

Collectors Claim Bias Epitomizes State Department Advisory Committee Management

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GAINESVILLE, Mo., January 20 /Xpress Press/ — Kerry Wetterstrom, representing the Ancient Coin Collectors Guild, opposed adding U.S. import restrictions on coins at a Cultural Property Advisory Committee (CPAC) hearing November 13, 2009. The occasion was an interim review of a Memorandum of Understanding with Italy. Wetterstrom, publisher/editor of The Celator, wrote in his latest editorial:

“This was the first such hearing that I have attended, and it was an interesting, albeit a bit frustrating, experience. I came away from this hearing with the strong belief that the odds are against the ancient coin collecting community in receiving a “fair shake” from the U.S. Department of State, specifically its Cultural Heritage Center office, at these CPAC hearings.

“The three speakers representing collectors and dealers were invited to speak first, each speaker was limited to five minutes, and we were informed that this would be strictly enforced...

“...though I entered the hearing with a bit of trepidation, the hearing’s casual atmosphere had a calming effect on my nerves. Unfortunately, I was not allowed to finish reading the two-page statement that I had prepared, and after answering a couple of questions from the committee, I walked back to my seat thinking that this was the fastest five minutes I had ever experienced. Later, several people commented to me that they believed I had been cut off before the end of my allotted time.”

Other speakers, who advocate import restrictions on coins, were reportedly allowed to exceed the published time limit with comments ranging up to 30 minutes. Wetterstrom concluded that, “Based on this experience, I now know that the best option that the ancient coin collecting community has for a “fair hearing,” ...is through the court system...”

The crux of Wetterstrom’s abbreviated comments was that the ancient coin market within Italy itself is robust. Legitimate trade in these coins flows from the United States to Italy without any requirement for permits or provenance. There are many Italian auction houses and firms that sell ancient coins locally and prominently advertise in Italian coin collecting periodicals. The Numismatici Italiani Professioniste, a numismatic trade organization within Italy, lists on its web site (<http://www.accg.us/issues/news/accg-comments-on-interim-review-of-italy-mou>

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