

Statement of Lonnie G. Bunch, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
On the Fiscal Year 2021 Request
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives
March 12, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to speak with you about the Smithsonian's FY 2021 budget request. This is the first time I've appeared before this committee to share my vision for the Institution and provide an overview of our priorities for fiscal year 2021 and the future.

A Vision for the Smithsonian's Future

History has an extraordinary power to contextualize and help us understand our current moment in time. As a historian, in my varied roles at the Smithsonian, and now as its Secretary, I have witnessed what an immense gift the Smithsonian has been to our nation and our world. We are grateful for the long-standing support that we have received from the American people, Congress, and the Administration that has enabled the Institution to fulfill its mission to increase and diffuse knowledge.

The Smithsonian represents much more than history. We have always proudly looked toward the future, examining contemporary developments and contemplating their potential effects on our future. We represent a balance between tradition and innovation: honoring the past while actively making an impact on the present and future with world-class scholarly and educational achievements. As we at the Smithsonian prepare to celebrate our 175th anniversary in 2021 as well as the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026, we see the incredible opportunities that lie ahead of us. We will use our vast repository of treasures, research, data, and scholarship to improve communities locally and globally, embodying the promise of "greater reach, greater relevance, and profound impact" embedded in our strategic plan.

Greater Reach

A key component of having greater reach is expanding the Smithsonian's transformation as a virtual museum. Nothing replaces the authentic objects we display, but by using all the digital tools available to us, we can ensure that our treasures reach millions across the country and the globe who cannot visit us in person. We have already done impressive work in the digital realm. In FY 2019, our websites attracted more than 154 million visitors, we had more than 17 million social media followers, and our Smithsonian podcast *Sidedoor* has been downloaded more than 3 million times by people in all 50 states and more than 146 countries.

For years, we have digitized our objects, specimens, archival, and library materials to make them more accessible to the public. Our museums and libraries create digital images that now total nearly 5 million objects, specimens, books, and electronic records for more than 32 million artifacts and items in the national collections. Our Digitization Program Office, now in its eleventh year, creates 3D digital images of objects in our collections that people can access, explore, and even print, such as the Apollo 11 command module, *Columbia*. And in February, we announced Smithsonian Open Access, an initiative that removes copyright and other restrictions from about 2.8 million of the institution's digital 2D and 3D collection items, nearly two centuries of collections data, as well as research data sets, making them available in the public domain. People everywhere will be able to download, share, and transform this content for any purpose, for free, without further permission.

To expand on these efforts, I envision an Institution-wide initiative that will allow audiences to experience our world-renowned scholarship, research, and collections in new and exciting ways. This initiative will be organized around themes such as democracy, race, innovation, and identity. By seeking out more innovative partnerships that leverage state-of-the-art resources, we can scale up our use of groundbreaking technology and reach new audiences worldwide.

Greater Relevance

One of the Institution's greatest strengths is our ability to engage people in meaningful dialogue. The National Museum of African American History and Culture exemplifies that capacity. Since its inception, the museum has fostered a national discussion about issues of race, identity, and community that resonates with modern audiences. It has held a symposium that examined the legacy of Civil War monuments and racialized mascots. It has inspired the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department to implement training at the museum to help all its officers improve community relations between police and citizens. Other Smithsonian projects are helping expand the ways museums can address social issues. In March 2019, the National Museum of the American Indian presented "The REDress Project," an outdoor art installation of empty red dresses to draw attention to the epidemic of missing or murdered Indigenous women in North America. And later this year, the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) is collaborating on a community-engagement project that will embark on a four-year, 40-city tour to raise awareness about the science and history of implicit bias.

Across the Smithsonian, we can build upon projects like these to have a greater influence on the national discourse. Our world-class scholars, researchers, historians, curators, and educators work on issues as current as the new coronavirus discovered in bats, as complex as social equity, as urgent as climate change, and as profound as cultural heritage and patrimony. We have a well-earned reputation as honest brokers of knowledge across many fields of

expertise. As the leader of the largest scientific, cultural, and educational institution, I believe it is essential for us to exercise our power in ways that bring people with differing perspectives together to share big ideas. In this way, the Smithsonian can increase the public's ability to understand our universe, our history, and our shared future. Doing so will also allow us to reach a younger audience that expects us to exert our strengths for the common good.

Citizen science programs that are fundamental to climate research at our Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and Smithsonian Environmental Research Center rely on scholarship, public engagement and innovative practices. Our efforts today emerge from a long tradition of environmental research and public engagement. The Smithsonian's first Secretary, Joseph Henry, began one of the first citizen science programs in the United States, building a vast network of climate observers to record weather and storm data across the environment. That innovative spirit lives on in our Earth Optimism Summit, a collaborative effort between many of our museums and research centers and a host of external partners. This year's program will coincide with the 50th anniversary of Earth Day and will convene over 200 scientists, artists, thought leaders, philanthropists, conservationists, and civic leaders from across the political spectrum. The participants will explore solutions to global conservation problems and provide a platform to discuss ways to apply findings and replicate successes.

Profound Impact

The Smithsonian has a rich educational tradition. When the Institution was still being planned in the 1830s, there was vigorous debate about how to direct James Smithson's fortune: should his namesake institution be a university, a national library, a museum, an observatory, a publishing house, or a research facility? After a decade, the Congressional act that finally created the Smithsonian was a compromise: The Institution would eventually take on all these roles except a formal university although education has always been a key component of what we do. Despite that, the "diffusion" part of James Smithson's original vision—sharing knowledge—is still central to our mission as we continue to embody the ethos "learn something, teach something."

Today, we have many education, learning, and discovery spaces in our museums and research centers. Our Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform (LASER) program, STEM curriculum, and digital resources from the Smithsonian Science Education Center continue to support STEM teaching and learning. These programs have reached nearly 1,700 districts in every U.S. state and 29 countries since its founding. The Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access Learning Lab website offers teachers and students free digital access to more than 1 million resources from across the Institution.

We bring education directly to communities around the country in other

ways, too. For instance, Smithsonian's 217 Affiliate museums in 46 states, Puerto Rico, and Panama host speakers, traveling exhibitions, and webinars, bringing educational offerings far and wide. In FY 2020, SITES will take 39 large and small exhibitions to regional museums and provide educational materials to schools and libraries in 157 communities nationwide.

Building on our extensive history, vast resources, and sterling reputation, I plan to encourage and foster more innovative thinking to ensure that we are a national leader in PreK–12 education. My goal is for the Smithsonian to reach every classroom in America. Educational materials based on our science and scholarship can enhance the ways students and teachers engage in 21st-century learning. We are developing a model of education and museum cooperation through a collaboration with the Washington, D.C., public school system. Sharing that work nationwide and abroad while drawing on best practices and lessons learned will expand our impact and help us make the most effective use of our resources.

The Smithsonian's programming in 2019 underscored our incredible impact. The National Museum of Natural History opened its *David H. Koch Hall of Fossils—Deep Time* exhibition; the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative amplified the voices of women and inspired people everywhere; our Year of Music showcased our incredible music collections with daily music programming; and the National Air and Space Museum celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing with a number of magnificent events. The Institution also continued its pioneering research, exemplified by the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory-led collaborative international project, the Event Horizon Telescope, an array of radio telescopes that produced the first-ever image of a black hole, an achievement that won the prestigious 2020 Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics.

Looking Ahead

Today, I am confident that the Smithsonian's future holds the promise of even greater and more profound gifts for the American people. We can build on our impressive legacy of scholarship, collections-preservation expertise, innovative exhibitions, and education in the fields of history, the arts, culture, and the sciences to be even more relevant and valuable to audiences, scholars, and lifelong learners everywhere. To do so, however, we must become an institution that maximizes the use of technology to serve 21st-century audiences, one that applies its research and collections to help Americans better understand ourselves and the world.

Over the past seven months, I have been keenly focused on developing and outlining my top priorities for the Institution. After careful consideration, it is clear to me that in order to achieve our objectives, we need to build an even more cohesive

leadership team, one capable of focusing on our core activities, emphasizing education and science, and better integrating our work across the entire Institution.

I do not believe that our current structure maximizes our ability to achieve our goals, so I have included in the FY 2021 submission the proposed organizational structure with four Under Secretary positions reporting to the Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer. These changes will allow us to focus on our core areas of existing work, while also giving us the capability to build out new activities. With the approval of Congress,

- The new Office of the Under Secretary for Museums and Culture will oversee Smithsonian history and art museums, cultural centers, and the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Exhibits, International Relations, and the National Collections Program.
- The new Office of the Under Secretary for Science and Research will oversee the science museums and science research centers and support for research including the Scholarly Press, Libraries, and Archives. The office will focus on the Smithsonian's collective scientific efforts and commitment to research especially as we address some of the most important issues of our time such as biodiversity, global health, climate change, species conservation, space, and astrophysics.
- The new Office of the Under Secretary for Education will better position the Smithsonian's educational objectives and help us reach every classroom in our country by creating a holistic strategy for Smithsonian education. The Office of Fellowships and Internships will be added to this organization.
- The Office of the Under Secretary for Administration will oversee human resources, finance, information technology, facilities, security, audience research and Smithsonian Enterprises.
- The Office of Advancement, the Office of Communications and External Affairs, and the Director of Equal Employment and Minority Affairs will continue reporting to me. The General Counsel will continue reporting to the Office of the Secretary and the Board of Regents.

We will not accomplish as much, or be as effective, without working across organizational boundaries and I am confident this newly created structure will foster greater knowledge and collaboration, and increase communication, openness, and transparency.

I am submitting the Smithsonian's budget request in support of the goals I have described.

The Smithsonian's FY 2021 budget submission of \$1.1 billion supports this

vision. The request includes \$820 million for *Salaries and Expenses*, the appropriation that funds most of our public programming, exhibitions, research, facilities, security, and administrative support activities. This request also includes \$290 million for *Facilities Capital*, resources that fund major building revitalization projects.

The *Salaries and Expenses* increase is \$27 million above the FY 2020-enacted level. Most of the increase, \$24 million, is needed to address fixed-cost increases, such as pay for existing staff and for utilities expenses and software licensing increases. The remaining programmatic increases will directly support collections management and curation at several of our most popular museums. The additional funds will also support the Smithsonian's educational activities in science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics—STEAM—which will bring our collections and research into classrooms across the nation. Furthermore, the request will provide specialized care for our living collections at the National Zoological Park, including support of specialized habitats for our popular animal exhibits.

The request for *Facilities Capital* is \$290 million, an increase of \$36 million above the FY 2020-enacted level. Major projects funded by this include \$55 million to continue the transformation of the National Air and Space Museum on the National Mall, \$52 million to begin renovation of the Smithsonian Castle building, \$25 million for upgrades to building systems at the National Zoo, and \$16 million for major revitalization of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. The request will also address revitalization projects throughout the Institution's facilities in Washington, D.C., New York City, Arizona, Maryland, and the Republic of Panama. Furthermore, the request includes \$51 million to plan and design future projects including future work on the Castle and the Arts and Industries Building.

On the cusp of our 175th anniversary, with the continued support of the Congress, the American people, and the Administration, I have no doubt we will achieve our goals. The Smithsonian will continue to welcome everyone to learn, marvel, and imagine, using our creativity and intellectual capital for the good of society. And we will commit enthusiastically to the project of fully transforming this hallowed Institution into a place of ideas, innovation, and understanding, one in which our return on the nation's investment is proven for generations to come.