A Flying Fiasco

So the head broke off the prehistoric bird replica at Andrews on 17 May—so what! The fact that a recognized international organization such as the Smithsonian Institution sponsored this farce is pathetic. I cannot imagine a greater waste of money—$700,000—than to construct a replica of a bird from prehistoric times, attempt to make it fly and publicize it. Since it costs nothing to visit the Smithsonian, my lack of patronage in the future will make little difference in this august organization's survival, but think what $700,000 could do if spent rationally. We could have made some significant improvements to Mitch Snyder's shelter; sent many folks to college; developed some work-training programs; or even bought some cars and an engine for the commuter service from Manassas to Washington. There are lots of ways to spend $700,000 and help lots of people. We might even cure cancer. No one at all was helped by the bird, and the money was spent for nothing—absolutely nothing at all.

KARL D. SPENCE

Burke

A Flying Fiasco: No Way

Under The Post's cutey head- ing, "A Flying Fiasco," Karl D. Spence (letters, May 24) cannot imagine "a greater waste of money—$700,000," which is what the Smithsonian paid for the pterodactylus Quetzalcoatlus. "Does he think its coatlus, flying model and a person of liberal sensibilities have been appalled by the reaction against this project's $700,000 cost. The claim that the money could have been better spent elsewhere is nonsense. The model was built with three goals in mind: the advancement of science (aerodynamic and palaeontological), education of the public, and entertainment. It succeeded and met other challenges, and even solve other problems. And even- tually people will benefit in ways that are unimaginable. Entire industries and technologies flowed from those few fertile minds that played with useless ideas, from Fuldon's Folly to transistors, to lasers, our advances depend on, strive to know, to solve, to achieve, not on the carping of shortsighted critics. Undoubtedly some will be excited and inspired toward careers in science by the sight. And it was fun!"

LEONARD COHEN

Greenbelt

'A Flying Fiasco? A Drawn Board', May 24; Drawing Board, May 24]

JAMES E. COX JR.

Bethesda

Drawing Board, May 24

I find the recent comments concerning the pterodactylus Quetzalcoatlus most frightening [Henry Mitchell, May 23; letters, May 24; Drawing Board, May 24] very misleading. The primary reason for creating this "replica of a bird" (note that a pterodactylus is not a bird, but a reptile) was not for the demonstration flight at Andrews, but to be a principal character in the Space Museum's new IMAX film, "On the Wing." And remember: much of the money for this project came not from the taxpayer, but from corporate dona- tions. Before Mr. Spence boycotts the Air and Space Museum, as he indi- cated he would, perhaps he could stop by next month and see the reptile in the medium for which it was designed.

GREGORY S. PAUL

Baltimore