



Jan. 26, 2009

**Installation Remarks
by Secretary Wayne Clough**

Good afternoon and thank you. Welcome to all my Smithsonian Institution colleagues and our distinguished guests. Welcome to the National Museum of the American Indian. Thank you all for being here and for the wonderful greetings you have brought to me.

This is a time of new opportunities in our nation's capital—welcome to our friends from the House and Senate. We look forward to working with you and the new administration of President Barack Obama.

We are honored by the presence of Chief Justice Roberts, the Chancellor of the Smithsonian. And, if I may, I want to thank the Chief Justice for his active involvement at the Smithsonian both at meetings and public events.

To the members of the Board of Regents, thank you for your commitment and the valuable time you have given us.

I am deeply honored and humbled to serve as the 12th Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian came into being in 1846 thanks to the remarkable bequest of James Smithson, an English scientist who never set foot in this country. It was shaped by many, but one of the most influential was John Quincy Adams, who stepped forward to speak eloquently of the Institution's potential at a time when there was debate about the ends it would serve. As he said of James Smithson's mandate, "the increase and diffusion of knowledge":

"To furnish the means of acquiring knowledge is, therefore, the greatest benefit that can be conferred upon mankind. It prolongs life itself and enlarges the sphere of existence."

Creating and sharing knowledge remains the core of the Smithsonian Institution. For 162 years, the Smithsonian has been faithful to its mission. It is now the turn of our generation to build on the work of those who have gone before us and ensure this Institution remains a great resource to our nation and the world.

Generations of Americans before us have faced difficult times. Ours too is a time of great challenge and change. The world's economy is buffeted by forces unseen since the Great Depression. Our nation's demographic mix is becoming more richly diverse. Technology and new modes of communication based on the World Wide Web are dramatically altering the way people access,

interact with and communicate knowledge. International test scores show American children falling further behind those of most of the other developed nations at the very time our competitors are focused on winning the battle for technology-based jobs. Climate change is modifying weather patterns and disrupting ecological norms. And nations are struggling to deal with entities that do not recognize traditional forms of government and civil society.

These forces are causing a sea change in our world and call for us to chart a bold path if we are to meet the challenges ahead. Long-established institutions are disappearing because they could not adapt at this crucial time in our nation's history. The historic election of President Obama brings a new administration that will take a new and fresh look at many issues facing our nation. It is our opportunity to renew the Smithsonian as well, and some would say it is necessary if we are to remain relevant.

Our goal should be no less than to build the foundation for a new era for this great Institution. The explosive growth of new communication and networking tools provides us a unique opportunity to share our vast collections and other resources in ways not possible before, with people all around the globe.

To be successful, we must be innovative, disciplined, focused, nimble and more self-reliant than in the past. We must seek excellence in all we do and build on the talents of our passionate, dedicated staff and volunteers. We have to be ready to create new partnerships and even take risks given the urgency of our task. Based on my visits to our various museums, research centers and offices, I am confident that our staff understands the Institution's potential for engaging with the world's great challenges and the need for change.

The Smithsonian has made great contributions to our nation. Conceived primarily as a science-based institution, the Smithsonian expanded its original interests to include history, arts and culture giving it a unique combination of strengths. With the help of volunteers throughout the nation gathering weather data, the first Secretary, Joseph Henry, built the foundation for the National Weather Service. The Institution developed the 19th-century fields of anthropology and archaeology; helped strengthen the nation's dominant position in astrophysics; built unmatched collections in the natural sciences as well as important holdings in history, arts and culture; developed the world's largest museum complex; and displayed the iconic objects that tell the story of what it means to be an American—to our citizens and the world.

Our collections include a remarkable 137 million artifacts, works of art and scientific specimens. The Smithsonian is steward to many of our nation's treasures that we know and love. Among them, as well, are objects that speak to our nation's unique inquisitiveness, bold vision, creativity and courage: Edison's light bulb, the Wright flyer, Lewis and Clark's compass, Colin

Powell's Desert Storm uniform, Mark Twain's self-portrait and Kermit the Frog, who was way ahead of all of us who want to be green today.

We have great resources, but we must find new ways to utilize these assets to meet the grand challenges of today and tomorrow. I believe that over the next decade, the Smithsonian will be called upon to become more deeply and more visibly engaged with the great issues of our day.

By way of example, I want to speak of three great issues, and how the Institution's role can be enhanced, enlarged and better understood by the public. These three "grand challenges" are: Education; Climate Change and Biodiversity; and American Identity and Diversity.

Education

The Smithsonian is a deeply educational institution, providing extensive informal and formal education and training for all ages. We have a significant number of programs, but it is essential to find a focus for them and to shape a common mission for the future. At the same time, by becoming an early adopter in the use of new technology, we will reach new generations and make it easier for them to reach us. The social networks that did not exist until recently (blogs, twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, podcasts, and Web cams) will become transformative agents for the Smithsonian.

We need to make our collections, talented scholars and other resources accessible worldwide by providing additional platforms and vehicles for educating and inspiring large audiences. Our job is to authenticate and inform the significance of the collections not to control access to them. It is no longer acceptable for us 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. In doing this, the relevance of the Smithsonian to education can be magnified many times over.

Technology is not our only new opportunity to shape the future of education. There have been recent studies demonstrating the power of informal education programs as well as of systemic education reform, and we have strengths in both areas at the Smithsonian. Taken together, our resources can help inspire young men and women to be the citizens who will sustain our nation's promise.

Climate Change and Biodiversity

Rising global temperatures have created changes in glaciers, oceans and coral reefs affecting far-away coastlines, flora, fauna and people. Relevant Smithsonian research illuminates past and present climate change, potential mitigation strategies and human adaptations.

Our research ranges from measuring atmospheric pollutants and greenhouse gases from space; studying the effects of increasing CO₂ gas on Chesapeake plant communities and Florida coastal wetlands; and creating vast, linked observatory networks for measuring climate change impact on flora and fauna at our centers in Virginia, Maryland, Florida and Panama and worldwide through

collaborations with others. In the North, our anthropologists collaborate with native people to understand their adaptations to increasingly unpredictable weather and shrinking sea ice.

Our strengths in this area and our convening power allowed us to recently mobilize a symposium on tropical deforestation that received media attention around the world. This exercise was illustrative of the importance of the Smithsonian in generating open debate on matters of importance to scientists and the public alike.

Through the long-standing efforts of our scientists, the Smithsonian has been among the leaders in understanding climate change and biodiversity issues. Now we need to take two more steps. The first recognizes that these problems are not simple, and that communicating the complex science behind the dynamic processes is difficult, but necessary. Now is the time for the Smithsonian to extend its reach by communicating the research in such a way so that our political leaders and the public can understand it, so that global action can be mobilized to help our planet become more sustainable. This will position the Smithsonian to increase the impact of the remarkable efforts of our scientists. The second step is to bring our world-wide commitment to sustainability to our doorstep. We will commit to an overarching approach to sustainability for our museums and facilities here on the Mall and wherever in the world the Smithsonian has a footprint or a building.

American Identity and Diversity

As our country becomes more diverse, it is important to support and strengthen the cohesiveness of our society. How can the Smithsonian help reinforce the elements of cohesiveness through our history, traditions and aspirations? Our artifacts and specimens tell wonderful stories illustrating the great American spirit. We can articulate these many stories that speak with unique power to the creative ingenuity and diversity of the American people.

Painter Robert Rauschenberg, whose works we have, once said, “The artist’s job is to be a witness to his time in history.” The Smithsonian has the best of many of those “witnesses.” We offer a world of art—Asian, Latino, American, African American—through our art collections and the many items in our Archives of American Art.

Working with others through innovative collaborations, we will clarify what America means to our own citizens as well as to those around the globe. The Smithsonian will, in this way, expand its influence and aid our country in its efforts to build alliances in support of its economic and strategic goals.

In conclusion, let me once again pose the question: How will the Smithsonian respond to the great national and international challenges of our day? Will we stand on the sidelines or will we become more deeply engaged with these challenges?

A primary obstacle I see to deeper engagement is that our present funding resources are not adequate for the needed levels of staffing and upkeep of facilities, nor will they allow us to capture new opportunities. Since it was founded, the Smithsonian has benefited from the generosity of the American people and the Congress. Today, we must be clear with the Congress on these issues and entrepreneurial with the public in seeking outside support.

Given the dire economic projections, it is difficult to see into the near future, much less the farther horizon, but this is not the time to diminish our aspirations. We have too much to offer. By dint of our own ingenuity and determined effort, and in seeking support from others, we will persevere when needed and seek opportunity when it is found or presents itself.

To prepare ourselves, we are developing a new strategic plan and this will lead to an understanding of where we should focus our efforts, where we should be prepared to adapt to new circumstances and where we can reduce duplication and build on our strengths. We should not be satisfied with simply being large. If we cannot do something within the framework of excellence, we will ask if it is worth doing.

If we do our work right, our planning process will position us for a national campaign by helping us build a powerful case statement for the campaign, as well as help to explain our relevance to the Congress and other groups, including the public.

Our process will result in regular discourse across units—allowing us to use each others’ strengths to tackle complicated issues necessitating interdisciplinary work that occurs at the boundaries between disciplines. We have some of the best minds in the country here. It is my privilege to work with them, and we must be enablers to allow them to come together in creative ways. I can assure you sparks will fly.

We can help our nation and the world face the grand challenges that lie ahead. We will work on climate change and help protect biodiversity. We will develop innovative education models to improve K-12 education, help young people and new citizens understand what it means to be an American and enhance our ability to train the next generation of scientists and scholars.

Our goal is to build the foundation for a new era for this great Institution. We do not want the next generation to look back and see that we missed our opportunity. One thousand years from now, we want people to look back and say of our time at the Smithsonian Institution: “Those folks got it right.”

Thank you.

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