

May 6, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Mr. President:

We write as a diverse community of librarians, archivists, historians, access specialists, non-governmental organizations, civil society, records officers, information managers, members of the public, and technologists concerned about management of and access to federal information and records. We applaud the achievements of the National Archives and Records Administration and the precedents set under the leadership of David Ferriero.<sup>1</sup> Transparency and accountability of government requires continued commitment to protect the integrity of the public record. Therefore we call on you to appoint a qualified Archivist of the United States who will continue to safeguard our national knowledge assets and ensure the implementation and enforcement of effective, standards-driven, and sustainable records and information management policies throughout all branches and levels of government.

The appointment of the Archivist provides an opportunity for the Administration to build on a dynamic relationship between civil society and the public servants who steward public records to ensure a well-informed public. Toward that end, we strongly support the 2008 statement of the Society of American Archivists and other key archival organizations that is included at the end of this letter.

As the National Archives moves to “go digital;” to support public access to records through traditional archival research, support for FOIA, and declassification; to oversee records management processes and proper records retention schedules; and to manage its resources, we commit to continuing our deep partnership with the Archives in the advancement of these efforts.

It is our fervent hope the next Archivist is committed to public collaboration and engagement, both personally and on an agency-wide basis. We have valued the hard work and close engagement of Archivist Ferriero and his team and we look to build upon that solid foundation.

Additionally the next Archivist of the United States should:

- Enunciate clear, consistent, and practical electronic record management policies that balance innovation with an appreciation for cost effective enterprise-wide standards for access and preservation of records starting from the point of information creation through

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<sup>1</sup> See Letter thanking Architect of the United States David Ferriero (April 29, 2022), [https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/letters/2022-04-29\\_Letter\\_Thanking\\_AOTUS.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/letters/2022-04-29_Letter_Thanking_AOTUS.pdf)

its final disposition;

- Possess not only the management skills to lead NARA, but also to foster successful partnerships within the federal government and with state / local records, history and access professionals who manage and use collections to enhance the public's understanding of the nation's documentary history;
- Recognize that the accuracy, timeliness, security, completeness, and "findability" of federal records is assured only by the diligent maintenance of current record schedules, taxonomies, indices, controlled vocabularies, finding aids, and enforced use of metadata schema, and that ephemeral dissemination devices (such as web pages) are no substitute for reliable and easy to use cross-organizational electronic record and data repositories designed for both contemporary and future researchers;
- Commit to a campaign to expand funding for those organizations that share NARA's custodial responsibility for records including the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Federal Depository Libraries, and a wide variety of consortia of academic institutions and special collections;
- Continue the commitment within NARA to work directly with civil society on information security issues, including countering attempts by other agencies or former officials to limit public access to records not properly classified, marked improperly, or that a President did not choose to keep secret;
- Ensure the adoption of the Public Interest Declassification Board's recommendation to discontinue "pass/fail" review, which means a single word in a historical record can doom the entire document to "fail" to qualify for declassification;
- Strengthen the Records Appraisal and Agency Assistance branch to ensure thorough and comprehensive oversight of records retention schedules and important records management policies ; and
- Continue stewardship of OGIS & the FOIA Advisory Committee, including by enhancing the capacities of these entities, and approving and implementing their recommendations to Congress.

We also support the view of the outgoing Archivist's urging that leadership of NARA reflect the full diversity of the nation, and the commensurate commitment to access and equity embedded in NARA's Strategic Plan, 2022-2026.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/about/plans-reports/strategic-plan/strategic-plan-2022-2026>

The historical record not only tells the story of our nation, it collectively testifies to the strength, diversity, values, and unique accomplishments of a people who have struggled to provide to upcoming generations lessons learned and an appreciation for the free exchange of ideas. An Archivist of the United States who can earn the respect of tomorrow by professionally performing their statutory duty today may well prove to be the most enduring part of your legacy because the success of the Archivist, especially during this time of transformation in communications, will determine whether there is a history to share with future generations.

Thank you for your attention to the important matter of the appointment of the next Archivist of the United States. We stand ready to provide our counsel and advice both in the selection of the next individual and also to provide them with civil society partners to work on the important matters before the Archives. To discuss this matter further, please contact Patrice McDermott, Government Information Watch, at [pmcdermott@govinfowatch.net](mailto:pmcdermott@govinfowatch.net).

Sincerely yours,

American Oversight  
Antimony Media  
Association of Research Libraries  
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)  
Demand Progress Education Fund  
Dominican Sisters of Peace  
East Carolina University  
Academic Library Services, East Carolina University  
Free Government Information (FGI)  
Government Information Watch  
Information Trust  
In the Public Interest  
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health  
National Coalition for History  
National Security Archive  
Open The Government  
Regional Archival Associations Consortium  
Society of Georgia Archivists  
The Carter Center  
The Digital Democracy Project  
The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project  
UC San Diego Library

Anne L. Weismann  
Paul Lagasse  
Sarah H Jackson  
Rhonda Super  
Scott G. Birgh, retired law library director

Kris M. Kasianovitz  
Ron Nakao  
Beverly J. Geckle  
Gretchen A.B. Judge  
Kelly L. Smith

Lisa Vallen  
Amy McDonald  
Alston Cobourn, MLS, CA  
Cynthia Wolff  
Stephanie Bennett  
Michelle Ganz  
Martha G. Elmore

Janice S. Lewis  
Erin Gallagher  
Dick Lankford  
Andrea Belair  
Dana Cushing, Research Historian  
Charlie Amiot

cc: Senator Gary C. Peters, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs  
Senator Rob Portman, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
Debra Steidel Wall, Acting Archivist of the United States  
Phillip C. Roege, Director, White House Office of Records Management

Attachment

**Joint Statement on "Qualities of a Successful Candidate for Archivist of the United States" (December 9, 2008), from the Society of American Archivists, the Council of State Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, the Academy of Certified Archivists, ARMA International, the National Coalition for History and others**

The following personal and professional qualities are important in order for a nominee to be successful in this essential position of public trust:

***Vision***

- Ability to present a compelling vision for the mission and work of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and, more broadly, for the archives and records management professions in the United States.
- Ability to envision NARA's stewardship role in preserving America's historical and cultural heritage.
- Ability to envision a leading role for NARA in ensuring that our government's record-keeping processes provide for accountability, transparency, and openness.

***Values***

- Commitment to the principle of public ownership of government records.
- Commitment to open and equal access to government records by all citizens, as defined by law and custom.
- Commitment to expediting the declassification of historical records and documents.
- Commitment to protecting the public's right to privacy, as defined by law and custom.
- Commitment to protecting NARA's professional integrity and political non-partisanship.
- Commitment to furthering NARA's leadership in the advancement of electronic records management.
- Commitment to the ongoing mission of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.
- Commitment to working creatively with other federal offices, with state and local governments, and with other archival programs, including those in foreign countries, to identify and address shared responsibilities and concerns.
- Commitment to ensuring diversity among the individuals who serve in NARA and the archives and records management professions, as well as in the documentation of America's multi-cultural society.

## *Expertise*

- Experience and excellence in leadership, program advocacy, and management of a complex organization.
- Ability to listen, communicate effectively, and partner with a wide range of stakeholders, including archivists, historians, journalists, political scientists, and the general public.
- Understanding of critical issues confronting government records and the archives profession generally, particularly the challenges of new information technologies, and the competing demands of access to government records, privacy, and national security.
- Ability to provide leadership and advocacy on behalf of NARA's roles to the public, government officials, and NARA staff, and on behalf of the archives, records management, and historical communities.