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# United States Senate

CHARLES E. GRASSLEY  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE EMERITUS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1501

September 21, 2021

## VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Mr. David Ferriero  
Archivist of the United States  
700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC, 20408

Dear Mr. Ferriero,

As the man charged with safeguarding many of our nation's most precious documents, I'm sure you are aware of the great significance of our founding texts. They birthed a new nation founded on certain timeless principles, namely that we are all created equal, are all endowed by our creator with rights, and that governments are established to protect those rights. Our nation is unique in human history in that it was founded not on the basis of a common ethnic identity or loyalty to a monarch, but on those enduring principles. Shared belief in these principles is what binds us together as Americans. Anyone from any background, whether born in the United States or naturalized, can look to our Founding Principles and claim with pride a full, equal share in our national inheritance as Americans.

The Declaration of Independence articulated our founding principles, and they were embodied in the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. Although they did not accomplish it immediately, the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights laid down the principles that lead to the abolition of slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and equal rights for women. They are the guarantors of all the rights that we now take for granted as Americans. All Americans can be proud of that. To suggest otherwise is not just divisive, it strikes at the very heart of our common bond as Americans. Now, more than ever, we need to strengthen the common bonds between Americans of all background and political persuasions.

That is why I am very concerned to see that the National Archives website now includes a "Harmful Language" warning above these documents. While I understand that the alert now appears on a wide array of documents on your website, it is incredibly jarring to see it paired with the documents that form the basis of our national ideals that we all share. The mere suggestion that readers of these documents need to be linked to a page warning them that "some of the materials presented here may reflect outdated, biased, offensive, and possibly violent views and opinions" is offensive.

This is only exasperated by recent reports that members of the National Archives' Task Force on Racism recommended deleting the moniker "charters of freedom" from the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Independence. Evidently, they also recommended "reimagining" the rotunda which houses these documents. I certainly hope their proposal does not come to fruition if their reimagined presentation is anything like their first recommendation.

RANKING MEMBER,  
JUDICIARY

AGRICULTURE  
BUDGET  
FINANCE

Co-CHAIRMAN,  
CAUCUS ON  
INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL

Neither I nor most other prominent defenders of our founding documents are arguing that our charters of freedom were absent of any flaws or that they instantly granted the freedom they promised to every American. But, they laid the groundwork for all Americans to claim their God-given rights, and have led to an enormous expansion of freedom throughout American history. Our founding principles and the documents that reflect them must remain a source of shared pride and unity as we continue to strive to achieve the promise of freedom that is our birthright as Americans.

One of the primary purposes for the existence of the National Archives is to preserve the Charters of Freedom as the founding documents of our country. If the National Archives is going to join in the popular fad of chipping away at our country's foundation, it will undermine the unity of the country that rests on that foundation and be a betrayal of its own mission. In a country that has already become too polarized, I urge you to push back on any effort to alienate Americans from the heritage that binds us all together. As a result, I ask that you respond to the below questions by October 22, 2021 and please number your responses.

1. What was the rational for making this decision?
  - a. Who was involved in the decision to put this warning on the website?
2. Was it considered that putting a “Harmful Language” warning on American’s founding documents would be seen and demeaning or undermining them?
3. Is it true that members of the National Archives’ Task Force on Racism recommended ending the use of “charters of freedom” to describe the Founding Documents?
  - a. Please list any recommendations that have been made by members of the Task Force on Racism. Please list any decisions to implement or reject each of these recommendations.
4. In 2009, shortly after you became the National Archivist, your strategic plan said that “we see the soul of America in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.” Do you still believe this is the case? Do you agree with reported recommendations that the rotunda be “reimagined” to counteract racism?

Should you have any questions please reach out to Reid Willis at (202) 224-3744. Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this important matter.

Sincerely,

s/ Digital Sig.

Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator

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JUDICIARY

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