

Statement of Senator Thomas R. Carper, Chairman

Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

“Hearing to Consider the Nomination of Mr. David Ferriero to be the Archivist of the United States of America”

October 1, 2009

The Committee will come to order.

Today, we'll be considering the nomination of David Ferriero (*note: pronounced FAIR-e-o*) to be the Archivist of the United States at the National Archives and Records Administration. Mr. Ferriero is no stranger to the records management and archives world. He comes to us after serving 44 years in various record management roles. Most recently he served as the Director of the New York Public Libraries and before that as Vice Provost for Library Affairs and University Librarian at Duke University.

I'm pleased that the President has sent us such a qualified candidate for this position. As I'm sure Mr. Ferriero will point out in his opening statement, he has experience working with the National Archives in his previous positions and will hopefully bring in some fresh new ideas if he is confirmed as its new leader.

In his previous role as head of the New York Public Library, Mr. Ferriero worked to increase efficiency and streamline operations. Mr. Ferriero has also harnessed the power of the Internet to make it easier for citizens to access the holdings of the New York Public Library from the comfort of their homes. He knows very well the tough work that lies ahead should he be confirmed. When Mr. Ferriero and I sat down together recently, he made clear that there are issues that the world is looking to the National Archives to solve and that he'd like to take a leadership role in solving them.

First, there is the issue of electronic records management. Every year, more and more records are being produced entirely in electronic form. For example, I am sure a good number of people in this room sent an E-Mail today that contained an attachment with a document, photo, or a video. Now, not all of those records will be important for our nation's history, but some may be. In the past few decades, important electronic records -- such as E-Mail -- have been printed on paper and placed in a filing cabinet, but we can't do that forever. To address this challenge, the National Archives is developing an IT system that can store the government's electronic records forever. While this technology sounds promising, there are many experts who question whether or not it will be effective. For example, will we know in the year 2109 that an electronic record created in 1999 is the original? I don't have an answer to that question and I doubt many people here do, but it's one that Mr. Ferriero will be responsible for finding out if he is entrusted with this position for which he has been nominated.

The second area I want to touch on is the cost of running the presidential libraries. The Presidential Libraries Act of 1955 requires the National Archives to maintain libraries from President Hoover onward. Pretty soon we will see President Bush's library added to this list. These libraries are typically privately constructed and then deeded and maintained by the federal government. However, some library facilities have unexpectedly required millions of dollars in additional funding from Congress in order to prevent the destruction of priceless artifacts from weakened and leaking roofs, poor infrastructure, and improper temperature controls. Further, I learned last year at a hearing that some records in presidential libraries are often unavailable to the public for extended period of times. That's why I asked my colleagues on this committee to join me in passing a bill during the last Congress that asked the National Archives to take a hard look at the presidential library system. The bill asked the Archives to report back to Congress on ways to better preserve presidential materials, reduce the financial burden on the federal government, and reduce the delay in public access to the records held by the library. In fact, we recently received that report and I look forward to partnering with Mr. Ferriero to take steps to save costs and better protect these precious historical treasures.

Finally, I'd like to touch on the leadership role of the National Archives. Every year, millions of paper-based and electronic records are created by the government. Some of these records are at risk of being lost forever because the records-keeping systems used by agencies are flawed. We saw this unfortunate situation unfold when 3 months worth of Bush White House E-Mails leading up to the start of the Iraq war went missing. I am not sure if all of those emails were recovered, but that's a situation that simply should have never occurred in the first place.

In addition, we needlessly spend millions of taxpayer dollars declassifying records that never should have been classified in the beginning. And when records are labeled classified, it takes decades longer than it should to finally declassify them. For example, my staff tells me that the National Archives has records that are unavailable to the public that date back to the Spanish-American war due to their classified status. That is simply unacceptable. One major challenge for Mr. Ferriero will be to make sure the National Archives assumes the leadership role Congress intended back in 1934 and more aggressively works with agencies to appropriately manage their records.

My thanks to you, Mr. Ferriero, for your willingness to tackle this difficult job.