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BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTURCTURE

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 Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on Presidential Libraries: Their Mission and Future Direction.

For those of you who I have not met, I am Duke Blackwood, Director of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the historic institutions called Presidential Libraries and the important role they play throughout our country.

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established what would be the first Presidential Library in Hyde Park, New York, I'm not sure even he envisioned how transformational they would become. What started as a straight forward offer to access his historic materials has grown into a system that reaches across the country. His library and the 12 others that have followed have had unparalleled impact on tens of millions of people - perhaps more. Our Founding Fathers and Mothers would have applauded his vision as an important component in safeguarding the freedoms that they fought and died for. An informed citizenry and an accountable government are at the heart of what we do. What he did for our country, our citizens and most importantly future generations of our school children continues to pay significant dividends today…across America and around the world.

My testimony today will further build the case in support of the great opportunities afforded at Presidential Libraries that Tom eloquently presented. I will address their impact and why they should continue as they are for future generations.

This brings us to the reason we are here today: to discuss our mission and future direction. Ask an historian, member of the media or a student what is the mission of Presidential Libraries and you are likely to have diverse opinions. So what is right? Where should we go? What should we be doing?

I am not here today to give definitive answers or to promote a specific mission statement. Rather I hope to provide further context to what Tom presented, present an objective perspective, and finally to argue that our mission should be multifaceted. Ultimately though, everything starts with President Roosevelt's basic principle of access and the definition of access should be expanded for today as well as the future.

With any lasting institution, natural growth, change and adaptation are good. That is the way I view the mission of Presidential Libraries. As Tom referred to in his remarks, President Roosevelt wanted his materials to be preserved and made available. Fast forward to 2000, our mission was "ready access." It seems that President Roosevelt's intentions had stood the test of time as his original mission was adapted well to the 21st century approach and thinking. But is that enough for today or tomorrow?

On the surface it might continue to work as an overarching mission. But dig a little deeper and you start asking for more. Does such a mission fully address what we are doing, should be doing, can be doing or need to be doing?

Access to the process, workings and activity of our government is paramount. I am confident that won't change. Our country is unique in this regard by providing access quicker and more broadly than most. We should all take pride in that. I believe our Forefathers and Mothers certainly would.

Over the years Presidential Libraries have grown, changed and adapted to reflect the times, needs and expectations. Tom provided many examples of how each one of our libraries have developed and nurtured ideas, created exciting programs, and kept up with technological advances all of which serve our citizens in ways that no other institution can match. That is a great accomplishment.

The growth of Presidential Libraries is due in good measure to the support we receive from the attendant foundations, in our case, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation. Working hand-in-hand with the Reagan Foundation the current Library model is working well. In the ten years that I have had the honor to work here, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Foundation and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) have worked together with a tremendous amount of success. The Foundation's support allows us to better serve the public by providing real value to the government in a successful public-private partnership.

There are five key areas that demonstrate why our partnership with the Foundation has been successful:

- Financial Support
- Educational Opportunities
- Community Outreach
- Communication
- Programs and Events

During my tenure here, the Reagan Foundation has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual support and more than $50 million in direct capital improvements to the site. This is on top of the $69 million that they provided to build the Library itself. Specific projects include: approximately $35 million to build the Air Force One Pavilion, $9 million to build and support the Discovery Center and they recently funded $15 million for the museum renovation and technology support.

This support has had a tremendous impact, most notably in three key areas: more than doubling the attendance since the opening of the Pavilion; a significant expansion of education programs; and a heightened awareness of the Library locally and nationally. In addition, our reputation as a world-class institution has grown substantially. With each of these projects, the Foundation and NARA staffs have worked in partnership.

The Federal Government's involvement and support of Presidential Libraries is also critical. With the necessary appropriated funds and revenue from admissions, fees and other sources, NARA successfully leverages the foundations support providing tremendous value for the government and the American people.

Because of this broad range of support, Presidential Libraries now serve many constituencies. This is important when discussing the mission and the future. I broadly categorize our constituencies into three groups: citizens, students and scholars.

Let's begin with the scholars. How are they being served? How are they using the Libraries? What are their needs?

I believe for the most part, scholars are served well. Providing them access to the documents, media and collections is critical. If there is a criticism - it would be that they want more material, sooner. I would concur. At the Reagan Library our archives team has improved efficiencies, set new standards and even though we are processing more than 1.5 million documents a year, with shorter queue times, the research community clamors for more, more, and more. However, we seek to address the increasing demands as much as possible with the available resources from our funding sources.

In our numbers driven society it is fair to ask how many scholars use presidential materials. While it is a good question, it shouldn't be asked alone. You must also judge the impact of the use of our materials - not just by how many researchers are visiting. This is what I refer to as the downstream affect. A single scholar might publish multiple articles, books or blog entries that will reach hundreds, thousands perhaps millions of people. That same scholar

may appear on radio broadcasts or television shows reaching even more people. That is impactful. Perhaps in the future we should take a look at collecting the downstream data as a way to provide you with another yardstick to measure our impact.

I doubt that President Roosevelt had blogs or such advanced technologies in mind when he established his Library. One could argue with today's technology everything should just be done via the internet. Not so fast. While Tom proudly reported the Kennedy Library just made available vast quantities of their material on the web, there are the practical concerns of funding, staffing and processing time. Access through technology is one critical area that needs serious attention and will require significant investment.

If access is available via the net, then why not just have the material all in one central place? Again, that is a fair question. However, I believe Tom presented a very strong case why Presidential Libraries should continue to grace different locations across the country. It is the right thing to do and I would vigorously argue against any centralized reorganization.

There is one other point I would like to make regarding accessing the material via technology. While it is critical to move ultimately towards that goal, we cannot lose sight of working with the real materials. Perhaps it is old school thinking, but when you touch history it is a very different approach. The real documents can inspire, motivate and cause you to think differently. When you hold President Reagan's personal diary and read "getting shot hurts" or leaf through the Day in Infamy speech or any handwritten note from a President I would argue that it puts the researcher, scholar or student in a different frame of mind that can lead to new thinking. In short, history inspires! Therefore I would argue that it is not always about technology.

This brings us to my fundamental point about access - it is more than just about the material. This will come into focus when talking about the next two constituencies.

The second important user group is school children. Presidential Libraries offer unique and exciting educational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of students across the country. So is access important to them?

With all due respect to the archives, that type of access is not necessarily a priority for my daughter Abby's sixth grade class. But access to the museum, the curriculum and the amazing educational programs like the Air Force One Discovery Center at the Reagan Library certainly is. Abby's class and thousands like hers across the country want and deserve access to these opportunities.

So should school children and education be part of our mission? I contend that if you ask any living President, their families or just about any educator you would get a resounding yes. Students represent the future and learning about our history, the presidency and civic engagement is critical for an informed citizenry. Presidential Libraries offer an important way to access learning. At the Reagan Library our approach to this learning is referred to as the Three E Philosophy: engage, excite and you will educate. That is what Presidential Libraries do.

Our last key constituency is our citizens. They represent the millions of guests who visit Presidential Libraries. Any discussion about our mission and the future must include them, their wants and expectations. Their involvement is at the heart of the Presidential Library system and broadens the definition of access even more. They tour our museums, they attend our remarkable programs, they enhance the debate, and they too learn – all of which are different ways to access Presidential Libraries.

So what is our mission and what should the future bring?

In summary, Presidential Libraries are repositories of historical materials, tourist destinations, museums, gathering places for civic literacy and debate, educational institutions, and places where communities gather to learn and even have fun. Our mission should reflect this diversity, particularly as we look at the different locations across the country. We should continue to embrace President Roosevelt's vision and broaden it to include a multifaceted

definition of access for our many constituencies. Furthermore, we need to be proactive with the use of technologies as the future is now.

Presidential Libraries are unique institutions that cause us to think, offer a look at and perhaps question our government, help educate and provide many exciting opportunities for millions of people. Whether you are Republican, Democrat, or Independent I believe strongly that Presidential Libraries are vital institutions and inspire countless people across the county and even around the world.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.