

Testimony of Ed Howell
Senior Vice President of Retail, Smithsonian Enterprises
Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Government Operations

November 14, 2013

Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing.

Smithsonian Enterprises is a division of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum and research organization. Established in 1846 with a bequest from English Scientist James Smithson, The Smithsonian currently encompasses 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoo, and nine research centers. The Smithsonian has facilities in seven states, the District of Columbia, and the Republic of Panama, and over 6,000 employees. We conduct research in more than 100 countries.

Smithsonian Enterprises operates retail, media, product development, licensing and other services that promote the Smithsonian mission while generating essential unrestricted funding for the Institution. These include museum stores, theaters, restaurants and cafés, mail order and online catalogues, book publishing, an award-winning television channel and an award-winning magazine. By providing products and services that draw from the Smithsonian's collections and the research and scholarship of our curators and scientists, Smithsonian Enterprises plays a critical role in advancing the Institution's mission: the increase and diffusion of knowledge. Smithsonian Enterprises is self-sustaining; it does not receive federal appropriations.

The Smithsonian offers food services in nine museums and the National Zoo. These consist of restaurants, cafés, and food carts operated by three independent contractors, known as concessioners.

Smithsonian Enterprises oversees the concession contracts at the museums and Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ) oversees the concession contract at the National Zoo. The concessioners pay the Smithsonian a percentage of their sales.

The concessioners are responsible for hiring and managing food service staff, purchasing all food and supplies, and meeting performance standards established in their contracts.

The Smithsonian is proud of the variety of food services offered at its museums and the Zoo. The Smithsonian food services provide food and beverage to approximately 20% of our 30,000,000 visitors each year. The variety of offerings, ranging from a hamburger and fries to cedar-planked salmon cooked over an open fire pit at the National Museum of the American Indian, is designed to appeal children, families, and adults from the U.S. and abroad.

I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.