



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**Smithsonian Institution, FY17 Budget Hearing
March 23, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Dr. Skorton, I'd like to welcome you to today's hearing. We appreciate you joining us this morning to share your vision for the future of the Smithsonian and to discuss your budget priorities for fiscal year 2017.

The Members and staff are also grateful that you have brought some interesting historical items for "show and tell." It is always one of the highlights of our hearing season. You clearly have one of the most interesting jobs in town. I think most of us around this table would love to trade places with you—but that probably wouldn't be in the best interest of the Smithsonian!

The Smithsonian's mission is "the increase and diffusion of knowledge." As the 13th Secretary of the Smithsonian, you are entrusted with the challenging responsibility of operating and managing one of our country's most revered institutions. The Smithsonian is often referred to as "America's attic" and it's no wonder—you are the steward of more than 138 million objects in a national collection that reflects America's artistic, cultural, and scientific heritage.

The Smithsonian provides education and outreach programs in art, culture, history, and science for visitors and scholars alike. It is governed by a Board of Regents consisting of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Vice President, nine private citizens, and six members of Congress—including our good friend, Tom Cole, who serves on this subcommittee.

Overall, the proposed funding level in the Smithsonian's fiscal year 2017 budget request is \$922.2 million—which is \$82 million, or 10 percent—above the fiscal year 2016 enacted level. Compared with other major accounts under this subcommittee's jurisdiction, your request is one of the most ambitious as measured on a percentage basis.

Like most big organizations, the Smithsonian faces some enormous challenges which we will be discussing at some length today. The subcommittee recently learned of the need for enormously costly repairs to the National Air and Space Museum. If approved, this effort will place extraordinary burdens on the Smithsonian's annual budgets for the foreseeable future.

The Subcommittee congratulates the Smithsonian on the news of the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture on September 24th this year. This committee has met its funding commitment—providing \$270 million, or one-half of the total cost—toward

construction of the museum. We are pleased that this extraordinary public-private partnership enabling the museum to be built has proven successful and that construction is now nearly complete.

The construction of the African American Museum and the proposed repairs to the National Air and Space Museum are illustrative of the very real challenges this subcommittee faces: there is both an increasing demand for—and a shrinking supply of—Federal dollars to address many legitimate priorities.

For this reason, it is essential that the Smithsonian outline and clearly communicate its highest and greatest priorities. Every member of this subcommittee would like to support a ten percent increase in funding for the Smithsonian but, given the incredible demands across this bill, it is an unrealistic outcome. Difficult funding decisions will have to be made. This subcommittee will do its very best to address the Smithsonian's most urgent priorities. I look forward to your testimony and continuing our work together.

In closing, I want to commend you for the Smithsonian's efforts to improve the display and storage of your vast collections. Based on the input this Committee receives from Members on both sides of the aisle, it's very clear that the preservation and care of these priceless, irreplaceable collections remain a high priority of this Committee and this Congress.