

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

Statement by Sara J. Bloomfield
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Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to report to you today on the accomplishments of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and to ask for your support as we continue our critical mission into the 21st century. I would like to thank the Chairman for calling this hearing, and I would also like to thank Congressman Cannon, a member of the Museum's Council, for sponsoring H.R. 4115, the Administration's reauthorization legislation, and whose efforts on the Museum's behalf have been invaluable.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has just marked its seventh anniversary, but in these few short years the exceptional resonance of the Museum has enabled it to play a much larger role in American life than its founders could have imagined. In addition to approximately two million visitors each year, the Museum has hosted 2,000 foreign officials from 130 countries as well as 61 heads of state. But its most important visitors remain the hundreds of thousands of school children from all across the nation who come each year with their parents, teachers, and community organizations.

Even though the Museum opened to extraordinary popularity and overwhelming public demand, with each year the institution's potential is more fully realized as its service to the nation is continually expanded in increasingly more meaningful ways. In its relatively brief existence, the Museum has made substantial progress towards realizing its guiding principle that remembering and understanding the Holocaust can make valuable contributions to our pluralistic democracy. And, by extending our educational impact beyond Washington to reach the millions of Americans who may never visit their national capital, the Museum has begun to fulfill its truly nationwide mission as envisioned in its original Congressional mandate.

The Museum's public-private partnership, first articulated in the enabling legislation, is central to the institution's success. Built with private funds on federal land, the Museum operates with a combination of federal appropriations and substantial private support. It is through the effectiveness of this partnership that the Museum has been able to respond to the enormous demand for its programs and services. To date, the Museum has welcomed nearly 14 million visitors and annually serves several hundred thousand through traveling exhibitions and over a million "visitors" to its website.

This popularity and success, while heartening, must not be cause for complacency. We know from research that there is much work to be done. A major national study commissioned by the Museum indicates that 80% of Americans believe the Holocaust is extremely or very important in learning the lessons of history. Two out of three Americans say they want to learn more about the Holocaust, and the percentage is even higher for minorities. And, 69% of Americans state that they want to visit the Museum. This data

corresponds to the Museum's experience that every pilot project tends to generate more demand that can be accommodated.

The institution's service and success, now and in the future, extend well beyond Washington. The Museum is at the center of a national program of remembrance and education. In addition to the national, annual Days of Remembrance commemoration held in the Capitol Rotunda, every year all 50 states, hundreds of communities and civic and religious organizations sponsor their own ceremonies for the victims of the Holocaust. The Museum's fellowship opportunities, teacher training, curricular resources, publications, website, regional programming, and other outreach activities reduce the barriers imposed by geographical distance and bring the latest findings in scholarship and pedagogy to all localities. And, its new traveling exhibitions program - made possible through private funding - has already taken exhibitions to 25 cities in 15 states. These travelling shows include exhibitions on the 1936 Berlin Olympics; the story of Varian Fry, an American who rescued thousands trapped in Vichy France; and the children of the Holocaust.

Exhibitions and related programs are the most visible means by which the general public has access to the Museum. Three traveling exhibitions visited 10 states in 1999, while three other special exhibitions were on view at the Museum, both accompanied by related educational activities. The Museum's long-range exhibition plan is designed to ensure that its programming is thoughtful, balanced, and can best serve the needs of the diverse American public. It also allows the Museum to take maximum advantage of its expertise, resources and opportunities.

The collections are the foundation for all of the Museum's activities. They serve as the basis for exhibitions, educational programming, and scholarly research. The Museum now houses the world's most comprehensive collection of Holocaust documentation and is used as a resource by scholars from all over the world. The holdings include 12 million pages of archival documents, 65,000 photographic images, 420 hours of historical film footage, 35,000 artifacts, and more than 6,200 oral histories. The Museum's library has over 30,000 volumes in 18 different languages. Reference services for the library, archives and photo archives exceed 17,000 requests annually.

Additions to the Museum's collections are prioritized according to gaps in the holdings, exhibition plans, and the current window of opportunity while the eyewitnesses are still alive and political situations in various countries afford access to important collections. Because of the international nature of this event, documentation of the Holocaust is scattered throughout the world and is often in poor condition. The Museum's attempt to acquire this material now is important not only to amass this documentation in one central location but also to insure its long-term preservation and accessibility.

National educational outreach, including teacher training and programs for secondary schools, are core activities of the Museum. The Museum provides resource materials, technical assistance, and formal training to 25,000 educators annually. For example, the Arthur and Rochelle Belfer National Conference annually brings together 400 teachers with little or no experience teaching the Holocaust. At the other end of the spectrum, the Mandel Fellowship Program is designed for very experienced educators. Its purpose is to provide advanced training to a group of highly skilled teachers who can serve as leaders of Holocaust education in their own communities. In this way, the Museum can leverage its impact and maximize the value of its limited resources.

The Museum's educational efforts are not limited to teachers and students in traditional classroom settings. Recently, the Museum embarked on a series of programs for various professionals. Special programs at the Museum include those for various police departments in the Washington metropolitan area, the U.S. Naval

Academy, the U.S. Military Academy, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Foreign Service. The leaders of these organizations recognize that an understanding of Holocaust history provides an invaluable perspective on many issues and situations central to their work. Interest in these programs is growing, and the Museum is working hard to meet the demand.

Through programs such as "Bringing the Lessons Home" the Museum reaches out to underserved audiences. In 1994, the Museum launched "Bringing the Lessons Home," originally funded with a five-year grant from the Fannie Mae Foundation, to work on an in-depth basis with teachers and students in Washington area public schools.

Five years later, the program has dramatically exceeded its own goals and expectations. Well over 13,000 students and 700 teachers have participated to date. Nearly 200 students pursued further study through an optional 11-week after-school course at the Museum that culminated in the students conducting guided tours of the Permanent Exhibition for family members, friends, and community leaders. Many participants have continued and expanded their relationship with the Museum, becoming Museum interns and leading other students and peers through the exhibitions.

The Museum also has a strong commitment to families, recognizing the challenges and sensitivity of introducing this subject to younger audiences. A special exhibition, Remember the Children: Daniel's Story, is an environmental, hands-on, interactive presentation geared specifically to children ages 8 and up. Developed with the assistance of child specialists and tested for several years before the Museum opened, a permanent version of this exhibition is on view on the Museum's first floor. Special programming, teacher training, and resource materials were developed to enhance the exhibit's educational potential. As a result of its popularity not only with younger visitors but adults as well, a travelling version was developed and has been touring the country for the past few years.

Students are active users on the Museum's website, which includes special exhibits and curricular resources designed for the secondary school level. But they represent only a portion of the more than 50,000 weekly "visitors" to the website, which is quickly becoming the busiest "entrance" to the Museum. This number has been steadily increasing and we expect the trend to continue since, according to our quarterly visitor surveys, over 90% of Museum visitors use the internet. We have responded to this demand by augmenting the educational programming available on the website and providing access to the Museum's rich resources. The public can now "visit" various special web exhibitions; download Museum publications and educational resources; search the Museum's archival, photographic, and library holdings; and will soon have access to the multi-media Learning Center. The development of the Museum's NameSearch system has linked the Survivors Registry to other Museum resources and ultimately to resources in other institutions. Eventually this novel system will fundamentally change the potential for researching the fate of individuals. The Museum has also developed an innovative geographical information system that permits integrated access to the Museum's content through the search of geographic terms.

While most of the Museum's educational programming is targeted to students, teachers, and families, the Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies is critical since scholarship provides the basis for our understanding of this relatively recent history. The Center seeks to stimulate scholarship, promote the growth of Holocaust studies at American universities, and ensure the training of future generations of scholars. In 2000-2001, the Center will host 22 visiting fellows, mostly funded through private grants. Three seminars for faculty teaching college-level Holocaust courses will serve 56 faculty members from 55 institutions in 28 states. The Center also sponsors publications and a vigorous program of lectures, symposia and conferences. The Center's historian's office responds to approximately 700 research requests annually,

many from other governmental entities, such as Congress and Federal agencies.

Recently, at the request of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, the Museum underwent an independent study performed by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). In fact, language in the FY2000 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill conference report strongly urges the inclusion of NAPA legislative recommendations in the reauthorization request.

Released in the summer of 1999, the NAPA study includes recommendations that address three major areas: statutory authority, governance, and management. The NAPA Study came at an opportune time since the Museum was itself in the midst of self-study regarding these same issues. Most of the report's recommendations have or will be adopted over the course of the next year. For example, the Council recently adopted a new governance plan, and the new director has begun to strengthen accountability, management practices, administrative systems, and long-range planning.

Our reauthorization request includes legislative changes that reflect the Council's own assessment of its needs and incorporates several recommendations from NAPA as well. The reauthorization request makes five changes to 36 USC Chapter 23.

First, in accordance with NAPA's recommendation to "establish the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as the institution with primary responsibility" for the mandates of the original legislation, Section 2301 has been so modified. The original language established the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Council with the primary responsibility for fulfilling the Congressional mandates. This was necessary during the period before the Museum existed when the Council's mandate was to raise funds for and build the Museum. Now that the Museum has been built, operational responsibilities are more appropriately a staff function. This change is consistent with the other Federal cultural institutions.

Second, in accordance with NAPA's recommendation to "establish the Council as a board of directors of the Museum, with the relationship to the Museum and governance functions normally associated with a board specified," Section 2302 has been so modified. This makes the Council a board of directors with institutional oversight at a governance level, consistent with the other Federal cultural institutions.

Third, in accordance with NAPA's recommendation to "make the director the chief executive officer of the Museum," Section 2305 has been so modified. This is consistent with the definition of the board being responsible for governance of the institution while the director is responsible for operations and management.

Fourth, the Museum operates as a public-private partnership, with the Federal government having responsibility for operations of the Museum facilities and basic programs, and the private sector support responsible for programmatic growth and national outreach. Consistent with the nature of that partnership and the Museum's desire to be able to respond to more of the demands for its services within current resources, the reauthorization request contains the authority to retain and expend revenue generated from activities such as fees to borrow traveling exhibitions and reproduce historic photographs. These fees will enable the Museum to provide these services without utilizing scarce resources from either the Federal or privately-funded budget and is consistent with the similar authority granted to the Smithsonian Institution and National Archives. This change is requested in Section 2307, the section which already permits the Museum to raise private funds for the purposes mandated by Congress.

Fifth, the final change requested is that for permanent authorization for appropriations, as indicated in

Section 2310. The presence of permanent authorization for appropriations would signify that the Museum is now an integral part of the capital city. Consistent with the changes enumerated above, this change also establishes parity of status with the other cultural establishments on the Mall, the Smithsonian Institution and the National Gallery of Art, and affirms that the institution is the "permanent living memorial museum," as was stated in the enabling legislation. To this nation's rapidly declining population of Holocaust survivors and American soldiers who liberated the camps and to their families, permanent authorization conveys that the memorial here today will be here forever. They deserve no less. As do the more than half a million school children who visit the Museum each year.

Further, permanent authorization for appropriations will facilitate fundraising and this in turn will enhance the institution's ability to function as a public-private partnership. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, since its establishment, has raised over \$320 million: for donors it has always been important that they are giving to this nation's permanent memorial to the victims of the Holocaust and sharing this responsibility with the federal government.

Along with the other enumerated improvements to the Museum's authorization, fundamental to the long-term vitality of the institution is its status as a public-private partnership. Since the Museum opened seven years ago, the private component of the annual operating budget has grown from \$11 million in FY 1994 to \$21 million in FY 2000, an increase of 91%. Private donations now provide 40% of the annual budget. Federal appropriations cover the costs of the operating the facility and core programs; private support enables the Museum to sponsor educational outreach, traveling exhibitions nationwide and scholarly activities. In addition, the Museum raises private, restricted funds to support specific programs. For example, during FY 2000, the Museum will spend - over and above the base budget - more than \$2 million in restricted funds, dedicated to particular programs in education, exhibitions, and scholarship, bringing the total private annual spending to over \$23 million.

Because the programs and services are so dependent on this substantial level of private support, the Museum is concerned about insuring a secure financial future for the institution. Even though the Museum has a large membership - approximately 220,000 -- raising such significant funds every year is a constant challenge and will become increasingly more difficult as the Holocaust recedes in time. Therefore, to protect the private support for the basic programs and to enable future growth, the Museum is in the process of establishing an endowment campaign. The Museum's current endowment is approximately \$80 million. While the campaign itself is still being developed, we anticipate an initial goal of at least \$250 million. This reauthorization is critical to the Museum's fundraising efforts. As individual Americans contemplate their role in this public-private partnership, the clear and unequivocal statement of permanent authorization provides that critical margin of difference for many donors who are confronted with numerous opportunities for underwriting good works.

In conclusion, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is well placed to carry out its mission of education and remembrance in this new century. As the last century drew to a close, ethnic cleansing was taking place in Europe and in the 55 years since the Holocaust, that mid-century vow of "Never Again" has been repeatedly forgotten. Holocaust education is as important as ever as each generation has to learn anew the lessons of this immense tragedy for humanity. Understanding the past for the sake of a better future is the fundamental principle of the Museum's mission, and the growing interest in Holocaust education reflects the importance and resonance of that mission for people from every walk of life. It is both a privilege and challenge to fulfill this mission in ways that are meaningful for all Americans, and our continued success will always depend on the combined efforts of the public-private partnership. We are grateful for the strong support the Museum has received from every Administration and every Congress since the original

legislation passed in 1980. We look forward to continued support and thank you for this opportunity to share the accomplishments of this unique federal institution. I have submitted a copy of the Museum's latest statistics to be included with this statement.

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