

Smithsonian Institution

Statement of Acting Secretary AI Horvath Oversight Hearing on the Smithsonian Committee on House Administration U.S. House of Representatives June 17, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Smithsonian's major oversight committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on House Administration.

In 1846, Congress established the Smithsonian as an independent federal trust instrumentality dedicated to the "increase and diffusion of knowledge."

The Smithsonian greatly appreciates the continued support of Congress, the Administration, and the American people, enabling the crucial role we play in advancing the civic, educational, scientific, and artistic life of this nation. As a public trust, the Smithsonian addresses some of the world's most complex issues — and uses new technologies to broaden access to information for citizens, students, and policy makers.

The Smithsonian is a unique public-private partnership that has achieved outstanding results for 169 years. The federal commitment provides the foundation for all we do, and is especially helpful in attracting private support. We leverage our federal funding to enrich the lives of the American people and advance our standing as one of the most respected and trusted institutions in America.

We continue to implement our 2010 Strategic Plan that focuses on four "Grand Challenges," promoting interdisciplinary and Institution-wide collaboration. That plan has been extended to 2017. Accordingly, we are improving facilities maintenance and collections care to be better stewards of America's treasures. We are also working with new federal, state, and local partners to avoid redundancies and expand our reach. We work with virtually every cabinet-level federal agency.

The Smithsonian is large and diverse, encompassing art, history, science, education, and culture. We have 19 museums and galleries, 20 libraries, nine research centers, the National Zoo, and 201 affiliate museums in 45 states, Puerto Rico, and Panama. We are open 364 days a year — and admission is free. We have research and education facilities in eight states and the District of Columbia, and operate in more than 130 countries. Last year, our museums had almost 27 million visits, and another 4.5 million people visited our traveling exhibitions, in all 50 states and in 263 communities around the nation. In addition, *Smithsonian Magazine* is now read by more than seven million people. The Smithsonian Channel, which last year featured exciting content on the Civil War and the

history behind the Star-Spangled Banner, is currently distributed by eight of the top nine cable operators that serve a total of 74 million households.

Our collections total 138 million objects, including 127 million scientific specimens, 340,000 works of art, and two million library volumes. We also care for 157,000 cubic feet of archival material — and more than 2,000 live animals. We have the Star-Spangled Banner; Morse's telegraph; Edison's light bulb; the Hope Diamond; the Wright Flyer; one of Amelia Earhart's planes; Louis Armstrong's trumpet; labor leader Cesar Chavez's jacket; the Lansdowne portrait of George Washington; the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to Japanese American World War II veterans; the *Spirit of Tuskegee* airplane; the camera John Glenn used on his voyage into space; Asian, African, and American art; the Apollo 11 Command Module, *Columbia*; and the space shuttle *Discovery*. We hold all these objects in trust for the American people.

The year 2014 marked many anniversaries at the Smithsonian: the bicentennial of the Star-Spangled Banner; the 125th anniversary of the founding of the National Zoo; the 50th anniversary of National Museum of American History; the 50th anniversary of the National Museum of African Art; the 10th anniversary of the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall; the 20th anniversary of the National Museum of the American Indian's Heye Center in New York City; and the 10th anniversary of the opening of National Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Virginia. In addition, the Charles McC. Mathias Laboratory opened in September at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland, and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum reopened to the public in December after a major renovation.

In the past several months, our visitors have experienced nearly 100 new exhibitions, including *Through the African American Lens: A Preview of the National Museum of African American History and Culture*, curated by the National Museum of African American History and Culture and presented at the National Museum of American History; *Outside the Spacecraft: 50 Years of Extra-Vehicular Activity* at the National Air and Space Museum; *3-D Portrait of President Obama* at the National Portrait Gallery; *Orchids: Interlocking Science and Beauty* at the National Museum of Natural History; *American Bison* at the National Zoo; the high-tech *Immersion Room* at the renovated Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; *Out of Many, One*, the giant National Portrait Gallery landscape portrait that decorated the National Mall; *Shirin Neshat: Facing History* at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; *Peacock Room REMIX: Darren Waterston's Filthy Lucre* at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African Artists* at the National Museum of African Art; *Bridging the Americas: Community and Belonging from Panama to Washington, D.C.* at the Anacostia Community Museum; *Freedom Just Around the Corner: Black America from Civil War to Civil Rights* at the National Postal Museum; and *Richard Estes' Realism* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

And exciting exhibitions are on the horizon, including *The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire* at the National Museum of the American Indian and multiple exhibitions at the National Museum of American History's renovated West Wing, including *Places of Invention*, *Spark!Lab*, and *American Enterprise and the Value of Money*.

The Smithsonian's 500 scientists are tackling vital issues of the day, making important discoveries — and sharing them with the public. For example, scientists at the Harvard-based Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory are using telescopes in outer space to discover new planets. Scientists there have discovered an exoplanet dubbed a "mega-Earth." Found in the constellation Draco, Kepler-10c is a rocky world weighing as much as 17 Earths.

This year, our consortia launched the Smithsonian Institute for Biodiversity Genomics. The launch of the Institute will provide the high-profile, multidisciplinary scholarship, leadership, collaborative spirit, and logistical support necessary to enhance our understanding of the natural world through genomics. The collections and field-based initiatives of our museums and research centers include the National Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, the National Zoo, the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, and the Museum Conservation Institute.

The National Museum of Natural History is the leading partner in a global effort called the Encyclopedia of Life, an ambitious, 10-year project that will become a key repository of scientific information about virtually every form of life on Earth. The Encyclopedia is an online database that has financial, logistical, and research support from numerous partners, including the MacArthur and Sloan Foundations.

With our international partners and worldwide reach, the Institution is particularly well connected to study biodiversity issues. The Smithsonian's ForestGEO (Global Earth Observatories) network is a worldwide partnership of more than 95 institutions working to monitor the health of six million trees (10,000 species) on 61 plots in 24 countries. Our new initiative, Tennenbaum Marine Observatories, or MarineGEO, seeks to replicate this success and assess the health of coastal areas and the oceans at large.

On the education front, we deliver educational materials to students and teachers in all 50 states. More than 2,000 learning resources, all tied to state standards, are available online for free. We have several new education centers, including centers at National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Postal Museum and National Museum of Natural History's *Q?rius*, our new 10,000-square-foot science education center for teenagers. And there are more to come. In addition, our digital badging program (similar to merit badges in Scouting) is called Smithsonian Quests. This exciting new digital tool motivates young learners by helping them build skills, explore their interests, and try out new Smithsonian-inspired roles. The program now has more than 4,000 registered users from all 50 states and more than 50 countries. In addition, this year we piloted a first-of-its-kind collaboration with the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Reception Rooms to create two

digital badge opportunities under the Inter-Agency Collaboration on Education's "Declaration of Learning" initiative.

We continue to digitize our objects, specimens, archival materials, and library books. So far, our museums and libraries have created digital images for 2.2 million objects, specimens and books, and electronic records for 25 million artifacts and items in the national collections. Our archives have created 3.5 million digital images, and have electronic records for close to 100,000 cubic feet of archival material. Our new Transcription Center, with over 5000 volunteers, has transcribed 49,000 pages of data in the last year and a half alone. Furthermore, we are implementing conveyor-belt technology to digitize full collections. The Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery released their entire collections online in January 2015, providing unprecedented access to one of the world's most important holdings of Asian and American art. "Open F|S" (Freer/Sackler) is free to the public and allows access to most of the 40,000 artworks, in high resolution and without copyright restriction. Approximately 73 percent of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum's collections are now available online. These efforts establish the Smithsonian as a leader in digitizing our nation's intellectual capital and cultural heritage for future use.

Digital technology allows us to reach new, diverse audiences more than ever before. Our more than 200 websites attract 100 million unique visitors, and, in social media, we have 6.6 million followers on Facebook and Twitter alone, with tens of thousands more engaging with us on other online platforms.

As part of our work to broaden access to the nation's treasures, a new report, *Delivering on the Promise of the Digital Smithsonian*, outlines the action agenda we have set for the digital arena. It highlights the Institution's major priorities: 1) use technology to enhance the in-person visitor experience; 2) digitize the collections; 3) make Smithsonian digital content easy for the public to find and use; and 4) spark engagement and participation among learners everywhere.

The Smithsonian takes collections stewardship very seriously, as stated before this Committee at a hearing two years ago. Since that hearing, the Smithsonian has made many improvements. We recently concluded an in-depth study of collections space needs and published the results in *Securing the Future for Smithsonian Collections: Smithsonian Collections Framework Plan (2014)*. The Plan documents requirements to add new collections storage space and improve existing space and sets out a multi-year plan to improve and expand space for collections across the Institution, including a variety of storage spaces and related laboratory and processing spaces. Implementing the plan will require authorization for construction of new facilities and renovations and improvements to equipment in existing facilities, which we expect to send to this Committee this year.

The National Air and Space Museum opened in 1976, almost 40 years ago. Hosting an average of 7 million visitors annually, it is the most visited museum at the Smithsonian and second most visited museum in the world according to Time magazine. Its major building systems are at the end of their useful lives, and we have long anticipated a major

renovation project there. The early phase of design for the renovation revealed that we also have a major problem with the building's exterior envelope. The building's exterior cladding system, made of Tennessee marble (limestone), has exhibited signs of degradation in several locations and careful forensic analysis has determined that the stone panels must be replaced. In addition, the Sustainability and Exterior Envelope Studies found that the combination of deficiencies in the exterior envelope, the age and condition of the existing HVAC systems, and the higher-than-designed-for visitation all contribute to the building's energy inefficiency and create unacceptable interior environmental risks for the public, staff, and collections. The President's FY 2016 Budget requests \$34.65 million to start addressing these issues at the Air and Space Museum and includes pre-construction activities required for collections care and design work for the exterior shell of the building.

In addition to the National Air and Space Museum, many of the Smithsonian's buildings are old, historic, and reaching the age where significant renewal is necessary. The Arts and Industries Building shell revitalization project replaced the roof and windows and incorporated some structural improvements. However, much interior work remains. In the Freer Gallery of Art, we are upgrading the humidification system, which is unreliable and frequently fails, putting collections at risk for loss or damage. At the National Zoo, among other improvements, we continue to install the smoke evacuation system in the animal facilities, and increase traffic and pedestrian safety. Those are just some of the improvements we are making. Continued maintenance and revitalization of Smithsonian facilities are necessary to ensure optimal stewardship of the Nation's Treasures and a safe, secure, and healthy environment for our millions of visitors and our employees. Our budget requests \$200.0 million for major renovation projects.

Last year we briefed this Committee on the Smithsonian National Zoological Park and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, our stewardship of our important collection of animals, and our research and conservation efforts in support of our mission to save species from extinction. In the past 18 months we have had more than 200 successful animal births. Among those births are four lion cubs, six lions, two spectacled (Andean) bears, and a grey seal. All are doing well. Our panda cub, Bao Bao, celebrated her first birthday last August; we added a new female Asian elephant, Bozie; and welcomed three new Asian elephants from the Calgary Zoo in Alberta, Canada, expanding our herd to seven. We have hired additional highly qualified specialists, including veterinarians, conservation specialists, animal keepers, biologists, and nutritionists to ensure the safe care of our animals. Communication among animal care staff is more effective due to enhanced procedures now in place. We recently completed a construction project in the Cheetah Conservation Station that will improve the functioning of the animal doors and gates, and improve the fencing around the hornbill/lesser kudu (formerly wallaby) yard. In addition, we are implementing an extensive review of our animal pre-quarantine checklist, which will put measures into place to ensure that animals will only enter the quarantine at the zoo once their exhibit area is complete. We are committed to excellence in maintaining the highest standards of animal welfare and safety.

With the continuing support of the Congress, the Administration, our Board of Regents, and the American people, we will open more doors in the future — such as the new National Museum of African American History and Culture currently under construction and scheduled to open its doors in the fall of 2016. We have maintained a tradition of serving our nation and the world as a source of inspiration, discovery, and learning. Today, with our free museums, distinguished research and scholars, iconic American treasures, and the vast array of information accessible from its websites, the Smithsonian remains a valuable resource for the American people.

We can do all this thanks to 6,400 dedicated employees, including award-winning scientists and scholars, curators, researchers, historians, and experts in fields from astrophysics to zoology, and 5,500 generous on-site volunteers, 340 research fellows, 935 research associates, 420 interns, and 5,000 digital volunteers— brain power that benefits the Smithsonian and the world many times over. They all care deeply about their work and the Smithsonian. That is why the Smithsonian was, for the fifth year in a row, ranked as one of the best places to work in the federal Government.

The Smithsonian is more innovative, disciplined, focused, nimble, and self-reliant than ever before. We are determined to expand access to new and diverse audiences, in keeping with our original mission. As we face both exciting new opportunities and imposing challenges, we will continue to take full advantage of our many strengths and carefully steward the critically important resources provided by the federal government.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity and look forward to your questions.