questionnaire asked, among other things, what challenges NARA would confront in the period ahead. If confirmed as Archivist, I would undertake both an initial set of briefings by NARA's management team and other senior staff and another by key NARA stakeholders to gain their assessments of current system-wide challenges and priorities. I believe this will allow a more cost-effective and efficient use of NARA's budget. Until then, I would place the following group of clear challenges and priorities in any list of concern to the Archivist of the United States:

- providing effective post-9/11 security for the documents, materials and staff at the Washington, D.C. and College Park NARA headquarters and throughout NARA's installations (i.e., presidential libraries, regional records centers, *et al.*);
- completing the Redesign of the Federal Records Management initiative;
- moving forward NARA's major electronic records initiatives (i.e., Electronic Records Archive [ERA], Electronic Records Management [ERM], Records Lifecycle Business Process Re-engineering [BPR], *et al.*);
- expanding NARA's educational and public programming not only in Washington but throughout the regional records centers and the presidential library system;
- supporting the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) in its important work at effective budgetary levels;

- addressing major internal administrative concerns at NARA, including (but not limited to) the loss of experienced personnel due to retirement, aging facilities, deteriorating records, and administrative backlogs;
- Strengthening cooperation with the presidential library system while creating effective liaison with state and other non-federal archival groups.

Once fully briefed, however, undoubtedly other priorities will join this initial list.

Chairman Collins and Members of the Committee, I want to call to your attention the fact that several archival and historical organizations have raised concerns regarding insufficient consultation with their groups prior to this nomination, concerns—they were quick to point out—more about the process of selection itself than about the nominee. I would mention, as an historical note, that many of these same concerns—and others—were also expressed when President Clinton nominated Governor Carlin as Archivist in 1995.

To address these concerns, one of my important goals, if confirmed as Archivist, would be to maintain an open dialogue with all of NARA's key stakeholders and partners, and since my nomination in April, I have attempted informally but vigorously to reach out to many of these groups. I have met with the heads of over a dozen archival and historical organizations and with a number of other influential figures involved in NARA-related activities seeking dialogue and not endorsements. At these meetings, mostly I have listened and opened lines of communication; if confirmed, I would continue to strengthen mechanisms of consultation with these and other stakeholding groups. They are all valuable members of the NARA family. Since these meetings, one of the concerned archival groups, the important Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC) did endorse my nomination as Archivist. In short, I have been working hard and steadily to keep open communication with many concerned NARA

stakeholders and, as Archivist, will try to engage all segments of NARA's constituent communities both in and out of government.

Before concluding, I want to thank the Committee for accommodating a longer written statement beyond these opening remarks, should I wish to elaborate further. Considering the thoroughness of the Committee's two questionnaires ("Biographical" and "Policy"), I thought it more useful to append my answers to these to my opening remarks and have taken the liberty of doing so.

In closing, I want to share with the Committee two personal stories of my encounters with the three great "Charters of Freedom" housed in the National Archives Building on Pennsylvania Avenue. The first occurred in Boston in 1987, when I was invited to deliver the 216<sup>th</sup> annual Fourth of July Oration at historic Faneuil Hall. I called my remarks "The Declaration Meets the Constitution: A Bicentennial Fourth of July," and the talk concerned the efforts at Philadelphia's Constitutional Convention—in the end successful—to avoid a deadlock in its deliberations. The "Great Compromise" eventually agreed upon confirmed the convergence of the 1776 and 1787 guarantees of freedom, which even today balance in the American Republic the rights of citizenship and its obligations.

Three years later, in 1990, The Center for Democracy hosted the new President of a democratic Hungary, Arpad Goncz, who spoke in front of the Bill of Rights at the National Archives, in a ceremony commemorating its Bicentennial, on the global influence of that document. The Faneuil Hall talk confirmed for me the unbreakable links among the three great founding documents of our "first new nation" in guaranteeing the rights and responsibilities of our people. President Goncz's remarks called attention

to the ideological and geographic reach of this country's principles, from its beginnings, in a world filled with despots, now as then, in which ordinary people dream of and fight for freedom, individual rights and the rule of law. Together, the two occasions also symbolize for me the awesome responsibilities placed on the Archivist of the United States as a designated custodian of America's national memory. For the Archivist, this role is a result of his obligation to preserve and assure timely and maximum access to our governmental records in the evolving historic saga of the American people. On a personal note, as the son of pre-World War I Russian-Jewish immigrants, if confirmed, I would view my work as Archivist as an optimal way of giving back to this great country a small measure of what the United States of America has given to me and my family.

Chairman Collins and Members of the Committee, I am keenly aware of the responsibilities involved in the position for which I have been nominated, and I welcome the challenge, Senators, as I now welcome your questions and comments. Thank you.