



Smithsonian Institution
The Board of Regents

E-MAIL COMMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE REGENTS' REQUEST FOR PUBLIC INPUT AT THE NOVEMBER 17, 2008, ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS

Thank you for your interest in and support for the Smithsonian. At the first annual public meeting of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents on November 17, 2008, the Board expressed its strong desire to receive candid and constructive feedback from the Smithsonian's stakeholders. At that time, the Smithsonian also provided a designated e-mail address — comments@si.edu — to support this important dialog. The comments and questions received to-date, as well as some responses, are provided below.

The purpose of this forum, however, extends beyond exchanges of information between the Smithsonian, its governing Board of Regents, and the Institution's stakeholders. Your comments will inform the creation of the forthcoming Smithsonian Strategic Plan. As the Institution embarks upon its Strategic Planning Process, your input will be critical to the development of a successful strategic plan that is overarching, flexible, and designed to firmly establish the Smithsonian as the current and future leader in our nation's initiatives to explore its scientific and cultural explorations and history.

This is not a static document. Responses will continue to be added — and new submissions are welcome. Thank you again for sharing your time and your thoughts.

ADMISSION FEES

[Question] *The Institution — and the U.S. Congress — must finally realize that a nominal admission fee should be charged for admission to the Smithsonian museums. There could be a fee for one-day admission to all facilities, a weekly pass, family pass, etc. If this were to happen, the parking fees at NZP and the NASM annex at Dulles would have to be modified to account for the admission charges. I am a retired Smithsonian employee. I do not have a lot of extra money, but I do realize that the luxury of free admission must become a thing of the past.*

[Response] As indicated at the public meeting, several Regents expressed the opinion that the museums should remain free to all Americans and visitors.

LICENSING SMITHSONIAN NAME

[Comment] *I am responding to your solicitation of comments on the challenge to the Smithsonian Regents of limited resources, including appropriateness of vehicles that attract additional resources. The opportunity given to many, many of our nation's schoolchildren to visit Washington DC — to see our national museums and national monuments — is a fine thing. I see them by the hundreds on the National Mall and their interest and pleasure in their visit is apparent. However, it is not fine that the Smithsonian Institution has a non-competitive contract giving one travel agency exclusive use of the*

Smithsonian name — a contract that financially advantages this travel agency over all other travel agencies offering student tours to DC. I hope the Regents will discontinue this practice. The Smithsonian Institution is functionally and legally a body of the federal government. For this reason, it is highly inappropriate for the SI to grant exclusive use of its name to any organization operating an enterprise that benefits financially from this exclusive right. I will attend your annual public meeting and look forward to hearing the discussion of this and other related matters related to your strategic planning initiative.

TECHNOLOGY

[Question] *In the digital age, museums and libraries are reinventing themselves to engage their audiences 24/7 in continuous learning. Forward-thinking organizations have reorganized their entire operation to become user-centric. They emphasize what the user will be able to do with their collections. Further, they are creating digital experiences that connect their audiences directly to collections and staff expertise. Fundamental changes such as these require rethinking the entire organization, from staff assignments to infrastructure. How will our strategic planning process similarly address our fundamental purpose and our role as an educational institution? In fifty years, if Smithsonian education is very successful, what would you hope to see?*

[Question was referred to Ann Speyer, Chief Information Officer, who responded as follows]

Let's take the second part of that question first. In fifty years, we would like to see Smithsonian openly share its authority with our users, allowing them to experience our collections and research, participate first hand, virtually if not physically, such that it is an integral part of the everyday operations at the Institution. We echo Secretary Clough's statement that it is no longer acceptable to share only one percent of our 137 million specimens and artifacts in an age when the Internet has made it possible to share it all—and to do so globally. And by sharing, we need to offer our visitors ways to enhance knowledge of Smithsonian collections and research in a rich dialog among the Institution's staff cutting across disciplines, external colleagues in an equal and dynamic collaborative manner, and with the general public sharing not only the collections of the Nation but also our expertise as an exchange of ideas.

It is difficult to predict what technological opportunities will exist in fifty years, but looking at recent trends what we can predict is that our world-wide public will not be satisfied with passively receiving our knowledge, and that this audience will be actively participating in both the creation and diffusion of knowledge that originates from the activities of the Smithsonian. The technology will exist for us to embrace this challenge, however as you pointed out in your question, we will need to re-engineer the Smithsonian from staff assignments to infrastructure in the near future to maintain our pre-eminence.

While we need to recognize the strengths of our many disciplines across the Institution, we need to balance these with opportunities to present a unified one-Smithsonian presence to make the biggest impact in learning that is 24/7, and seeps into every day aspects of life. Today the public views the Smithsonian brand as an authority, with a reputation for quality and trustworthiness, that we will want to live up to in the decades to come. We will require the culture across the Smithsonian to become more collaborative both internally, as well as externally; and also to be less risk adverse trusting that the public can differentiate between well vetted information, and that which is raw and open to debate. This global openness which is emerging with the growth of the Internet, in five decades will have spread to our physical venues as well in ways that we can begin to explore through the strategic planning envisioning workshops.

We will need to make the experience with the Smithsonian as a social network experience, both virtually and in person. The Internet has enabled institutions to become a part of the people's social network. Today, the Smithsonian needs to regain its leadership position in its broader communities. We have a clear opportunity for us to lead, not necessarily because we are at the cutting edge, but because if the Smithsonian takes the lead others will follow.

This is where today's strategic planning efforts, and the first part of your questions, will be significant in laying a foundation that will serve us well in the next fifty years. The Regents encourage bold thoughts and actions from you to close the gap between what we are today, and what we want to be. There is a current gap forming between what public wants to believe the Smithsonian offers as lead cultural institution, and what it really can offer via its programs and collections. Closing this gap will require a strategic position for our virtual self in relation to our other activities, programs, etc. The roadmap that comes out of the strategic planning process needs to be actionable to get us from strong individual units, to strong unified programs cutting across disciplines and divisional lines.

[Question] *The web has radically transformed the way that people look for, use, and experience information. Yet a relatively small percentage of our staff members have up-to-date technological expertise; even fewer know how to build, test, and maintain web sites and web applications. How can we meet the imperative to become more technologically savvy as an Institution?*

[Question was referred to Ann Speyer, Chief Information Officer, who responded as follows]

A cultural change at the Smithsonian will be required if we are to become technologically savvy as an Institution. The biggest challenge will be changing staid work practices while adopting the opportunities presented by technology. The technology exists and can be one of many transformative agents led by the content developers, who for the most part today need to be educated to embrace participatory social networking technologies, and mobile technologies. When choosing to embrace these technologies, often the biggest challenge is "what do I want to say?" "how do I convey, persuade or defend the ideas I hold?" or "who should I be collaborating with, to maximize the gain in my efforts?" These questions the Smithsonian's staff is uniquely qualified to answer. The Institution has insights and knowledge the world needs to hear. We have the skills in explaining, confirming, refuting, and reiterating on an encyclopedic range of topics as we've done for over 162 years.

We have long created and fostered communities of interest, and will be well served in continuing to do so. But we may need to redefine who these communities of interest are today. There is room online for both niches and wider audiences. Technology can enable us to do both very well with the right intellectual resources behind them, as we develop a staff and IT infrastructure that are nimble to seize opportunities.

One of the most fundamental developments fueling the rise of Web 2.0 technologies is their ease of use. We need to provide staff such as curators, researchers, educators, museum specialists, in addition to web practitioners exposure and training to new technologies such as blogs, wikis and social computing technologies – to build content, to access it themselves, and to put it out there. Staff are already doing this in pockets across the Smithsonian-- but they are few in number, not positions holding content (at least in numbers too few), and not well distributed throughout the Institution. So we'll need to provide training in non-traditional ways using peer-to-peer, online user friendly, and just-in-time training that quickly provides skills.

Admittedly, IT professionals will be needed to help inform of technical possibilities and provide support and basic systems, as warranted to enable these new technologies. While the Smithsonian already has a large and interested community of computing professionals who are doing just that, we need more IT staff to serve as internal consultants. All of the above will drive the need for additional content development and IT staff.

OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

[Comment] *Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I am a Smithsonian Resident Associate and have been a Contributing Friend of the Smithsonian. I believe that the most important task, facing the Secretary and the Board of Regents, is to restore the public's trust in the leaders of the Smithsonian. The November 8, 2008 letter from Secretary Clough to the Friends of the Smithsonian talked about visiting the museums and developing a strategic plan. There was no mention about the need for more accountability and meaningful oversight to ensure that the mismanagement of resources, that occurred in the recent past, at the highest levels of the Institution, will not be repeated. It is very distressing for those of us who have financially supported the Smithsonian over the years, to read that the Inspector General's Office characterized the Institution's oversight, of the expenditures of one of its museum Directors, as "anemic". I believe that the Contributing Friends are owed an apology for being asked over and over for "much needed" contributions, while Smithsonian officials, at the highest levels, were misusing public funds. I suggest that one way for the Smithsonian to increase revenue and better use its limited resources to serve the public, would be to implement a system of management controls, to ensure that none of the funds that the Institution receives is wasted. The development of such a system of management controls should be incorporated, as a goal, into the Institution's Strategic Plan.*

[Comment] *The Smithsonian Institution is a great scientific entity, but it has been pathetic lately in its governance. The Board of Regents has failed in its duty to hire and supervise executives capable of managing the institution in an ethical and professional manner. [Mr. Small] The previous Secretary is a prime example of oversight failure. The head of the National Museum of the American Indian is another oversight failure. There are others too numerous to mention here. We do not need prima donnas, who believe that they have the right to use the Institution's treasury of tax-payers dollars and Associate donations for their personal comfort. SUGGESTIONS:*

- 1) I am sure that we Associates would like to hear what the new protocols are for safeguarding the Institution from a repeat of these abhorrent abuses.*
- 2) An effective Inspector General with the fortitude and authority to confront officials who abuse the Institution and its Associates is mandatory.*
- 3) The Regents should have open door meetings, so that the Associates and the general public may see how the Institution is being managed, and which Regents are not performing proper oversight.*
- 4) Salaries and travel expenses should be closely tied to the standards for Federal Employees of the General Service.*
- 5) A Travel Office, which monitors and approves all travel expense claims for adherence to the standards for Federal Government Employees, is mandatory.*

[Comment] *Tell me, why would a bunch of millionaires/billionaires really give a care in the world to what the public or the staff think about them and their conduct over the last 10 years? Why would they want or need our input? Do you really think Smithsonian is about to let them go when someone like Mr. Sant can give a 15 million dollar donation with out losing sleep? These are the same guys that let Larry run*

wild and destroy this institution's good name. I wouldn't give them the time of day and shouldn't be giving them this time now.

DIVERSITY

[Question] *On several occasions, the Secretary has made it known that he is committed to diversity in the Smithsonian's workforce, programs and activities. What is the Regents' position on diversity at the Smithsonian Institution?*

[Response] The Board of Regents strongly supports the goals and policies of the Secretary as laid out in his "Diversity and Equal Employment Policy Statement" dated October 1, 2008. Link: http://prism.si.edu/oeema/sieeo/EEO_Diversity_Policy.pdf

[Question] *I am a Smithsonian volunteer of very recent vintage who was very impressed by the decision of the Board to hold an open meeting which I just watched via webcast. I was even more impressed by the able chairmanship of the meeting by Mr. Sant and the candor with which Dr. Clough answered questions. Patricia Stonesifer and Shirley Ann Jackson spoke with great clarity and understanding and were particularly impressive. I have the following comments to offer, as well as some questions:*

1) The membership of the Board, while well-qualified and committed to the mission of the Smithsonian, strikes me as a little outdated. The visual of so many older white males around the table was a bit off-putting. Can we, over time, have incoming members who represent the diversity that is America? Also, has the Board considered a student member, someone at the undergraduate or graduate level, who could bring to the Board a young, refreshing point of view? This might require a change to the Charter which would require Congressional approval. Doable? ? We have 2 new Regent nominees and are waiting for bills to be passed in Congress for them to become full Regents. One is David Rubenstein and the other is France Córdova who is currently President of Purdue University. They are both extremely capable and experienced and will bring new perspectives to the Board. There is no provision in the bylaws for a student on the Board but is an interesting idea worth exploring.

2) Continuing the diversity theme, Secretary Clough mentioned a forum, in January that would address demographics. I wasn't sure if the demographics he referred to related to the demographics of the SI staff or the visitors to the museums. Will the forum be open to the public? The Secretary convened "Smithsonian 2.0" in January which looked at how to get our collections out to more people electronically. He also has established a group to advise him on how to increase diversity among staff.

3) Regarding Secretary Clough's goal of increasing the diversity of the SI staff, I would suggest that SI's Human Resources Department reach out to groups representing Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Asian and Pacific Islanders as well as to groups such as Women in Science and Engineering. These groups tend to have job fairs and annual meetings where great connections can be made. The fact that the SI has such cachet should attract new hires. The Smithsonian's Office of Human Resources reaches out to these groups and attends job fairs, etc. and sends job notices to interested diversity groups. Individual offices can also reach out. For example, whenever there was an attorney vacancy in the Office of General Counsel, announcements were sent to diverse attorney groups to disseminate to members.

4) In a time of straitened resources, it might make sense to hire entry-level personnel to fill mid-level vacancies. The salary savings from this can be quite amazing. To the argument that every GS-12, -13,

and -14 needs to be replaced by a person at the same grade level, my experience of 28 years with the US Government has shown that young GS-7s, 9s and 11s bring with them sharp analytical and IT skills, great initiative, and a can-do attitude quite typical of Millennials and tend to give even Gen-Xers a run for their money.

5) Does the SI have an intern program where the best and the brightest from universities apply for GS-5 and -7 positions and are in a career track to a GS-12 or -13? These are excellent suggestions and I am passing them on the Office of Human Resources. There are numerous internship and fellowship programs available at the Smithsonian. Unfortunately, we currently have a hiring freeze due to the economy so there are not a lot of opportunities at the moment.

6) A questioner, on the webcast, asked about partnerships with foreign governments. I find that might prove to be an intriguing approach for the SI. Having experienced setting up bilateral relations with foreign governments, such partnerships can be extremely useful in many ways. Firstly, the program can be tailored to the needs of both countries and thus be of mutual benefit. Second, it can serve as a source of funding for the SI if the foreign government believes that the expertise of SI staff is sufficiently valuable to its national program. Thirdly, it can promote an exchange of scholars in a revenue-neutral manner. I am not familiar with the inner workings of the SI and thus may have made suggestions that are already in play. However, if they are in some way useful, I would be happy to discuss them with an appropriate person at the SI.

Regardless, I am greatly appreciative of the open meeting held by the Board, a Board that oversees a truly remarkable world-class institution.

[Responses above]

REVENUE-ENHANCING INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

[Comment] *Some changes already are afoot in response to limited resources (SI Networks' emerging media presence; contracts with foreign entities that pay the Smithsonian for training and exhibition development; alliances with academic institutions within the US and around the world that hold the promise of financial support from tuition, etc.). While these initiatives expand the Smithsonian's visibility and revenue intake, they're characteristic of a tendency at SI to embrace opportunities piecemeal, sometimes leading to independent, runaway initiatives that take on lives of their own. Even as the Smithsonian considers new ways of disseminating information and attracting new revenue, it's critical that we have the discipline to commit to a well-reasoned strategic plan that will make change meaningful for the whole and in the long-term.*

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY: ARCTIC EXHIBIT

[Comment] *I am interested to know when the Regents will release their report on the issues involving the Arctic exhibit. As a scientist I was appalled by the allegations in the Washington Post and by the response of the SI.*

[Response pending]

IMPORTANCE OF TANGIBLE COLLECTION

[Comment] *Hello — I am a newly trained docent at SAAM, and I write today to briefly describe what I feel are important things about the live docent role at art museums today. [I am an educated*

person but not an art history graduate. I have been an active docent at SAAM for a little more than a year, having received a generous and stimulating training at the museum.] Docents come off the street to the museums (by hear-say, by choice, by whim, in an open way) and then are trained by museums to be volunteer art educators. They are thus, in a sense, of the public, part of the public rather than part of the highly professional core — the staff — that is also essential to the running of a great museum. This is the most important thing about docents. Because they are often relatively recently trained, often newly and intensely interested in art, they serve a specific role as intermediaries between a restless, fast-moving visitor stream and the art. It is their role to slow that stream down — to ask each visitor to look, to think, and to ask questions — of the art, of each other, of the museum. Docents are thus hinge figures. They are both of the public and of the museum. They serve a really important role in bringing the art to the public and in bringing the public to the art. I am very aware of how technological innovation helps me today — for instance, email and the World Wide Web — but I myself feel that standing in front of a real work of art with the help of a live docent is the way to begin to see art in an alert and self-involved way. I do not feel that docents, in any financial climate, are replaceable by technology. I think that they are a very much needed human link in the flow of ideas in museums. They stand between pure thought and a restless world, and they bring the two together.

SECURITY

[Question] *I have been at the Smithsonian for 15 months as a security officer. I am often asked why we do or do not check bags in certain Smithsonian buildings. Because we are in Washington, should our security be at the highest level and for example, have all bags checked in all museums?*

[Question was referred to J.J. McLaughlin, Director, Office of Protection Services, who responded as follows]

The Smithsonian performs bag checks for visitors entering all of museums on the Mall and in New York City. Bag checks are not performed at the Reynolds Center (off the Mall) due to lack of perceived terrorist threat.

FUNDING

[Comment] *I am a volunteer docent at the National Air and Space Museum [and have been volunteering since 1992. I currently am executive director of a military related not-for-profit and have been doing this since 1995 after I retired from the Navy.] Among the many organizations, institutions and programs supported partially or entirely by the U.S. Government, I believe the Smithsonian ranks near the top of worthwhile organizations deserving of resources. In any forum, I believe you would find the general public, both U.S. and foreign, would give the Smithsonian very high marks as being a place that should be fully funded by the government. The fact that there is no admission fee always surprises foreign visitors or even U.S. visitors who are visiting the Museums for the first time.*

With the standing that the Museum has with the public and considering the other questionable things that are funded by the government, I have the following recommendations: In view of the questionable use of resources over the last many years by the management of the Smithsonian which was very well covered in the media, I believe the new leadership of the Smithsonian should exert significant efforts to demonstrate to the Regents, the government and the public at large that the Museum is a good steward of the resources provided. It is not enough that we are good stewards, it should look like we are good stewards to any observer. With the demonstration of unquestionably good stewardship of our resources, the Smithsonian should then make a strong approach for full government funding, on a continuing basis, of the Museum operations. Of the U.S. national treasures, the

Smithsonian is arguably at, or very near the top, of TRUE NATIONAL TREASURES. The collections, infrastructure and professional staff should not be allowed to deteriorate.

If the baseline of the Museum is fully funded by the government, private funding can be solicited for specialized exhibits or expansion. I know from my experience in my own not-for-profit, if there are concerns about baseline requirements, there is a temptation when private resources are offered to allow donors to dictate terms of donations beyond what we would accept if we had the baseline fully funded.

FUNDING: DONATIONS

[Comment] *I have felt for a long time that visitors to our great museums could be encouraged more pointedly to contribute to our coffers. The Newseum costs \$20; the Spy museum at least as much. It's wonderful that our museums are free to impoverished schoolchildren and individuals who can't afford more than a dollar or so, but it's also ridiculous that people making in the six figures are not at least encouraged to help out with our massive maintenance needs. I'm attaching signs from the British Museum in London, the National Building Museum here in Washington and the Metropolitan in NYC, all of which do a better job than we do in extracting money from visitors. (Yes, I know that we have places where people can put in a couple of dollars, but they're exceedingly easy to avoid and there's no imperative to contribute.) Our signs should have specific amounts as suggested donations depending on age, membership, etc.*

ATTRACTING YOUNGER AUDIENCES

[Question] *As a doctoral student who has just spent time gathering qualitative data at a number of Smithsonian museums last week, I am curious what the institution's leadership as a whole is doing to attract Young Cosmopolitans or Young Professionals to the Institution? Specifically I am talking about people in the 18–39 demographic. I am curious how the Smithsonian seeks to educate, attract and retain this demographic, as they are the next generation of museum patrons, donors and visitors.*

[Response] *The Smithsonian's workforce is a mix of age demographics which clearly helps the work we do. We plan to continue to offer fellowships and internships to attract young people who then often return as employees and research associates. We want the Smithsonian to be a vibrant place where creative, exciting things happen. In this way we will create an environment which will attract young audiences.*

[Comment] *It was a really interesting meeting today — thanks for holding it, and having it open to the public. You asked about ideas for more participation, especially for younger people. Both of my teen children are in programs run by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I know that the Smithsonian has many programs where they train volunteers, including teens — but I wonder if the Smithsonian has the resources and time to duplicate something like what is done at USHMM in their Bringing the Lessons Home program. Museum staff take the teens through the museum floor by floor over several months during Saturday morning session, and teach about the Museum — at the end of the program there is a graduation ceremony, and the teens are obligated to work as volunteer docents for one full summer. (Obviously, there are staff issues, resource issues, management issues — but USHMM is building a lifetime solidarity with their museum — not just with teens, who are primarily DC school students, but with the students' families. And USHMM can call upon the teens whenever they need extra docents.) That seems an especially likely pairing somewhere like the newly renovated American History museum. You might consider putting a local high school student on some of your advisory boards. Whatever else we might say about teens, I think we can agree that they know how to communicate. And*

I suggest a concentrated push at locals, especially federal workers, to join the Resident Associate program. (Or at least become members of the Smithsonian) My husband and I, both federal employees, are so aware of the awesome resources at our door — and we have neighbors who won't go downtown because (and I know this is not through lack of advertising) they don't know what is down there. The Smithsonian is, in addition to many other things, a lunchtime resource for the federal workforce. And if you buy gifts through the Smithsonian, you can recap your membership fee in discounts. And the program opportunities are, as you know, stunning. You could run some local media, geared toward getting locals to come to the Smithsonian. I love the Smithsonian, and am excited to see the Institution taking on its future in such a positive way.

RESOURCES: SHRINKING CURATORIAL STAFF

[Question] *There is such a shortage of federal funds that when a curator or other employee retires or dies, he or she is not being replaced. The shrinking of the staff comes at a time when there are more collections to care for and more demands on staff than ever before, creating an increasingly difficult work situation. Can the Regents foresee a way of turning this situation around? Among the new demands on the time and energies of the curatorial staff is having to make all our travel arrangements ourselves (formerly this was done by admin staff) through the widely-despised GovTrip website. The lack of admin staff for all but senior management also means curatorial and other staff are spending time researching vendors for office supplies, filling out vendor enrollment forms, completing FedEx forms, and other things that could be done by employees at a lower grade level, thus costing the taxpayers extra money and creating many frustrations among the curators, historians, archivists, museum specialists, and museum technicians. Can the Regents foresee a way of turning this situation around and securing more admin support?*

[Response] During the last decade, the Smithsonian has lost over 600 positions, curatorial as well as administrative, from both museums and core programs. These positions were lost during cuts to the units' budgets and is referred to as "base erosion." To help stem the erosion, the Smithsonian must find a way to tell its story and make the case that Federal dollars are well spent at the Smithsonian and that what we do is important. The strategic planning process, currently underway, will help by bringing in outside stakeholders who can help make the case.

RESOURCES: SAVING

[Comment] *Thank you for your request. There has been one thing I've been thinking of telling you. Each month, we get the Torch Newsletter. It is made of a heavy paper which could easily go through the mail without damage so you could save considerable money by not putting it in an envelope. The Arlington Civic Voice is printed on a finer paper and is sent through the mail without an envelope and I get it without much damage.*

[Question was referred to the Office of Public Affairs, publisher of the Torch, which responded as follows.] Thank you for your suggestion. All publications are facing increased costs for printing and distribution and the *Torch* is no exception. We are currently looking at ways to not only reduce costs but also our carbon footprint. We should be changing some of our processes within the next few months. Watch for news in upcoming issues.

PROGRAMMING

[Question] *I am the CFO of the Hip Hop Dance Association, a recently created not-for-profit organization that raises funds for hip hop dance teams, competitions, and studios. I believe my organization would help bring in a younger crowd to the Smithsonian, specifically ages 18–25, 25–30, and our youth, 17 and below. Our overall goals would help Smithsonian reduce costs for their strategic planning. I just found out about the open meeting, but cannot attend due to work obligations. Can I schedule an appointment with a Program Director or Executive Planning Director? Please advise. I would like to discuss further details about how we can attract more attention to the Smithsonian Institution. Thank you for your time!*

[Response] Museum and unit public programming contact information were provided to the author of the question.

[Question] *I believe reopening the Smithsonian Jazz Cafe will attract a "more diverse audience" to the Smithsonian and "serve(s) the public". It was a brilliant idea from the beginning, it built a strong following within the community, and it helped promote a traditionally African-American art form here in our nation's capital. The loss is still being felt throughout the metropolitan area. This should be a "no-brainer". How soon can you re-open the Smithsonian Jazz cafe? By doing so you will show this area that you are serious about your stated objectives and bring back a treasured venue.*

[Question was referred to Barbara Tuceling, Director, The Smithsonian Associates who responded as follows] I can appreciate your disappointment that the Smithsonian has made the decision to discontinue the Jazz Café. Last December, four Smithsonian offices (The Smithsonian Associates, National Museum of Natural History, National Museum of American History, and Smithsonian Folkways) joined in a pilot project starting to see if the financial situation of the Jazz Café could be improved. With changes, Jazz Café came much closer to breaking even on actual expenses than in previous years, but this did not include the staff time it takes to plan, market, and staff Jazz Café each week. Unfortunately, none of the four offices is in a position to fund this program, nor is central funding available. Without the funding, it had to be discontinued. However, the Resident Associate Program continues to offer a series of concerts by the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra as well as other jazz artists and the National Museum of American History has an office focused exclusively on jazz. Information can be found at http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/jam/jam_start.asp

EXPANSION

[Comment] *It was with great interest that I read an article in our local newspaper, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat that the Smithsonian Institution will be holding its first public meeting today and is seeking public comment. It is my understanding that you are seeking ideas from the public as you look to your strategic planning for the future of the Smithsonian. In particular, you seek ideas to improve your reach to America's diverse populations. With that objective in mind, please consider adding the goal of establishing a Smithsonian West as you plan broadly for the Smithsonian's future. While this is obviously an ambitious and expensive goal, it is also logical. The Smithsonian needs to go to where the people are since many of the people cannot afford to travel to the Smithsonian. It is not enough that the Smithsonian lends parts of its collections to affiliate museums across the country. It needs to have a permanent presence outside the East that can be a destination in and of itself. Ideally, there should be a Smithsonian West and eventually a Smithsonian Central. The Smithsonian's treasures and artifacts and the inspiration and pride they generate need to be more readily accessible to all Americans, not just those who live near your Washington, D.C. and New York City museums. Our family has traveled twice from California to visit your museums, but that travel comes at great expense. Most American families*

cannot easily afford such a trip unless they live nearby. Even when you see crowds of families visiting your museum, they represent only a fraction of the families that would be there if they could afford the funds and vacation time to go. It is my understanding that many of your treasures are stored in warehouses and rotated through your museums because there is not enough room for all to be on permanent display. A Smithsonian West would allow for more of your treasures to be displayed more regularly. We cannot build a Mount Vernon West or a Monticello West, nor can we build a Capitol West or a White House West, etc. But we can build a Smithsonian West where your exhibits can be more easily accessible to Americans who cannot afford airline tickets and hotel rooms thousands of miles across the country. Remember that Walt Disney recognized the opportunity to reach more American families by building a second amusement park in the East after seeing the success of his first one in the West. Why not follow his successful model? Thank you for your consideration, and thank you for your continued efforts to offer us more opportunities to improve ourselves at the "establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge...."

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS – FOREIGN VISITORS

[Comment] *My exposure has been primarily to Udvar Hazy in recent years so my comments pertain primarily to that site, tho they may have broader application potential. The "changing demographics" will certainly broaden the cultures and languages of our visitors and require that we be able to satisfy the majority of them without catering to any one group. I don't think that changing all the signage would be appropriate and it would be costly. Rather, perhaps, we could rent tape players and relevant tapes in a range of languages to visitors who don't speak or read English. The above suggestion could possibly be priced to be self sustaining.*

VOLUNTEER PERKS

[Comment] *I would like to propose that the Board of Regents set a policy for volunteers to be eligible for some of the perks offered to full time staff, since they frequently work shoulder to shoulder with staff and the institution could not accomplish many things without the volunteers. For example, the shopping discount and the membership in resident associates program. Although I work in Panama, I visit Washington, DC every year for a month, and use my personal time to meet with counterparts at the Smithsonian regarding the project we are collaborating on. STRI does not compensate me in any way for this interaction. But I would very much appreciate the free membership in RAP, since I could then take advantage of member's rates for RAP events during the once month when I visit DC.*

FUTURE OF THE SMITHSONIAN

[Question] *If the question has not already been asked ... how does the board envision the future of the Smithsonian in the years to come (five, ten, or twenty years from now)?*

[Question] *With the current recession we're enduring, what means does the Smithsonian Institute plan to institute to ensure its future survival? With such a splendid collection of irreplaceable artifacts on display and in archival storage it would certainly be a pity to allow degradation or destruction of these marvelous pieces to happen – I've read recently about several exhibitions being closed, never to reopen again and obviously this trend is due to the ever-growing cost of maintaining and preserving such wonderful national treasures. I'm new to the institution and I've never actually toured any of the museums, other than a brief walk-thru of The Castle and some other nearby buildings during my first week – but I can reassure each of you that I and millions of other Americans have learned to value and*

respect what this long-standing institution means to the people of America, particularly our young people. Surely our strategic plan must be developed and detailed enough to raise that funding necessary to not only keep the lights on, but to realize a resurgence of something new, something different – something truly brilliant that attracts more tourists and visitors, as well as potential stockholders, in the near future.

[Response] The Institution, spear-headed by Secretary Clough, initiated a year-long process to develop a strategic plan for the Institution. This will entail gathering input from the Smithsonian's many stakeholders including the public and will address programmatic initiatives as well as facility maintenance. The plan will be finished in the fall of 2009.

NATIONAL ZOO

[Question] *The annual public meeting is a wonderful idea! Thank you! My comment centers on the National Zoo — I am a close neighbor — next door. Why has the Zoo's 20 year plan been released to the public unilaterally, rather than as a part of an overall SI plan? The estimated cost is stated as more than a billion dollars. Where is this money coming from? I would rather see a plan that addressed such issues as the renovation of A & I — and whatever else — instead of such a piecemeal approach. Commenting on the plan specifically, the idea of overhead trams, motor driven, is absolutely awful for a residential area. The Zoo is not an amusement park! PLEASE don't allow this!*

[Answered at the meeting]

ARTS & INDUSTRIES BUILDING

[Question] *The future use of the A&I building has been a topic of on-going discussion and debate. Every year brings increasing repair costs to this building which is truly one of the Smithsonian's treasures. As such, I believe it provides the Smithsonian with an exceptional opportunity to showcase both its history and its present mission of studying and exploring our world. As a current employee I firmly believe that the Smithsonian needs to do a better job of educating the public of its history and mission — and its vital role in today's world. This has not been adequately done in the current structure of the Institution, nor do I think it is possible to do on a museum by museum basis given the disjointed nature of the museums throughout this Institution. BUT, the A&I building could make this possible. I propose that it be designated as the Museum of the Smithsonian. Its architecture lends itself beautifully to showcasing original exhibits as they were in the Institution's inception and early years. Additional new exhibits could inform the public of the Smithsonian's history, its changing role through time and its current role in research and preservation. There is such a treasure of history, characters, scientists, historians throughout the Smithsonian that would make for fascinating displays and education. What better forum exists for the public to not only be able to step back in time and see the origins of this amazing place, but then step into the present and learn what this Institution is really about and what it currently strives to do? If this building is restored to serve a need other than forwarding the Smithsonian's original mission and intent, then this Institution and its original goals and purpose need review. This building offers wonderful opportunity. Costs can be overcome with a determined purpose, but the board of regents needs to take a lead in defining this purpose and must do so in the spirit of the Institution.*

[Question] *Why is the precious space in the former Industrial Arts building (next to the Hirshhorn Museum) remaining unused? This strikes me as a terrible waste. This building is an architectural gem and certainly should not be torn down.*

[Response] One of Secretary's top priorities is the restoration of the Arts and Industries Building. Congress is also very interested in this and provided some funding to the Institution as part of the Stimulus Bill, part of which will be used to shore up the building. There are studies in the works on the best future programmatic use of the building.

LATINO MUSEUM

[Comment] *I would like to take this opportunity to respectfully request from your curatorial staff, more exhibits highlighting positive contributions from the Hispanic/Latino community in the United States. Arts organizations of your stature have a distinct privilege and responsibility to ensure that all citizens of this diverse country are equally represented. I thank you in advance for your consideration. Please keep me posted on any upcoming events, exhibits related to the Hispanic/Latino community.*

[Comment] *Good Morning... I would love to see more Latino representation at your Smithsonian exhibit. Thank you.*

[Comment] *Thank you for holding the First Annual Public Meeting. I am a proud former Fellow of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, and wrote the book Arte Latino: Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. I am a strong supporter of the Smithsonian Institution, and work in an organization that is a Smithsonian Affiliate. I am contacting you from Riverside, California with a comment: I wish to express my strong support for increasing Latino representation at the Smithsonian, and to express my strong support of the Smithsonian Latino Center. As you undergo the process of creating a Strategic Plan, please call upon me to assist you with these efforts. One day I – along with millions of other people – hope to see a Latino museum be part of the Smithsonian Institution. Thank you for your consideration.*

[Question was referred to Eduardo Díaz, Director, Smithsonian Latino Center who responded as follows] Thank you for sharing Mr. Yorba's e-mail of November 17th. Jonathan is a colleague of many years, and we in the Latino arts world know him to be a very valuable contributor to the field. That he has already done important work with the Smithsonian through *Arte Latino*, is emblematic of his commitment to our community and to this institution. Of course, we're very pleased that he advocates for increased Latino presence within the Smithsonian, the fundamental task of the Latino Center. It's great that we can count on this continuing support, especially as the institution continues with its strategic planning process. Should planning for the proposed new Latino museum point to more direct Smithsonian involvement, it will be good to be able to count on Jonathan's continued support, as outside input, especially from important local arts agencies like the one he currently heads and which serves important Latino constituencies, will be necessary to ensure the success of this effort.

MULTIPLE ISSUES

[Comment] *I am providing my comments in e-mail since I cannot attend the public meeting. I want to take this opportunity to first thank the Smithsonian's Board of Regents for holding this public meeting. It is important that the institution has recognized that it must evolve with the times, and aim to be accountable and transparent as possible. Therefore, it is my wish that these meetings be held in a public setting as often as possible. You might be interested to know that I am a young adult who is 25 years of age, and has a number of concerns with the Smithsonian. For the longest time, I felt a sense of disregard for the institution. I was embarrassed that the Smithsonian, a great cultural organization, was appearing to be second best among world class museums such as the Guggenheim, Victoria & Albert, and the Louvre. It was not doing enough to improve its reputation. The status quo position was to be accepted, and aspiring to anything better was inconceivable. I have been disappointed with the physical state of our museums, the lack of funding, and the Smithsonian's lack of accountability in an ever*

changing world. I believe there are a number of things we can do to fix these problems. If we are to renovate our museums, we must create a more effective outreach program to generate funds. Secretary Small may have broken rules during his time as Chair, but he was able to renovate, what I consider to be now the Smithsonian's hidden gem; the national portrait gallery. We must adopt better business practices so we rely less on government, and more on the public. In fact, I am in support of charging minimal entrance fees if need be so we can be a world class institution. Our museums cannot afford to look tired, and shabby. If we are to engage the public, especially those under 25 years of age, we must do a better job of keeping our museums in better shape. We must also provide better concession facilities, and dining options. Gordon Ramsay, the celebrity chef, opened up a restaurant at London's Heathrow Terminal 5. Why can we not have something similar at our museums that patrons would enjoy? Serving unhealthy foods like cheeseburgers and fries is simply not acceptable. If we are serving people in the nation's capital, then staff facing the public need to adopt a more friendly attitude too. I have often found that Smithsonian staff need training in matters of etiquette. My second recommendation is to "update" the Smithsonian logo. Our branding is outdated, and must reflect the times and new mission of the Smithsonian moving into the 21st century. I believe the Smithsonian should open a competition to "update" the logo. Everything from the logo, print materials, gift bags, promotional banners, to business cards should be revamped. I think its important that the public see that the Smithsonian is willing to evolve because it must. Lastly, I think the Smithsonian needs to recognize that the government is not forced into propping up its bank account. If you take my tax dollars, then you need to break down the wall of secrecy and act more accountable in front of the public. Hence, I applaud this first public meeting by the Board of Regents. In conclusion, I plan to visit the American History Museum next week, and I hope its just as awe inspiring as the National Portrait Gallery. Visiting the NPG a year ago, I was proud to say, for the first time, we have a great museum to go to. As for the other museums, I am not so sure, but I hope your actions will change my attitude in due time.

PUBLIC MEETING

[Comment] Just watched the Board of Regents meeting for the public. I am 72 years old and have always loved the Smithsonian and thought it was one of our finest institutions. However, having just watched the meeting, I am appalled. The last question concerning the Anacostia Museum was not only totally ignored during your supposed answer, but your chair/president also came across as unbelievably out of touch. I am glad that you all think so highly of this museum, but the questioner was asking a practical question. Why can't they sell books, pamphlets, etc., as all other SI museums are allowed to do. You all behaved as if he hadn't asked the question at all. Other questioners were given equal short shrift. I hope that your refusal to see your public as equals doesn't hurt your funding. I am sure that it will hurt your gifts.