

**Written Statement of Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution  
Oversight Hearing, Committee on House Administration  
U.S. House of Representatives  
September 18, 2019**

Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My tenure as the 14<sup>th</sup> Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution began only a few short months ago. However, my relationship with the Smithsonian spans many years. I originally joined the Smithsonian in 1978 at the National Air and Space Museum. Since then, I have served as associate director of curatorial affairs at the National Museum of American History. Most recently, I was honored to serve as founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. I am pleased and humbled to assume my role as the Secretary of this Institution, one that I love so much.

The Smithsonian greatly appreciates the continued support of Congress, the Administration, and the American people, and takes seriously the crucial role we play in advancing the civic, educational, scientific, and artistic life of this nation. This broad public support enables the Smithsonian to address important issues like the essence of the American experience, the diversity of the world's cultures, the sustainability of the planet, and the nature of the universe. It also helps us use new technologies to broaden access to the wonder of the Smithsonian for all American students, and policy makers nationwide and throughout the world. I want to express my gratitude to the Members and staff of this committee for their constant advocacy for the mission of the Smithsonian.

Our goal is to reach, in meaningful ways, at least one billion people worldwide. If we are to achieve this goal, it is critical that we develop a more cohesive institution—what we've dubbed "One Smithsonian"—using cutting-edge technology. A key component of having greater reach is continuing the Smithsonian's transformation into both physical and virtual spaces. Nothing replaces the authentic objects we have on display, but we need to reach millions who cannot visit us in person, using all the digital tools available to us. I envision a virtual initiative leveraging state-of-the-art resources and innovative partnerships that will allow audiences both domestically and internationally to experience our scholarship, research, and collections in new and exciting ways, organized around themes like democracy, race, innovation, or identity. I am committed to achieving this goal while protecting and securing our digital assets and those of the users of our technology. It is important that we do all we can to provide access especially to traditionally under-served populations.

If we are to fully serve 21<sup>st</sup>-century global audiences, we will have to be more inclusive, more accessible, and more diverse. Cultural institutions are uniquely equipped to inspire, and we can magnify that ability when we truly reflect the rich tapestry of humanity. The Smithsonian is committed to increasing, attracting, and developing a diverse and talented workforce. Whether

focusing on leadership employees, volunteers, fellows, or interns, diversity and inclusion are paramount to the future of the Institution.

A critical part of making museums more diverse is to include traditionally under-represented stories. Specifically, highlighting the stories of American women, Latino Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans is vital to fulfilling the Smithsonian's purpose. Based on the success of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, we know that visitors to our museums and websites are best served by seeing American history through many lenses.

I am pleased that Congress has supported the goal of telling more expansive and representative stories. The Institution is committed to making every single Smithsonian museum more inclusive and representative of the nation's population. Under my leadership, we will continue to prioritize diversity in our collections, archives, exhibitions and programming.

As you well know, bills to establish a Latino American and American Women's History museums are pending before this Committee. If Congress deems it in the public interest to move forward with these proposals, it is important that any additions to the Smithsonian do not impact our existing priorities. A new museum would need funds for both the creation and long-term operations of the facilities, the care and preservation of our collections, and the on-going success of the museum.

The Smithsonian's pressing infrastructure and collections space needs demand our immediate and on-going attention. Despite our best efforts, much of Smithsonian's aging infrastructure continues to be below acceptable standards and any efforts for building and operating new physical infrastructure needs to consider this context in near and long-term. We appreciate the support of Congress, in addressing our most visible and pressing infrastructure need, the renovation of the National Air and Space Museum. Just as important, we are grateful for the on-going support of the day-to-day maintenance needs of the Institution. It is our responsibility and priority to ensure that its museums, research centers, libraries, and educational centers are maintained and cared for at a level worthy of these national landmarks. Only then can we create new museums that exceed our imaginations and build on the standards of excellence set by the Smithsonian.

We will work diligently to tell a broader and more complete narrative with the resources already at our disposal. An example of a current effort to expand inclusivity is the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, *Because of Her Story* which launched in 2018. *Because of Her Story* represents a paradigm shift - a pan-institutional embrace and celebration of women's history as an integral part of the American story. Three *Because of Her Story* exhibitions have opened this year, and five more are slated to open within the next two years. *Because of Her Story* funded 10 internships in summer 2019. Additionally, there are 14 public programs or educational efforts currently funded. This is only the beginning of a transformative way of thinking about our content. I want to thank Congress for their on-going support and commitment to this important priority.

Regarding Latino engagement, the Institution has been working diligently for more than twenty years to increase the Latino presence throughout the Smithsonian's museums, collections,

research, and programs. The Smithsonian Latino Center was created in 1997 to promote Latino presence within the Smithsonian. The Center is not represented in one physical location; rather, it works collaboratively with the Institution's museums and research centers, ensuring that the contributions of the Latino community in the arts, history, national culture, and scientific achievement are explored, presented, celebrated, and preserved.

Our museums and programs have increased their collections and mounted scores of exhibitions and programs that relate to Latino American history. Currently, the Smithsonian Latino Center is preparing to unveil the first Latino gallery to open on the National Mall. The new permanent Molina Family Latino Gallery will open in the National Museum of American History in the fall 2021. You may be interested in knowing that the Latino Center currently has fifteen curators and nine curatorial assistants who we have added to our Museum staff in the last several years. We expect that many more diverse staff will be added in the future.

The Smithsonian also founded the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) in 1997 which has served to further the inclusion of Asian Pacific Americans across the Smithsonian's collections, research, exhibitions, and programs. APAC aims to bring the diversity and complexity of Asian Pacific America—the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. with a population of almost 20 million—to the Smithsonian. APAC is currently fundraising for the first gallery dedicated to Asian Pacific American history, art, and culture in the Smithsonian.

The Smithsonian has a long history as both a research institution and trusted educational resource. When we were founded, there was discussion about whether we would be established as a university. Ultimately, that did not meet James Smithson's vision to create an Institution for the increase and diffusion of knowledge. We had to be a unique establishment, dedicated to making new discoveries and educating the public about them.

Our work to increase knowledge is never ending. Earlier this year, the entire world shared in a moment of discovery as the first image of a black hole was revealed. You may not know, that the Smithsonian was at the center of this advancement in astrophysics. The global team responsible for this breakthrough was built and directed out of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory. Back on Earth, Smithsonian researchers are leaders in conservation biology. We are conducting groundbreaking research in marine and terrestrial environments alike, reintroducing animals that had been extinct in the wild to their native habitats and creating an unmatched resource for understanding life on our planet through our collections.

As we continue to make new discoveries, we must be sure to share them with future generations. To that end, I plan to reimagine the Smithsonian's role in a lifelong learning by becoming a national leader in pre-K-12 education. I believe as an educational organization we have an obligation to make education a priority. Already, we create educational materials based on our science and scholarship that enhance the ways students and teachers engage in 21st-century learning. Smithsonian education materials are used by teachers in all 50 states, but we can do more. We are developing a model for the future of education through a collaboration with the Washington, D.C. public school system. In time, we plan to share our model on a national and international stage.

Museums are more important now than ever because of their unique ability to serve as trusted sources of information that expand cultural and scientific understanding. Museums also have the power to convene. They can be incredibly dynamic places that provide opportunities to discover, to learn, and to have fun. Museums also have the capacity to be places of dialogue, public engagement, and discourse.

One of the Institution's greatest strengths is its potential to engage people in discourse around important and contemporary issues. By bringing people together and positioning our Institution as a hub of ideas and innovation, the Smithsonian has the opportunity to maximize impact on a larger scale and deeper level. We want people to see the Smithsonian as a tool to help them understand their universe, their history, and our shared future in order to live better lives. It is incumbent upon us as an Institution of this caliber to be a more universal resource, one that earns the American people's trust in us and leverages our great convening power to increase our relevance and resonance.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.