

CRISIS FOR NATIONAL AIR & SPACE MUSEUM

The Board of Directors of the American Aviation Historical Society recently received the text of remarks made by Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) on the 19th of May before the Senate of the United States. An editorial was prepared and forwarded to the Senator for comment. We received the following letter in reply:

"Gentlemen,

"The National Air and Space Museum offers Americans an incomparable inspirational center where the story of their heritage and future in flight and space can be told. It is high time that the shocking lack of attention to the Museum's needs was laid before the Smithsonian's doorstep, and I call upon all interested citizens to write their Senators and Congressmen, especially the six who are Smithsonian Regents, for immediate help. Congressman Thompson, who may schedule a hearing as early as July, is Chairman of the House Subcommittee that has original jurisdiction over Smithsonian authorization bills, and your suggestion is a good one that readers communicate with him as well.

Barry Goldwater"

For a quarter of a century the National Air Museum has been the unwanted stepchild of the Smithsonian Institution. The aviation-minded people of this country, and an increasingly large segment of the American public, are becoming aware of the critical conditions with regard to the administration of this vital part of our American heritage. It should now be recognized that the association of the National Air & Space Museum with the Smithsonian should be critically and carefully examined.

The Air Museum is directly responsible for more than 20 percent of the admissions to the Smithsonian complex; nearly one-third of the total attendance at the Smithsonian views the exhibits in the Air and Space Museum. It is becoming increasingly clear that neither The Establishment of the Smithsonian (consisting of the President of the United States, the Vice President, Chief Justice and most of the Cabinet), nor the Board of Regents have time to devote to the problem, much less rescue it from a hierarchy intent only upon art and animals.

All Members of this Society should be interested in what happens to the National Air & Space Museum, not only as taxpayers, but also for its expression before all of the citizens of the world of the accomplishments of mankind through aviation. No other industry has ever before had such an extreme impact upon the life of the world.

Portions of the remarks of Senator Barry Goldwater, printed in the *Congressional Record* of May 19, 1970, are repeated in the following paragraphs, pointing up the appalling lack of regard for the needs of the Air Museum.

Sen. Goldwater makes use of the speech given by Mr. S. Paul Johnston last year in citing the drift into the present crisis. (Mr. Johnston's speech before the Washington Aero Club on 22 April 1969 was distributed with the *JOURNAL* of AAHS, Summer 1969.) Within this last year the situation has grown increasingly worse, as witness the fact that no new Director of the Air Museum has been named, and this in spite of the fact that Mr. Johnston's resignation was announced some thirteen months prior to its effective date last year.

"Mr. President (of the Senate), it has been reported that the Smithsonian Board of Regents will be holding a semi-annual policy meeting tomorrow . . . Since these sessions are so important in setting the goals and boundaries for the Institution's activities, I would hope that the Regents will be able to address a part of their attention to a long delayed but urgently needed Smithsonian project.

"Mr. President, I am referring to the construction of a permanent building for the National Air & Space Museum, which without question is, or should be one of the major components of the world-famous complex of museums and galleries. The concept for this building can truly be said to date back nearly 25 years, to August of 1946, when Congress first established the National Air Museum as a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution. As a part of the 1946 law, Congress expressly included provisions for selecting a site for an air museum building to be located here in the Nation's Capitol. Subsequently, in 1958, Congress authorized a Mall site for the Museum and allowed funds to be spent on detailed plans for the proposed building. . .

"So the concept for the projected building has a history that started in 1944. The architectural work is finished and the construction plans are in hand. The site has been designated by Congress and approved by the necessary planning and art commissions. And Congress has approved the actual construction of the Building.

"Yet, as of today not one dollar has been funded for the construction of the museum. The proposed building is at an absolute standstill. In fact, according to S. Paul Johnston, former Director of the Air & Space Museum, the project 'may never get off the ground.'

(Citing Mr. Johnston's speech wherein he stated that he had felt an aura of excitement upon looking over the prospect of the new Museum facility when he took office as Director):

"Now, five years later, I make my valedictory address in an atmosphere of frustration and personal disappointment. The bright outlook of 1965 has receded farther upstream each year. At the moment the prospects for a new facility are at least as far in the future as they were then."

"For now I want to focus on what Mr. Johnston calls the real problem confronting the Museum. In his words, these real problems relate not to things, but to people - i.e., attitudes with respect to the Air & Space Museum, both in government - and, more specifically, in the Smithsonian itself.

"Without commenting upon the personality angle here, I would like to express my amazement at the fact that the aeronautical and astronomical sciences were in fact placed under the same section of the Smithsonian that is devoted to the humanities and arts. Aeronautics and space exploration derives from, and indeed incorporates, many of the sciences, including mathematics, physics, fuels chemistry, metallurgy, physiology, biology, astronomy, astrophysics, geology and geophysics. How in creation flight ever got mixed up with the 'arts' at the Institution is beyond me. This facet alone would raise doubts in my mind about the degree of interest and attention which the Smithsonian was devoting to its flight museum. I am happy to report that, after great pressures were exerted, the Air & Space Museum was shifted last fall to the section for Science where it undoubtedly belongs."

Sen. Goldwater requested that the text of Mr. Johnston's speech be incorporated in the Congressional Record for that day and then went on to explore the difference between the Smithsonian's words and its actions. Quoting from the Institution's request to Congress for Fiscal 1970 funding:

"The National Air & Space Museum is the nation's center for exhibition, education, and research in the history and principles of air and space flight. It maintains the world's greatest collection of objects related to flight and is a unique resource for research in aviation and aerospace history, in flight science and technology, in the impact of man-flight on the cultural life and economy of America, and in the pioneering efforts of early aviators and astronauts. This growing collection now consists of etc. etc. . ."

"In other words the Smithsonian leadership is saying that the Air & Space Museum should be the center in the United States for the exhibition of the historical mainstream of flight. With this bit of sketchy but revealing background we can take a look at the budget and personnel figures and find out whether the museum's share is equal to its needs.

"When Mr. Johnston took over in 1965 there were 34 authorized positions for that museum, the number allowed under the 1966 fiscal year appropriations. Yet today there are not even that many hands on board. The actual number of personnel at the National Air & Space Museum of the United States is 30 people, counting the administrative side, support crew, and secretaries. This number also includes the 14 employees working at the preservation and restoration division at Silver Hill. Several years ago the technical support team had 15 positions; now it is down to 14. The Curator's professional staff has decreased 50% in the Aero Section - from 4 to 2. The Historical Research Center, which supports the Museum in documenting the significance of acquisitions, answers 6,000 public enquiries annually, and runs a reference library. It has a grand total of 3 employees.*

"In terms of the overall Smithsonian picture, the Air & Space Museum has 1.6% of the actual total employment . . . The story is the same if we delve into the budget figures. It is true that there has been an increase in funds appropriated for the Air & Space Museum since the 1966 fiscal year. However, when we examine the money appropriated to the Museum (\$564,000) in light of the total money appropriated for Smithsonian salaries and expenses (\$29,565,000) in the current fiscal year, we come up with almost the same low percentage as resulted in the case of employment. The Air & Space budget is 1.7% and its share of the personnel is 1.6%.

"Some people may want to contrast these figures with the demonstrated capacity of the Museum to draw visitors to the Smithsonian complex. Out of a total of 12,438,909 visitors to the Smithsonian park in calendar year 1969, more than four million went through the air and space exhibits. This is more people than went to see the Lincoln Memorial in 1969, which is the country's most popular historical shrine. It also represents nearly one-third of the overall Smithsonian audience and I think this fact deserves greater attention by those people setting policies for the Museum. . . . If (the millions of taxpayers who come to Washington to see their dollars at work). . . were to be told that the stature of the National Air & Space Museum within the Smithsonian organization is only 1.6 or 1.7% in terms of actual employees and money provided for its operation, I imagine there would be many raised eyebrows and downright astonishment."

Senator Goldwater then went on to cite the documented record of expenditures in various parts of the Smithsonian complex, none of which have been held to the same restrictions as the Air & Space Museum. The Belmont Conference Center, nearer to Baltimore than Washington, was remodeled and is now little used. The Renwick Gallery of Art has received \$2 million for restoration and renovation of the building. New components have been added, several of them remote from Washington, i.e., the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in New York City; the Archives of American Art with branches in Detroit and New York City; the Hirschorn Museum and Sculpture Garden with its already existent cost-overrun of \$1 million and another \$9 million requested for further work.

Nearly \$7 million was appropriated for the restoration of the former Patent Office and for turning it into the center for the National Collection of Fine Arts and the National Portrait Gallery. And most of \$3 million for refurbishing of the original Smithsonian Institution building as it was in 1855. Then there are further requests for appropriations for construction of two Bicentennial Pavilions - \$6 million, and for reservation of a site for the creation of a National Museum of Man. This list goes on and on.

We do not question the need for continued work in the field of the humanities, art and anthropology. We do raise serious doubts as to why the scale is so out of balance. The Smithsonian administration is giving lip service to the Air Museum in order to get money, is claiming great importance for its place in the scheme of things, but is downgrading it to next to zero, to about 1.6/2% in fact, in comparison with other facets of greater attraction to the "arts and -ologies" group. We think it important to do something for the National Air & Space Museum - now!

The clue to the dilemma is in the wording of the only legislative holdup in the entire NASM program, the recommendation of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration on H.R. 6125 (in 1966). The language reads as follows: *"The Committee expressly recommends . . . that appropriations should not be requested pursuant to H.R. 6125 unless and until there is a substantial reduction in our military expenditures in Vietnam."* This roadblock has stood against the building of the National Air & Space Museum, but its philosophy has not been applied to expenditures in other areas of the Smithsonian complex. We think it is time to both lift this restriction and provide maintenance and personnel funding within the Air Museum's departments commensurate with its drawing power as one of the nation's foremost exhibits.

Make your opinions felt. Call attention to the derelict condition of your Air and Space Museum; insist that the Smithsonian Establishment, the Regents, the Secretary, "get with it."

Write especially to the Chairman and the members of the Subcommittee on Library & Memorials of the Committee on House Administration. These are: (The Honorable)

Frank Thompson (D), New Jersey (Chairman)
Kenneth J. Gray, (D), Illinois
John Brademas (D), Indiana
Jonathan Bingham (D), New York
Fred Schwengel (R), Iowa
James Harvey (R), Michigan

Write to your own Representatives and Senators, and as Sen. Goldwater suggests, to the Congressional representatives on the Smithsonian Board of Regents. These are: Senators Clinton P. Anderson, J. William Fulbright, Hugh Scott, and Representatives Frank T. Bow, George H. Mahon, and Michael J. Kirwan.

The Directors

*The two are Louis S. Casey (aircraft) and Robert Meyer (engines).