

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Nader Asks Smithsonian Chief: "What About Taxpayers?"**

Ralph Nader criticized Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence Small today for ignoring the taxpayers who pay most of his salary and selling this nation's great legacy to a weapons manufacturer whose revenues are derived heavily from taxpayers. Nader also denounced the Smithsonian chief's decision to belittle the contribution of an individual and promote a big corporation instead.

Nader was responding to news that the Smithsonian has agreed to rename the movie theater in the popular National Air & Space Museum after the Lockheed Martin Corp. The company is expected to announce soon a \$10 million gift to the Smithsonian. Until now the Air & Space Museum theater has borne the name Samuel P. Langley, the aviation pioneer.

"If they must rename the theater, they should call it Taxpayer Theater," Nader said. "We taxpayers have been paying the freight at the Smithsonian for years. We pay some 70% of the institution's budget. Wouldn't it be nice if Mr. Small showed the taxpayers a little appreciation and respect for a change? Why is it that taxpayers carry the biggest burden but corporations get the recognition?"

The Smithsonian is governed by a 17-member Board of Regents, including Vice President Dick Cheney and Chief Justice William Rehnquist. "Cheney, Rehnquist and Small are disrespecting the taxpayers," Nader said.

"Besides, individuals have made this nation great," Nader said. "The Smithsonian should honor individual achievement, not corporate glory-mongering."

"It's pathetic that the Lockheed Martin Corporation would want to push aside an aviation pioneer just to get its name before the public," Nader said. "Why can't it give the old fashioned way -- without expecting a big PR benefit in return?"

In recent years, Lockheed Martin has settled several lawsuits related to the use or release of toxic chemicals. "The Smithsonian's mission is to promote the increase and diffusion of knowledge, not to honor corporate polluters," Nader said. "Just how is Lockheed accounting for this contribution on its tax returns?"

In December 2000, a Los Angeles County judge approved a \$5 million settlement between Lockheed Martin and more than 300 Burbank, CA residents who claimed that they were harmed by Lockheed's release of toxic chemicals, including hexavalent chromium, into the air, soil and groundwater.

In 1996, Lockheed Martin agreed to pay approximately \$60 million to 1,357 Burbank residents to settle allegations related to the release of toxic chemicals, including hexavalent chromium.

Lockheed Martin faced heavy criticism in November, 2000 following a *Los Angeles Times* report that it was funding probably the first large-scale human study to test a water pollutant, perchlorate. Pollutants are usually tested on lab animals. "These tests are inherently unethical," Richard Wiles of the Environmental Working Group told the *Times*.

Last month, Commercial Alert demanded that the Smithsonian stop "acting as an advocacy arm of the oil industry" by distributing a National Museum of Natural History "museum guide" which promotes oil drilling in Alaska. The text of that letter is available at: <<http://www.commercialalert.org/releases/oilrel.html>>.

In January, Commercial Alert and a coalition of 170 scholars and activists sent letters to the Smithsonian Institution's governing Board of Regents, asking them to protect the Smithsonian from commercialism, and to fire Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence Small for commercializing the Smithsonian. The text of that letter is available at: <<http://www.commercialalert.org/smithsonian/commercialism.html>>.

On February 27, 2001, Ralph Nader sent Mr. Small a letter requesting the Smithsonian's policy regarding where it draws the line that determines the limits of commercialism within the Smithsonian's operations. Has the Smithsonian established lines beyond which commercialism cannot cross? Mr. Small has refused to reply, despite follow-up calls. The text of that letter is available at: <<http://www.commercialalert.org/cityforsale/smithrlet.html>>.

Background materials on commercialism at the Smithsonian are available at: <<http://www.commercialalert.org/smithsonian/index.html>>.

Commercial Alert's mission is to keep the commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy. Commercial Alert's website is at <<http://www.commercialalert.org>>.