

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

COMMITTEES:
BUDGET
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

January 7, 2009

Mr. Martin E. Sullivan
Director
National Portrait Gallery
8th and F Streets, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

The National Portrait Gallery holds a special place in preserving American history and in conducting, as you have put it yourself, "an ongoing conversation about ourselves, our heritage and our hopes." The gallery has not kept faith with that mission, by asserting in the text that accompanies a portrait of President George W. Bush that his two terms in office were "marked by a series of catastrophic events" including "the attacks on September 11, 2001, that led to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq . . ."

When President Bush and Vice President Cheney misled our nation into the war in Iraq, they certainly cited the attacks on September 11, along with the equally specious claim that Iraq possessed vast arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. The notion, however, that 9/11 and Iraq were linked, or that one "led to" the other, has been widely and authoritatively debunked.

There was no "collaborative relationship" between Iraq and al Qaeda, according to a staff report issued on June 16, 2003, for the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. The report for the 9/11 commission undercut one of the Bush administration's main justifications for the war in Iraq. It said there had been contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda, but no cooperation. Officials of the FBI and CIA agreed, in testimony before the panel, with the conclusion of the 9/11 commission staff report. Even President Bush, having repeatedly linked Saddam Hussein to the terrorist organization behind the September 11 attacks, allowed at a news conference on September 17, 2003, that there was no evidence that the deposed Iraqi leader had a hand in those attacks. "We've had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with September the 11th," Bush said.

Therefore, I feel strongly that the National Portrait Gallery should not be perpetuating a clearly erroneous history of the United States and our 43rd president. Might I suggest that a reconsideration of the explanatory text next to the portrait of President Bush is in order, so that in explaining our current president's portrait we do not inadvertently rewrite history?

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bernard Sanders". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "B".

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator