Testimony of Lawrence M. Small
Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
before the
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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I appreciate very much this opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution.

I've been at the Smithsonian officially for just over six months, since my installation on January 24h, but I was unofficially at the Smithsonian from the moment I was chosen as Secretary last September. I took advantage of the four months between my nomination and my installation to learn as much as I could about the history and traditions of the place, and to meet with dozens of individuals who were able to tell me about all that the Institution has contributed to American life for the past 154 years.

The point they made, again and again, was that the Smithsonian has been an immensely powerful force for good in the life of this country. The role it plays in American society is unique and fundamental. It engages Americans in experiencing their history and their cultural and scientific heritage more fully than any other institution in the world.

For the past six months, I've been working with the staff of the Smithsonian to protect and enlarge that fundamental role, and to do so in ways that will allow an institution begun in the mid-nineteenth century to function successfully as a complex enterprise in the twenty-first century, according to contemporary standards of management and organization. With the benefit of invaluable advice from members of the Board of

Regents and from dozens of other individuals knowledgeable about the Smithsonian and its traditions, we formulated two mission statements that will set the course of the Institution into this new century.

What I'd like to do today is give you a sense of the large design of our plans and the rationale for them, describe some of the organizational changes we've introduced to help us achieve our goals, report on the progress we've made in working toward the goals, and then speak briefly of a significant impediment in the way of our achieving them.

The Missions

Let me begin with the dual mission statements.

First of all, the Smithsonian is committed to enlarging a shared understanding of the mosaic that is American national identity by serving as the most extensive provider, anywhere in the world, of authoritative experiences that connect the American people to their history and to their cultural and scientific heritage. And, second, the Smithsonian is committed to promoting scientific innovation and discovery in a select ;umber of fields where it has traditionally shown

great distinction.

To realize the two missions successfully, we're implementing a four-part program focused on (1) public engagement, (2) precisely defined areas of scientific research, (3) management excellence, and (4) financial strength.

Public Engagement In Washington

The Smithsonian has been spectacularly successful over the years in attracting audiences.

Our Museum of Natural History, on the Mall, had a record 815,000 visits in March of this year-and then reached the figure of 1.3 million visits in April. For the first quarter of this year, Natural History was the most visited museum in the world. That number-one position is usually held by our Air and Space Museum, which can have as many as a million visits each month. In fact, the Smithsonian has the three most visited and most heavily trafficked museums in the world, all a couple of blocks apart on the Mall-the Air and Space Museum,.the Natural History Museum, and the Museum of American History.

To give you a better sense of what the numbers mean, let me make some comparisons. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Gallery here in Washington, the Louvre in Paris, and the British Museum in London all attract somewhere between 5 and 5.5 million visitors a year. The Air and Space Museum, in a bad year, draws 9 million-and the more normal figure is between 11 and 12 million. This year, we expect the number at the Natural History Museum to exceed 8 or 9 million. That's twice the attendance of the wonderful American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

There's an interesting additional statistic. Unlike the British Museum, 75 percent of whose visitors are foreign to Great Britain, and unlike other institutions in Europe and the United States that draw high percentages of their traffic from abroad, the Smithsonian attracts over 90 percent of its visitors from the United States. Americans consider the Smithsonian theirs. Ninety-three percent of Americans recognize the words

"Smithsonian Institution" on lists of major enterprises that play a role in national life. They identify with the Smithsonian and what it represents. It's a distinctly American institutions national treasure that's filled with our nation's treasures. As you know, there are 141 million incomparably interesting and valuable items in our buildings-a staggering array of famous icons from the cultural, technological, social, and political history of America.

Despite that record of past and current success, we believe we can do better. We want to increase markedly our levels of engagement with the public, here in Washington and throughout the country. There are many ways we can do that. We must make certain, for example, that the exhibits in all our museums are of absolutely first-rate quality-that they're on topics of compelling interest to the public and that they're mounted according to the highest standards of contemporary museum presentation. I'm speaking of both new exhibits and the many current permanent exhibits that should be completely redone-reconceived and reimagined for today's audiences.

But we can also increase visitation by giving the public entirely new reasons to visit the Smithsonian. We're moving forward with plans to put in place what we believe are the three most significant structures the nation's capital area will see in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Just adjacent to Dulles airport, we'll soon break ground for an extension of our Air and Space Museum, but an extension that yields nothing to the original. In fact, it's going to be one of the largest rooms in the world-two and a half football fields long and ten stories high, with some 185 aircraft and 1 18 space artifacts suspended from the ceiling and displayed on the floor. As you walk through the front door, you'll be face to face with the SR 71 Blackbird, the world's fastest plane. When it was delivered to us, the Blackbird flew from Los Angeles to Washington in 68 minutes. That's two and a half times faster than the speed of a bullet fired from a .44-magnum handgun. Entering that vast room at the Dulles museum for the first time, and even for the hundredth time, is going to be an absolutely overwhelming experience. We'll also be opening, at more or less the same time as the Dulles center, the new National Museum of the American Indian, on the Mail between the Air and Space Museum and the Capitol. By virtue of its location, the American Indian Museum should become, in no time, Yet another of the most visited museums in the world. But its location will be only one of the museum's glories. More significantly, it will house one of the world's great collections-the George Gustav Heye collection of indigenous objects from North and South America, the largest ethnographic collection ever assembled by a single individual, something between 800,000 and 1,000,000 items.

In addition to building those two museums, we're renovating the Patent Office Building in downtown Washington, where we house the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum of American Art. The Patent Office, as you may know, was to be the third great public building in Washington, after the Capitol and the White House. It's a massive, stone, Greek revival structure containing some 330,000 square feet of space.

Construction began in 1836, and the supervising architect was Robert Mills, who was also the architect of the Washington Monument and the Treasury Building.

The initial rationale for the renovation was to bring the building's infrastructure and hidden systems (electrical, heating and cooling, plumbing, and such) up to twenty-first century standards. But the building is so grand and irreplaceable, and so charged with history-it's where President Lincoln held his second inaugural ball-that we decided it should be restored fully to its original splendor and made one of the prime attractions in the city. And that's just what we intend to do.

So here in the Washington area we're building and renovating museums to make the Smithsonian an even more compelling destination for visitors. And though those visitors will be from nations all around the world, if past experience holds true, the great majority of them will be Americans.

Throughout America

But if the Smithsonian is truly to belong to America, its boundaries should not be the physical premises of our museums. For that reason, we're building a series of strategies to make the Smithsonian an increasingly vivid and ubiquitous presence across the United States.

The lure of Washington will always bring visitors to our sites here. But we must find ways of reaching new audiences as well. The demography of the United States is changing, with the greatest population growth occurring in the South, Southwest, and West, areas outside the North, Northeast, and Middle Atlantic regions from which the Smithsonian has traditionally attracted its largest audiences. This nation of 275 million people now has the highest level of foreign-born individuals in its history--one out of ten of inhabitants was born outside the United States. There are major segments of the population the Smithsonian is not yet reaching.

Because it may be difficult for new audiences to come over great distances to us, we're determined to bring the Smithsonian to them. And there's one way in particular we can do that. At any one time, we can display-even in sixteen museums-fewer than two percent of the 141 million objects in our collections. They're doing no one any good in the dark comers of our storage facilities. So we're determined to bring them to light and to use. America is blessed with thousands of museums, and there is in those museums an abundance of the resource we lack, which is display space. At the same time, because many of the museums are young and live on tight budgets, they lack the very resource of which we, have an abundance, which is objects. The circumstances are perfect for a win- win situation.

In 1997, we began what we call our Affiliations Program. Through the program, we're lending objects to any museum in the United States that can responsibly receive and care for them. The intent of the program is to draw institutions closer to the Smithsonian- and to draw the Smithsonian closer to all of America. We want the Smithsonian to be known across the country as much more than a distant group of museums. We want Americans to associate the name "Smithsonian" with objects physically present in their own communities, and with services generously rendered to their local museums and cultural organizations.

It has become one of our top priorities to move as many items as we reasonably can from our vast collections to the communities of America. By finding in museums throughout the country the display space we, lack, we're able to place out among the American people what are, after all, collections the Smithsonian keeps on their behalf And, to the extent that we can, we'll be lending institutions the expertise of our staff members as well-expertise about exhibitions and educational programs and outreach initiatives. We want the benefits of affiliation to radiate outward from institutions into their communities and their regions.

Earlier this month, representatives of the affiliate museums, which now number more than fifty, met for three days at the Smithsonian, and the meeting was a great success. An estimated two-and-a-half million visitors annually to those museums get to see the objects we have lent them. We're committed to making the program grow until we develop a presence within every state, and in as many communities as possible within each state. We hope to crowd the American landscape with affiliates of the Smithsonian, so that the reach of the Smithsonian encompasses all of America.

In addition, we'll be bolstering our program of traveling exhibitions-already the largest of its kind in the world-our adult education courses and trips, and our education programs for students from kindergarten through college.

We're determined to have the Smithsonian become, more literally than ever, what it has traditionally aspired to be-America's museum.

Science

Let me turn from our goals for public engagement to a consideration of how we're continuing the great scientific tradition of the Smithsonian, which dates back to its very origins.

We're immensely proud of the Smithsonian's scientific achievements-for example, in astrophysics, tropical research, and a select number of other specialized areas. But as the Members know all too well, scientific research has become so boundless and expensive an undertaking that no institution, not even the greatest university, can any longer attempt it all. Prudent institutions will choose the areas in which they can excel, and then establish clear priorities within them. And that's what the Smithsonian is doing: focusing on a select number of areas in which our achievements can be distinctive and to which the Institution can make an enduring commitment. Our first priority is to make certain that we have a real focus in our scientific work, that we are clear about what we are trying to accomplish, and that the work accords with a compelling, articulate, inspirational mission for science at the Smithsonian.

The additional point I want to make about our scientific activity is that the general public knows too little about it. We're committed to informing the public more forthrightly than we've done in the past, and in nontechnical terms, about the Smithsonian's part in the advancement of contemporary science. For example, the unit of the Smithsonian with the largest budget this year is not any one Americans might be tempted to name. It's the Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Among numerous research pursuits, the Observatory, under contract to NASA, is responsible for the development and operation of the advanced X-ray space satellite Chandra, which was deployed from the space shuttle Columbia in July 1999 and is showing us the heavens as we have never before been able to see them.

Nor do many Americans know of the Smithsonian's Tropical Research Institute in Panama, which pioneered the world's largest tropical rainforest research project. The project uses a uniform data collection methodology to track nearly three million trees at seventeen sites in thirteen countries of Asia, Africa, and America. And that's just one accomplishment of this superb facility, the world's most comprehensive and most innovative institute focused on tropical research.

We're currently involved in a major review of scientific activity at the Institution, to identify what's been genuinely innovative and distinctive. Our findings will allow us to focus thereafter on a select number of areas to which the Institution can make so strong and sustained a commitment that the outcomes of our research will be absolutely world- class. And we'll be phasing out over time, in an appropriate fashion, such activities as we decide are outside our chosen areas of specialization.

Management and Organization

To bring coherence, focus, and flexibility to the Institution's two missions, we've introduced a new organizational structure. The various units of the Smithsonian have been grouped into five divisions: (1) science; (2) American museums and national programs; (3) art museums with internationally oriented collections; (4) finance and administration; and (5) business ventures.

Dennis O'Connor, the former Provost of the Smithsonian, has become the Under Secretary for Science. Sheila Burke, who was the Executive Dean at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and, earlier, the Chief of Staff to then-Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, is the Under Secretary for American Museums and National Programs. Robert D. Bailey, who had a career of almost three decades at Citibank/Citicorp supervising a broad range of operations in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the United States, is the Under Secretary for Finance and Administration. Thomas W. Lentz, who was Deputy Director of the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, is the Director of the International Art Museums

Division. Gary Beer will continue to lead the Institution's revenue-producing operations as Chief Executive Officer of Smithsonian Business Ventures.

Finances

For the Smithsonian to succeed at its two fundamental missions of vigorous public engagement and selective scientific endeavor, we need to bring the full array of its management functions into the twenty-first century. Of our current financial and accounting systems, the best that can be said is that they serve their purpose and are under control. But they are terribly unwieldy and decades out of date. We're bringing them to the level of, other contemporary organizations with budgets of our size and missions of our scope and complexity, as we are upgrading our information technology systems.

Let me speak briefly to the Smithsonian's record of raising funds from the private sector to supplement the generous support we receive each year from Congress. The Smithsonian has had remarkable-and growing-success in recent years in raising private support. The total of such funds in fiscal year 1995 was approximately $51,800,000; in fiscal 1996, $40,700,000; in fiscal 1997, $51,100,000, in fiscal 1998, $91,500,000; in fiscal 19.99, $147,200,000. And for the first eight months of the current fiscal year, private contributions are running well ahead of what they were for the same period in 1999. In fact, last year, we raised more private money than any other museum in the country, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Our private support is essential, for it goes to such purposes as new and restored buildings, new exhibitions and programs, and collections growth-tasks that are absolutely fundamental to the identity and the character of the Smithsonian. We'll be working to better our record each year, and, given the great admiration for the Smithsonian throughout America, we are confident of doing so.

Physical Facilities

I'm enthusiastic and optimistic about the prospects for the Smithsonian in almost every respect. But that "almost" signals an area of genuine and profound concern. I raise it with you today only because I think it's important to tell you what's on my mind about the Institution, and I'd be less than forthright if I did not share with you a matter that is, in fact, on my mind daily and that seems to me of increasing urgency. I realize that this Committee is not an appropriating committee and can take no action to address the problem, and I've already shared the concern with the Members of our House Subcommittee at our hearing back in March. But to omit the matter from any account of the current state of the Smithsonian would be to leave that account seriously incomplete.

What troubles me is the condition of a significant portion of the physical facilities of the Smithsonian. Construction on the Smithsonian's oldest structure, the Patent Office Building, began in 1836. The cornerstone of the original Smithsonian Castle on the National Mall was laid in 1847. The National Museum Building adjacent to it (now known as the Arts and Industries building) was completed in 1881 (and the plaster began to fall shortly thereafter). The National Museum of Natural History opened in 19 1 0. The age of those four buildings would be reason enough for concern, but there's a significant additional stress on them-and on a building as relatively new as the Air and Space Museum, which dates from the mid-1970s.

Our museum buildings are open to the world. They exist to be visited and to be used, and they've been wonderfully successful at attracting the public. Even the Smithsonian

Castle, which doesn't contain a museum, gets 1.8 million visitors a year. Our buildings are among the most visited buildings in the world, and, in the years ahead, we'll be working to open our doors wider still and to attract even more visitors. So what time doesn't do to the buildings, popularity will. And thank goodness for that. If we have to be challenged, at least let it be by success.

But the truth is that the Smithsonian's buildings have become too shabby, and that seems to me unacceptable. They're not worthy of the treasures they contain. We can hide the problems behind curtains and plastic sheets, as we now do in the Arts and Industries Building, and patch up worn-out machinery with improvised parts (because the originals are no longer made). But the reality is inescapable and can't be concealed.

These grand buildings are the American people's buildings, and when the people enter them, they should feel proud, just as they do when they enter the Capitol or the Supreme Court, or any of the other buildings and monuments that stand here in Washington as the architectural and cultural symbols of the nation's spirit, purpose, and achievement. All such structures are the physical manifestation of our shared sense of national identity, and they are to be cherished and protected for that reason.

The House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee has provided increased funds for the renovation and restoration of our buildings, and we're enormously grateful for them. But the amounts are not adequate to the problem, and that's because the Smithsonian-and just the Smithsonian, not anyone else-has hesitated to represent to Congress the full scale of its need.

Instead, we've tried to make do. The Smithsonian has asked for less, and Congress, meaning to be supportive, has responded by giving the Smithsonian the less it said was enough. In the blinding light of hindsight, it's eminently clear we've seriously underfunded our repair and restoration function.

The Smithsonian's buildings are emblems of the nation. They should shine, and they should inspire awe. We're committed to raising whatever amount of additional public and private funds is needed to make them appropriate homes for the vast record of America that we've been charged with keeping. The start of this new century seems to me a fitting moment to give the museums new life, to restore these monuments to a state commensurate with their history and their purpose, and to commit to maintain them permanently in their condition of reclaimed glory. We're working on as detailed a ten- year plan as we can possibly produce to tackle this task, and we look forward to gaining support for its acceptance in both the Administration and Congress.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with the Committee today, the first of what I hope will be a long series of such opportunities. I'd be pleased to respond to any questions you and the other Members may have concerning our plans for a twenty- first century Smithsonian Institution in which Americans will recognize the grandeur of America.