



Chairman Blunt's Opening Statement Oversight Hearing on the Smithsonian Institution

Good morning. I thank my colleagues for attending today's hearing and we welcome our witness, Mr. Lonnie Bunch, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution—thank you for joining us.

This is Secretary Bunch's first appearance before the Senate Rules Committee and we are grateful to have him here with us. Secretary Bunch's appointment is a historic one. He is the first African American Secretary to lead the Smithsonian Institution, as well as the first museum director appointed to Secretary in almost 75 years. He is also a historian, something that we share in common.

This is Secretary Bunch's fourth position at the Smithsonian, something I imagine none of your predecessors could say. In 1978, Secretary Bunch began his Smithsonian career at the National Air and Space Museum as an education specialist. In 1989, he joined the National Museum of American History. He most recently served as the founding Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

As the founding Director, Secretary Bunch led the 11-year process of planning and constructing the 400,000 square-foot museum that tells powerful stories from our history.

Congress established the Smithsonian in 1846 through a bequest by British scientist James Smithson, who generously left his estate to the United States government to found "an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge."

Now, almost 175 years later, the Smithsonian encompasses 19 museums and galleries, numerous research and educational facilities, the National Zoo, and a growing collection of 155 million objects and specimens.

Secretary Bunch's many years of experience at the Smithsonian provide a unique perspective on both the present and future of the Institution.

As the newly-invested Secretary, you have inherited the Smithsonian's vast collections, expansive research projects, and significant educational tools. You even oversee the care and feeding of Bei Bei, the beloved panda at the National Zoo that will be soon headed back to China.

But, you have also inherited the Institution's challenges, including aging facilities and a deferred-maintenance backlog totaling \$1 billion dollars, an important topic that we also discussed at our last hearing. Over two decades, the Smithsonian nearly doubled its square footage, while funding for preventative maintenance remained flat. The Smithsonian's 19 museums are treasured, just as the 155 million historical and cultural items are, too. We need to take care of these treasures and I want to talk to you more about that today.

You became Secretary in the midst of the Smithsonian implementing a five-year strategic plan created by your predecessor, Dr. Skorton. I hope to discuss your thoughts on that strategic plan, as well as your vision for the Smithsonian this morning.

We look forward to hearing about what you have planned for the Smithsonian and how you plan to face its challenges.

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