

STATEMENT
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To the
Subcommittee on Government Efficiency, Financial Management and
Intergovernmental Relations
Of the
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives
Congress of the United States

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Mr. Chairman. Thank you for inviting me to testify before the subcommittee today. My name is Greg Bradsher. For the past six and half years I have been the Federal Government's expert on records relating to Holocaust-Era Assets. In that capacity I have worked closely with Federal agencies, Congress, foreign governments and commissions, domestic and foreign companies and financial entities, State governments, non-governmental organizations, and foreign and domestic researchers. Since 1996 I have been a member of the US delegation to two international conferences on Holocaust-Era Assets, served as the director of the National Archives Symposium on Records and Research Relating to Holocaust-Era Assets, served as my agency's representative to the Interagency Working Group on Nazi Assets, assisted the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust-Era Assets in the United States, and served on the staff of the Nazi War Criminal Records Interagency Working Group. I have authored numerous articles and given numerous presentations on Holocaust-Era Assets subjects and compiled a 1,100 page finding aid to relevant records in the National Archives.

During the past six years and half years there has been a significantly increased worldwide interest in the assets that were looted and lost, recovered and restituted during and after World War II. This renewed interest, to a large extent, began in the spring of 1996 when a researcher showed up at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland interested in Jewish deposits in Swiss banks. She had come to the National Archives on behalf of U.S. Senator Alfonse D'Amato, the head of the Senate Banking Committee, to investigate the supposedly large quantities of dormant Jewish bank accounts in Swiss banks. The senator has been asked by the World Jewish Congress to conduct the research because it believed that there were billions of dollars in accounts and that the Swiss banks were making it difficult, if not impossible, for survivors of the Holocaust and heirs of victims of Nazi persecution to retrieve. Very early in her research the researcher located records that contained detailed information about Jewish deposits in a Swiss bank. Within a month of her discovery D'Amato's committee held hearings on Nazi looted assets and the Swiss bank accounts and shortly thereafter began a major, worldwide research effort into Holocaust-Era assets.

The research effort coupled with diplomatic, political, legal, moral, and economic pressures have forced countries, organizations, and companies to come to grips with their past and to meet their

current responsibilities. Much has been achieved. Settlements regarding bank accounts, slave labor, and other property matters, have been reached with the Swiss, Germans, Austrians, French, and others, in amounts well over \$6 billion. Work is on going with the unpaid insurance issue, the restitution of looted art, and Jewish communal and religious property. And \$50 million dollars' worth of gold that was probably composed of, in part, non-monetary gold, or victim gold, instead of being returned to the central banks of Europe, from which it was stolen, has instead been donated to victims of Nazi persecution. Additionally, in early 1998 Congress adopted the Holocaust Victims Redress Act that authorized \$20 million for restitution payments. Subsequently Congress appropriated \$25 million over three fiscal years for The International Nazi Persecutee Relief Fund. A key element in the restitution process has been the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

The National Archives and Records Administration, the repository of our nation's archival records, became a key element of the Holocaust-Era assets story because of its holdings: well over 15 million pages relating to the looting, locating, recovering, and restituting assets during and after World War II. These records, accumulated by over thirty Federal agencies, were relatively little used before 1996. Researchers, representing countries, organizations (including the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims), companies, and financial entities, beginning in 1996, would find the records invaluable to their research. Law firms would find evidence for lawsuits and the media exploited the records for hundreds of stories. Historians have found the records exceedingly useful in expanding their knowledge of the financial and economic aspects of the Second World War.

Since March 1996 NARA's Archives II Building in College Park, Maryland has been visited and/or contacted by well over one thousand researchers interested in records relating to Holocaust-Era assets. Many of those researchers have spent weeks, months, and even years going through millions of documents. To assist these researchers NARA produced a 1,100-page guide to relevant records; sponsored a one-day meeting on art provenance and claims research, co-sponsored a two-day course on art provenance research, and held a Symposium on Holocaust-Era Assets Records and Research. Over 400 people, including representatives of numerous foreign governments attended this symposium. NARA in late 1998 created a Holocaust-Era Assets website: www.archives.gov/research_room/holocaust_era_assets/) and in early 2001 Dr. Michael Kurtz, the Assistant Archivist for Records Services, Washington, D.C., initiated a multi-year preservation and access program to microfilm and make more widely available Holocaust-Era related records.

NARA has been a major partner in the Federal Government's efforts to provide whatever measure of justice might be possible to Holocaust survivors, their families, and the heirs of those who lost their lives in the Holocaust. NARA staff was intimately involved during the 1996-1998 period in the work of an 11-member Interagency Group on Nazi Assets, headed by Under Secretary of State Stuart E. Eizenstat. This group produced for the President two reports detailing Nazi looting and criticizing the neutral nations for accepting looted assets. During the 1999-2000 period NARA staff worked with the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust-Era Assets in the United States and materially assisted them in producing a report to the President and Congress in January 2001.

I wish to note, Mr. Chairman, the leadership of you and Congresswoman Maloney in the successful passage of the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act of 1998 and its contribution in access to records never before available. Since the enactment of the Act, NARA staff have played the key role in the Federal Government's declassification efforts to make available formerly classified records relating to Nazi war crimes and war criminals, Nazi persecution, and Nazi looting. Additionally, NARA staff have assisted the State Department's Office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues and worked closely with the State Department planning for and participating in international conferences in Switzerland, England, Lithuania, and Washington, D.C.

During the past six years and half years much has been accomplished towards bringing justice and compensation to victims of Nazi persecution, as well as for providing for Holocaust memory, research, and education. Many issues, both old and new, are still unresolved. Thus, undoubtedly, interest in Holocaust-Era assets issues will continue for years, if not decades. And just as certainly NARA and its archival holdings will continue to serve as important roles in the search for truth and justice.

Mr. Chairman, as for HR 2693, the National Archives would be an appropriate location for the names registry envisioned by this legislation. Questions of resources, scope, and sunset that Dr. Kurtz will discuss this morning would need to be resolved. However, we stand ready to assist the committee in this or any future approach and to define how we might solve the problem at hand.

Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.