

**Senate Committee on Rules and Administration**  
**Testimony**  
**Smithsonian Institution**  
**Acting Secretary Cristián Samper**  
**12 December 2007**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify again before the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration.

The debate and counsel of the Congress have helped to shape the Smithsonian even before its founding in 1846—and does so to this day. I believe we all share the same goals: to improve the inspiring experiences the Smithsonian Institution offers to millions of visitors from across the country and around the world, to expand the important research conducted at the Smithsonian, and to preserve our nation’s greatest treasures for the benefit of future generations.

The support of the Administration and the Congress is essential to all that we do. We appreciate that support and look forward to working with members to make the Smithsonian even stronger in the future. The Institution does face serious challenges, but working together I believe we can find solutions.

The Smithsonian has been a public-private partnership since its establishment 161 years ago, thanks to a generous bequest from British scientist James Smithson, with the mission: “the increase and diffusion of knowledge.” Since then, the Smithsonian has become the world’s largest museum and research complex. With 19 museums, nine research centers and the National Zoo, the Smithsonian stands out as a unique entity, a leader in science, history, art, and culture. As an international institution it offers the world a picture of America and America a picture of the world.

We protect our nation’s treasures: moon rocks, tiny fossils, giant squid, the Hope Diamond, Gilbert Stuart’s “Lansdowne” portrait of George Washington, the Star-Spangled Banner, the Wright Flyer and much more. Our collections document our history and heritage, and represent the natural and cultural diversity of our world. The fact is the American people trust the Smithsonian, and we are determined to honor and keep that trust.

I was asked to serve as the Acting Secretary of the Smithsonian seven months ago. It has been both challenging and rewarding, and I am confident that the reforms we are implementing will make the Smithsonian a stronger institution in the future. That is our commitment to the American people. I am pleased to report that the core mission of the Smithsonian, our work related to research, collections, outreach, and public programs remains strong. More than 24 million people from across the country and around the world came to the Smithsonian during the past year—and loved it. They were safe and secure because our top priority has always been—and will always be—the safety of our visitors and staff and the security of our nation’s treasures.

Today, I would like to address three priorities for the Smithsonian: strengthening governance, fixing our facilities, and investing in our programs.

As you know, the Smithsonian’s Board of Regents established an aggressive governance reform agenda following the problems we identified earlier this year. I am pleased to report that we have fully implemented 12 of the 25 recommendations and we are on schedule to complete the rest by early next year. These reforms include changing the structure and operations of the Board of Regents, including the creation of a new position for a Chairman of the Board, reviewing the charter and composition of all committees, and establishing an Office of the Regents separate from the Office of the Secretary.

We have taken steps to improve communication and transparency, including making minutes of the meetings of the Regents available to the public through an enhanced Web page and also holding public forums on key topics like the selection of the next Secretary. We issued a set of interim policies regarding travel and expenses,

prohibited our senior executives from serving on corporate boards, and transitioned all of our senior management to an earned leave system. We are reviewing all our financial management policies, and will be issuing a new policy for access to information by the end of the year. I have also established a Task Force to review the operation of Smithsonian Business Ventures and they will present their recommendations to the Board of Regents in January. Our goal is much more than to fix past problems, our goal is to become a leader in good governance. We are well on our way to achieving this goal.

The second major challenge is the maintenance and revitalization of our facilities. This issue concerns not only the buildings themselves, some of which are priceless national treasures in their own right, but more importantly the fact that the buildings enable us to conduct research, look after our national collections, and create the experience of a lifetime for our visitors.

This problem stems from the size, scope, and history of the Institution. As I mentioned, the Smithsonian is the largest museum and research complex in the world, with 19 museums, nine research centers, the National Zoo, more than 137 million objects and specimens, more than 700 structures, and 11 million square feet of space. With more than 6,000 employees, 5,000 volunteers and millions of visitors, the Smithsonian is the size of a not-so-small town, with all the attendant challenges. Most of our facilities are located on or near the National Mall and in the Washington metropolitan area, but we also have research facilities in many other locations around the United States and the world. We have National Historic Landmarks, research labs, collections storage areas, office buildings and a wide array of other structures, all possessing a unique set of challenges. Many of these buildings are several decades old, some more than 100 years old. It has also become clear to me that the Institution has not invested enough in maintenance, even as we continued expanding our museums and infrastructure over the last 40 years.

The Institution currently uses federal funding to respond to the highest priority needs: those that could threaten public safety, cause damage to collections, or pose significant limits on public access or operability. This focus leaves out the necessary routine maintenance that prevents small problems from growing into big ones that ultimately cause more damage and cost more to fix, and delays the planned replacement of aged building systems before they reach the breakdown stage. Over the last five years, our obligation rate for facilities capital projects has averaged above 90 percent; while the obligation rate for facilities maintenance (one-year appropriation) has been greater than 99.9 percent. This shows that with current funding levels, the Smithsonian has managed to resolve a number of significant facilities problems.

The Arts and Industries Building on the National Mall is a perfect example of the larger problem. We made the difficult decision to close that building due to safety concerns. We are examining solutions to this challenge and plan to reopen this historic building, but it will cost more than \$75 million alone just to fix the shell and roof of the building. As you know, we have issued a public call to interested private entities to partner with us to renovate the building and return it to public use, in a manner that would be compatible with our mission and advance our programs.

The Smithsonian has taken important steps to address the facilities problem in recent years and we have made significant progress. In 2004 we established a central Office of Facilities Engineering (OFEO), greatly improving efficiency and coordination of our efforts in this area. We are pleased that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has recognized the significant progress to date. This reinvigorated structure has enabled OFEO to perform a critical assets inventory of more than 10,000 operating components, each with work plans, to enable our use of a Reliability Centered Maintenance approach. This has resulted in a reduction in failures of major equipment by 20 percent. We have also initiated a massive energy conservation effort that has resulted in more than \$5 million in savings during the past 18 months. These successes led OFEO to be named the 2006 National Winner of the APPA (*Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers*) Award for Excellence in Facilities Management and enabled the Institution to achieve the highest rating by OMB on the

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) evaluations for both the Facilities Capital and the Facilities Operations and Maintenance programs.

We have made substantial investments in the revitalization of some of our existing facilities, creating better conditions for the storage of our collections, the display of our exhibitions and the safety of our staff, volunteers and visitors. For example, this year we completed the expansion of our Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland, for biological collections preserved in alcohol. This will enable us to move approximately 15% of our collections to a state-of-the-art facility. Last year we completed the renovation of the Patent Office Building, home to the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery at the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture. This six-year renovation represents an investment of \$ 283 million, of which \$117 million has come from private sources.

The most recent report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Smithsonian Institution: Funding Challenges Affect Facilities Conditions and Security, Endangering Collections* reiterated our progress in many areas, but also identified three areas where we need to make improvements. These relate to improving communication with museum directors about security in our buildings, showing the investments from private funds in our facilities in our budgets and examining different ways to secure the funds to tackle the facilities problem. We have accepted all three recommendations and are taking steps to address them. It is my hope that we can continue to work constructively with the Congress to solve these problems—and also build on the excellent work that continues at the Smithsonian but doesn't make headline news.

Given our many buildings, the Smithsonian's safety record is outstanding. The Smithsonian's Office of Protection Services (OPS) and the professional security officers that make up its force are directly responsible for the safety and security of the people and collections that are housed in our buildings. Incidents of theft and other crimes, while regrettable, are extremely rare, as evidenced by our Total Recordable Crimes Rate, which is well below the average for museums and zoos. Responses to emergencies are swift and professional, such as the 2006 mall-wide evacuation that required Smithsonian security personnel to shelter-in-place thousands of people fleeing a Fourth of July thunderstorm. And design elements and planning for natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other major incidents are done to the highest standards, leading other organizations to cite our Glass Hazard Mitigation Program and our Mall-Wide Perimeter Barrier program as benchmarks in the field.

But despite the progress we have made, there are major challenges ahead. The Institution's FY 2007 appropriation provided \$99 million for facilities revitalization and \$51 million for maintenance, for a total of \$150 million. The National Academy of Public Administration recommended annual funding of \$150 million for facilities revitalization and the National Research Council recommends a minimum of \$100 million a year for facilities maintenance – for a total investment of \$250 million a year to repair and maintain Smithsonian facilities

The Board of Regents has established a Facilities committee to address this problem. This committee has been working closely with our staff since last June reviewing multiple options to secure additional funds for the facilities challenge, including a national fundraising campaign, a federal income tax check-off contribution, and a facilities revitalization bond, among others. You will hear an update on the work of this committee from Regent Robert Kogod at this hearing.

This brings me to the third challenge for the future of the Smithsonian: investing in our programs. The mission of the Smithsonian is “the increase and diffusion of knowledge,” in diverse fields like science, history and art. We achieve this mission by expanding our collections to adequately document our history and heritage, as well as the natural and cultural diversity of our world. We use these collections to ask new questions and generate knowledge through the research of our scholars. We then share these collections and ideas with millions of people across America and the world through our publications, exhibitions, Web pages and partnerships with other institutions.

We have been fortunate to secure substantial funding to support our programs thanks to the generosity of individuals, foundations and companies. During this past fiscal year we secured more than \$160 million for specific projects in education, research and collections. We also secured an additional \$100 million in grants and contracts to support our work, primarily in the area of astrophysics. This means that every year the Smithsonian generates 30% of its operating budget from sources other than our annual federal appropriation.

As a person who has led one of the major Museums of the Smithsonian for the last four years, the National Museum of Natural History, I know that investing in our exhibits and research is absolutely crucial to fulfilling our mission and maintaining the Smithsonian as a vital and vibrant institution into the future. We will need to raise substantial private funds in the coming years to replace outdated exhibits and scientific equipment, and to make up for many years of erosion in these areas. These funds will support the activities at our museums and research centers and are absolutely essential to our future. I mention this because I am concerned that most of the attention has been placed on fixing our facilities, and not enough on investing in the programs at the core of our mission. There is no point in having beautiful facilities if they are going to be hollow inside. We need to invest in our physical and intellectual infrastructure. We must continue to attract the best minds in the world: the brightest scientists, educators, art historians, astrophysicists, scholars, and curators. These people bring our collections to life, reach out to visitors from around the world, and explore the world to create new knowledge.

The Smithsonian would not be what it is today without the generous support of the Administration, Congress and the American people. The Smithsonian traditionally looks to the private sector to help fund exhibitions and research, while the federal government generally assumes responsibility for the infrastructure and maintenance. This dual responsibility ensures the integrity of the Smithsonian's intellectual pursuits and ensures its independence.

The challenge ahead is enormous. It will require a true partnership where the Smithsonian, the Administration and the Congress work together to address both the needs of the facilities and the activities that take place inside them. We will continue working hard to secure the funds necessary to carry out our mission, including designing and launching a national campaign to appeal to the American people for additional support. When a donor gives the Smithsonian and the American people his or her valuable objects and treasures reflecting the patrimony of the nation, it does so assuming that the nation will protect those treasures. It is the federal support that enables us to leverage funds from the private sector.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the Smithsonian has been a public-private partnership from its inception in 1846. When Congress decided to establish it as a trust instrumentality of the United States, it recognized a unique role for the Smithsonian in American society. The Smithsonian is the repository of our nation's values, icons, memories and aspirations. For 161 years, the Smithsonian Institution has built the national collections, disseminated innovative research, and welcomed millions of visitors to its museums, creating a reputation so strong that the Smithsonian is known as a symbol of America throughout the world.

At a time when globalization is bringing countries and peoples closer together, at a time when there are growing tensions among some cultures, at a time when the image of America abroad may be questioned by some, the Smithsonian has an important role to play, to show another face of America, an institution driven by the desire to increase and disseminate knowledge among humankind.