

**Written Statement of Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
U.S. Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
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10:00am**

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My tenure as the 14th Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution began this past summer. However, my relationship with the Smithsonian spans many years. I originally joined the Smithsonian in 1978 at the National Air and Space Museum. Since then, I have served as associate director of curatorial affairs at the National Museum of American History. Most recently, I was honored to serve as founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. I am pleased and humbled to assume my role as the Secretary of this Institution, one that I love so much.

The Smithsonian continues to appreciate the on-going support of Congress, the Administration, and the American people, and takes seriously the crucial role we play in advancing the civic, educational, scientific, and artistic life of this nation. This broad public support enables the Smithsonian to address important issues like the essence of the American experience, the diversity of the world's cultures, the sustainability of the planet, and the nature of the universe. It also helps us use new technologies to broaden access to the wonder of the Smithsonian for all American students, and policy makers nationwide and throughout the world. I want to express my gratitude to the Members and staff of this committee for their constant advocacy for the mission of the Smithsonian.

Our collections are vast, representing an incredible scope and depth of artistic, historical, cultural, and scientific achievement. We are an internationally respected scientific and cultural institution that does cutting-edge research in many disciplines. Our 21 libraries collectively form one of the world's great repositories of knowledge. We have an extensive array of educational material that learners of all ages can access on-line, in classrooms, and in our museums.

In regard to our facilities, the Smithsonian buildings host millions of visitors each year and we must assure that they are safe. Our facilities provide the foundation on which we build our programs, exhibitions, research, and scholarship and we have been successful at maintaining building systems beyond their intended lives, like those at the National Air and Space Museum.

With a deferred maintenance backlog of nearly a billion dollars, there is still much work to be done. Comprised in our 19 museums and galleries, 9 research centers, and the National Zoo in addition to leased spaces, we must care for 13.9 million square feet of buildings. With a backlog of maintenance issues, we have been reacting to problems instead of proactively maintaining assets. Reactive maintenance is many times more costly than preventative maintenance.

Addressing and making the long-term care of our facilities a priority is an important investment. In their wisdom, Congress and the Administration have recognized the need for that investment and have supported steady increases to our maintenance budget. In FY 2020, the President's budget included \$84.5 Million for our facilities maintenance; an increase of 6% above the FY 2019 enacted level of \$80 Million. Many of our museums built from the 1960s to the 1980s, like the National Air and Space Museum, need revitalization. Funding preventive care will result in reduced overall maintenance costs, cause fewer breakdowns, save energy, and decrease unplanned closures.

The planning and design funding requested in FY 2020 will begin to address the future of the Smithsonian Castle, the Arts and Industries Building and several other planned building projects. These projects represent the core components of our twenty-year plan for the South Mall, a series of capital projects required after decades of deferred maintenance. We are committed to continuing on this path toward a more sustainable level of care to our physical facilities. As part of our planning process, we continually look for innovative approaches, materials, and designs to reduce the long-term maintenance needs of our buildings, improve their efficiency, and enable the Smithsonian to operate more sustainably.

A billion-dollar backlog may sound insurmountable, but it is not. Since becoming Secretary, I've had a chance to look at it with fresh eyes. In order to be more strategic in our approach, I have directed our staff to begin analyzing our projects in a new way. Rather than seeing our backlog in total, we will be analyzing our maintenance projects building by building. With this approach, we'll be better able to communicate our existing priorities, develop a better sense of where our limited federal dollars are best spent, and find opportunities to address maintenance needs as part of our capital revitalization projects. The strategic combination of capital projects with steady growth in maintenance from Congress will yield greater results. I believe that addressing our maintenance backlog is of paramount importance to the future of the Institution.

All of these projects are necessary because of our continued popularity as a destination. We are pleased that tens of millions of visitors come from across the world to visit our museums every year, but they create wear and tear on facilities, and they come in greater volume than we could have ever anticipated. When the National Air and Space Museum was built, we expected 2.5 million visitors per year, not the 7.3 million we see today. When the National Museum of Natural History was built in 1910, the thought of 6.9 million visitors per year was simply unimaginable.

In addition, it is hard to believe that our collection has grown to 155 million objects. These specimens and objects need to be stored, maintained, and prepared for research. To most of our visitors, the collections we have largely define who we are as an Institution. There is nothing like the real thing to inspire imagination and spark a lifetime of learning and exploration. Our collections are a vital national asset, and we are always striving to improve storage conditions, striking a balance between preserving the collections and providing access to them.

The spaces that house and preserve our collections are not immune from deterioration. The maintenance of our collection storage areas has been deferred to the point of requiring capital investment. For example, we continue to use spaces in our Garber facility that were meant to be temporary when constructed in the 1950s. In FY 2020, we will continue design development for the new MSC-Suitland Pod 6 collections storage building. We signed an MOU with the National Gallery of Art and initiated design of the Pod in collaboration with the Gallery to address near-term collection space needs of mutual concern. Our Collections Space Framework Plan outlines a strategy for improving all our collections facilities, but it is a long-term plan and maintenance needs will continue as we work to implement it.

The Smithsonian's pressing infrastructure and collections space needs demand our immediate and on-going attention. Despite our best efforts, much of Smithsonian's aging infrastructure continues to be below acceptable standards. We appreciate the support of Congress, in addressing our most visible and pressing infrastructure need, the renovation of the National Air and Space Museum. Just as important, we are grateful for the on-going support of the day-to-day maintenance needs of the Institution. It is our responsibility and priority to ensure that our museums, research centers, libraries, and educational centers are maintained and cared for at a level worthy of national distinction.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the Smithsonian that I envision. Under my leadership, our goal is to reach, in meaningful ways, at least one billion people worldwide. If we are to achieve this goal, it is critical that we develop a more cohesive institution—what we've dubbed "One Smithsonian"—using cutting-edge technology. A key component of having greater reach is continuing the Smithsonian's transformation into both physical and virtual spaces. Nothing replaces the authentic objects we have on display, but we need to reach millions who cannot visit us in person, using all the digital tools available to us. I envision a virtual initiative leveraging state-of-the-art resources and innovative partnerships that will allow audiences both domestically and internationally to experience our scholarship, research, and collections in new and exciting ways, organized around themes like democracy, race, innovation, or identity. I am committed to achieving this goal while protecting and securing our digital assets and those of the users of our technology. It is important that we do all we can to provide access especially to traditionally under-served populations.

If we are to fully serve 21st- Century global audiences, we will have to be more inclusive, more accessible, and more diverse. Cultural institutions are uniquely equipped to inspire, and we can magnify that ability when we truly reflect the rich tapestry of humanity. The Smithsonian is committed to increasing, attracting, and developing a diverse and talented workforce. Whether focusing on leadership, employees, volunteers, fellows, or interns, diversity and inclusion are paramount to the future of the Smithsonian.

A critical part of making museums more diverse is to include traditionally under-represented stories. Specifically, highlighting the stories of American women, Latino Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans is vital to fulfilling the Smithsonian's purpose. Based on the success of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, we know that visitors to our museums and websites are best served by seeing American history through many lenses. We are

committed to making every Smithsonian museum more inclusive and representative of the nation's population. I am pleased that Congress has supported the goal of telling more expansive and representative stories. Under my leadership, we will make diversity in our collections, archives, exhibitions, workforce, and programming a higher priority.

As you well know, bills to establish a Latino American and American Women's History museums are pending before Congress. If Congress deems it in the public interest to move forward with these proposals, it is important that any additions to the Smithsonian do not impact Smithsonian's pressing infrastructure and collections space needs that demand our immediate and on-going attention. Despite our best efforts, much of Smithsonian's aging infrastructure continues to be below acceptable standards and any efforts for building and operating new physical infrastructure needs to consider this context in near and long-term. A new museum would need funds for both the creation and long-term operations of the facilities, the care and preservation of our collections, and the on-going success of the museum.

Our work to increase knowledge is never ending. We are conducting groundbreaking research in marine and terrestrial environments, have become leaders in conservation biology, reintroduced animals that had been extinct in the wild, and created an unmatched resource for understanding life on our planet through our collections.

As we continue to make new discoveries, we must share them with future generations. To that end, I plan to reimagine the Smithsonian's role in lifelong learning by becoming a national leader in pre-K-12 education. I believe as an educational organization we have an obligation to make education a priority. Already, we create educational materials based on our science and scholarship that enhance the ways students and teachers engage in 21st-century learning. Smithsonian education materials are used by teachers in all 50 states, but we can do more. We are developing a model for the future of education through a collaboration with the Washington, D.C. public school system. In time, we plan to share our model on a national and international stage.

One of the Institution's greatest strengths is its potential to engage people of all ages in discourse around important and contemporary issues. By bringing people together and positioning the Smithsonian as a hub of ideas and innovation, we have the opportunity to maximize impact on a larger scale and deeper level. We want people to see the Smithsonian as a tool to help them understand their universe, their history, and our shared future in order to live better lives. It is incumbent upon us to be a more universal resource, one that earns the American people's trust in us and leverages our great convening power to increase our relevance and resonance.

Museums are more important now than ever because of their unique ability to serve as trusted sources of information that expand cultural and scientific understanding. Museums also have the power to convene. They can be incredibly dynamic places that provide opportunities to discover, to learn, and to have fun. Museums also have the capacity to be places of dialogue, public engagement, and discourse.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.