

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

December 29, 2022

Ms. Debra Steidel Wall
Acting Archivist of the United States
National Archives and Records Administration
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20408

Dear Ms. Steidel Wall:

In response to concerns raised by the Committee, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) revised their agreement with the George W. Bush Foundation to privatize portions of the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum.¹ The revised agreement takes steps to include NARA and historians in decisions on certain exhibits and ensure presidential materials and historic artifacts are presented in a fair and balanced manner. The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, as well as the digital archive for the Barack Obama Presidential Library, present new models for the future and sustainability of the presidential library system.²

In 2009, NARA released a Report which examined the then-current model for the presidential library system and its funding sources.³ The report proposed five alternative models and a summary of the cost analysis that might reduce the financial burden to the federal government and improve preservation and public access to presidential records.

We request that NARA conduct an updated study of alternative models for presidential libraries and a cost analysis, including answering the following questions:

¹ Letter from Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, to Deborah Steidel Wall, Acting Archivist of the United States, National Archives and Records Administration (Sept. 13, 2022) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2022-07-01.%20FINAL%20CBM%20GEC%20to%20Steidel%20Wall-NARA%20re%20Bush%20Presidential%20Library.pdf>); National Archives and Records Administration, *Memorandum of Understanding Between the George W. Bush Foundation and the National Archives and Records Administration and the National Archives Trust Fund Board Regarding the Operation of the Museum Exhibit Galleries and Major Renovations to the Permanent Exhibit* (Oct. 31, 2022).

² See e.g., Letter from the Barack Obama Foundation to the National Archives and Records Administration (Sept. 11, 2018) (online at www.archives.gov/files/foia/letter-of-intent-re-obama-digitization-project.signed.2.pdf).

³ National Archives and Records Administration, *Report on Alternative Models for Presidential Libraries Issued in Response to the Requirements of PL 110-404* (Sept. 25, 2009) (online at www.archives.gov/files/presidential-libraries/reports/report-for-congress.pdf).

1. How can reductions in the financial burden on the federal government through privatization be balanced with historical objectivity in the presentation of presidential materials?
2. Since 2009, how has the preservation of presidential records and materials changed, such as the increase of electronic records and corresponding need for digital storage? How will NARA address the changes?
3. How does NARA plan to improve access to presidential records for the public, particularly through digitization and facilitating online educational programming?
4. How can NARA reduce delays in Freedom of Information Act requests for presidential records and better facilitate declassification reviews to make documents more readily available to researchers?

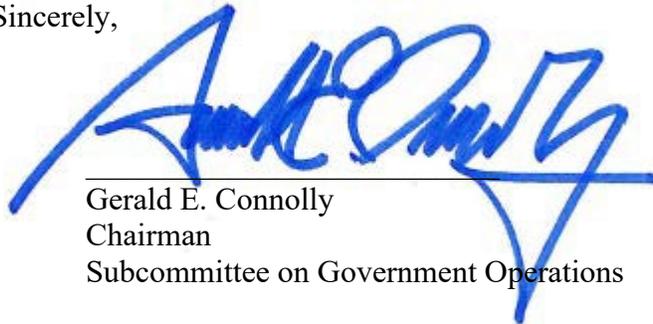
The Oversight Committee has jurisdiction over presidential libraries and presidential records and has an established record of examining the mission and structure of presidential libraries.⁴ In 2011, under Chairman Darrell Issa, the Committee held a joint hearing with the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure that explored the future of presidential libraries, including the need for transparency and historical objectivity.⁵

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Gerald E. Connolly
Chairman
Subcommittee on Government Operations

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Jody Hice, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations

⁴ House rule X, clause 1.

⁵ Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, *Hearing on America's Presidential Libraries: Their Mission and Their Future*, 112th Cong. (Feb. 28, 2011) (online at www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg65446/html/CHRG-112hhrg65446.htm).