

APPENDIX V

RESPONSES OF DR. I. MICHAEL HEYMAN, SECRETARY,
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY
HON. JESSE HELMS, MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON RULES AND
ADMINISTRATION

1. **Question:** Do you agree with the Commission on the Future of the Smithsonian Institution in its May 1995 report, "E Pluribus Unum: This Divine Paradox", that one of the primary goals of the Smithsonian Institution should be to "devote attention and resources to the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing facilities?"

Answer: The Smithsonian's Board of Regents, which is the governing body of the Institution, has established a Committee on Policies and Programs. Its initial goal is to review the recommendations in the Report of the Commission on the Future of the Smithsonian Institution, which was appointed by the Board of Regents in 1993. Thus, while I am happy to respond to your questions, it must be understood that these responses reflect my personal view rather than any policy direction of the Board of Regents.

With that in mind, I can say that I am in full agreement with the idea that the Institution must devote attention and resources to the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing facilities. I was a member of the Board of Regents when it approved the FY 1996 budget for the Institution that sought an increase of more than \$10 million in order to accelerate its ability to deal specifically with rehabilitation and maintenance issues.

2. **Question:** The Smithsonian Institution has been called "America's attic." Do you agree that the Smithsonian should be first and foremost a national--as opposed to a local Washington, D.C. and metropolitan area--museum?

Answer: The Smithsonian Institution consists, of course, of a number of museums, many of which carry the word "National" in their titles. Although the provisions of Mr. Smithson's Will required that the Institution be established in Washington, his purpose--the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men--has from the outset been interpreted as being global in its application. In the course of my tenure, I hope to make the Smithsonian more truly national, taking it beyond the boundaries of the Mall into schools, libraries, and homes across the country by means of the new communications technologies that are increasingly available.

3. **Question:** On page 3 of its report, the Commission states that "steps have been and are being taken to make the museums inviting, interesting, and

relevant to (visitors from Washington, D.C. and the surrounding area)." Do you agree? If so, what steps are you planning to ensure that the primary focus of the museum as a national museum will be carried out?

Answer: Smithsonian museums must be interesting, inviting, and relevant to all of their visitors. We want people to visit our museums--electronically or on the Mall--knowing that they will be welcome and made comfortable by finding there ideas and objects that are familiar icons of America's heritage, as well as those that may be less so, but which will stretch the horizons of their imaginations. This, I believe, is more and more the case, particularly in the National Museums of American History and American Art that quite consciously reflect and extend the multiplicity of traditions that make us a nation.

4. **Question:** Please provide a breakdown of the exhibitions which, according to page 12 of the Commission report, are in "need for restoration, renewal, and expansion."

Answer: I do not know which exhibitions the Commission had in mind in making the statement quoted. However, I can report that in the National Air and Space Museum and the National Museum of Natural History there are a number of areas that are out-dated in terms of design and the information that they convey. As an example, the Hall of Gems and Minerals in the latter currently is undergoing a major rehabilitation that, among other things, will include a section on plate tectonics, which has transformed our understanding of earth science in the last 30 or 40 years. In the National Air and Space Museum, which has been open for nearly 20 years, there has been nothing to explain the principles of flight to the general public in a clear and systematic way. That, too, is now being remedied.

5. **Question:** The Commission states that "investments in these activities and facilities should have high priority." Do you agree?

Answer: I do agree. Museum exhibitions are the primary means by which the Institution shares knowledge with the public. Thus, investment in them is essential. However, permanent exhibitions are very expensive and require long periods of time to plan and create. As the previous examples illustrate, they must be based on the most current information available, and also suggest where new ideas might lead. Furthermore, they must be designed with the needs and interests of the visiting public in mind.

6. **Question:** In regard to operating budgets, the Commission states that "The Institution has responded by significantly decreasing staff size and postponing needed improvements to facilities. The gap needs to be corrected; it is already threatening the vitality of the Smithsonian." The former Secretary of the Smithsonian, Dr. Adams, had also alluded to the need of downsizing at the Institution. In the Washington Times (September 24, 1993), he is quoted as saying, the downsizing is "affecting every aspect of what we do,

from the size and extent of our exhibition programs to the educational programs . . . to our ability to acquire objects."

Please share with the Committee your plans for downsizing the Smithsonian.

Answer: At present I am engaged in a planning process to review various aspects of the Institution's operations and get a better sense of how we can most effectively deploy available resources in protecting the collections and facilities of the Institution, while also meeting our obligation to serve the public on the Mall and beyond in a lively and intelligent manner. In addition, I have taken steps to remove layers of management and to consolidate functions where possible. Soon after I became Secretary, I reorganized the Institution's central administration into two major groups: operations, which are within the purview of the Under Secretary, and programs. The offices of three assistant secretaries were combined into a small, cohesive programmatic unit under a single Provost. A fourth assistant secretary position was eliminated. This approach to reorganization through consolidation and delayering levels of management is intended to serve as a model for the various units of the Smithsonian as they undertake their own reorganization efforts.

7. **Question:** In light of the downsizing, do you believe the Smithsonian should engage in creating new museums?

Answer: The issue of creating new museums is closely tied to the needs of collections, overall Institutional priorities, and, most particularly, authorizations by the Congress. Certainly, new museums cannot be created at the rate of the recent past, but one should not foreclose that option in case unique opportunities arise. At this point, I have no plans to propose any new museums. However, I believe it is important to fulfill the obligations inherent in P.L.101-185, which authorized establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian, because an incomparable collection of immense significance to the American people is at risk. Not only must that collection be protected in a physical sense, it also must be articulated intellectually, so that the fullness of the heritage of America's original people can be understood.

8. **Question:** The Commission also recommends "the elimination of (unspecified) programs or facilities." Do you feel this is going to be necessary, and if so, what programs or facilities do you think would have to be eliminated?

Answer: While it ultimately may be necessary to eliminate programs or close facilities in order to keep resources available for the core activities of the Institution, it is not possible at this time to say if and where that will happen. The Regents' considerations most certainly will be brought to bear on this matter, and my own views will be informed by the results of studies planned and now underway.

9. **Question:** I am concerned about what the Commission describes as a "large and growing" "deferred maintenance problem." What is this maintenance problem and what steps are you going to take to assure Smithsonian resources are used to maintain exhibits and artifacts already in the possession of the Smithsonian before actively pursuing new objects for new exhibits or museums?

Answer: The deferred maintenance problem to which the Commission referred is, I believe, that associated with the Institution's facilities and referenced in Question No. 1. Appropriations simply have not been sufficient to cover the backlog of repair and restoration requirements. While I recognize the difficulties of the present fiscal environment, we will continue to seek adequate funding for this purpose. We also will continue to apply resources that are available to the care and protection of the collections with which we have been entrusted and to the maintenance of existing exhibitions.

10. **Question:** On page 26 of its report, the Commission states "continued capital expansion in the early decades of the next century..is out of the question. The Smithsonian should essentially assume a moratorium on new museums." Do you agree?

Answer: While the statement quoted is not an unreasonable one, as I indicated above, I would not want to foreclose the option of addressing an unique opportunity for the Smithsonian and the American people, should one arise. I am more in sympathy with the statement further on in the same paragraph on page 26 of the Commission Report that states: "New construction should be undertaken only if the funds are assured for capital and operating costs."

11. **Question:** How much taxpayers' money is being spent on the Smithsonian in FY 1995 and what percentage of total Smithsonian receipts does this amount to?

Answer: For fiscal year 1995 \$371.1 million has been appropriated. It is expected that this will be about 70% of the Institution's total net receipts.

12. **Question:** In light of the need to reduce the size of the federal debt, which stood at \$4,885,256,391,108.42 on May 18, 1995, how much money do you believe can and should be cut from the federal contribution to the Smithsonian for FY 1996?

Answer: The Smithsonian cannot sustain any reduction in the Federal contribution for its activities in fiscal year 1996 without correspondingly reducing its level of public services by limiting museum hours; ridding employees, among whom will be some of those who repair and maintain exhibitions and facilities; and postponing needed repairs to the buildings on the Mall.

13. Question: What previously appropriated funds does the Smithsonian currently have in its base budget for general planning?

Answer: The Smithsonian currently has \$1.1 million in previously appropriated funds for general planning.

14. Question: Due to the current budget situation and the size of our federal debt, should such funds appropriated in prior years be used for current operating expenses, therefore reducing the current federal contribution to the Smithsonian?

Answer: The Institution would welcome the availability of unexpended prior year appropriations. Instead of using those funds for current operating expenses, we would propose applying them to the backlog of repair and restoration requirements without reduction in the level of the current Federal contribution.

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Extending the Frontiers of Science

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 15, 1995

Senator Ted Stevens
ATTEN: Christine Ciccone
305.Russell Office Building
Committee on Rules and Administration
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510 6325

Dear Senator Stevens:

I am pleased to enclose copies of the report of the Commission on the Future of the Smithsonian Institution, released earlier this month. This will stand as my written testimony for the hearing on the *Smithsonian Institution: Management Guidelines for the Future*, on Thursday, May 18, 1995.

I had the honor to chair this Commission of independent citizens, which was established by the Regents of the Smithsonian. Commission members came from around the nation and represented many fields of endeavor. It met and worked over the last 20 months, studying in depth various aspects of program, governance, finances, and administration of the Institution. The written report describes the Commission's final ideas about how the Smithsonian can best prepare for the future, considering a time frame of 15 to 10 years.

In my oral presentation at the hearing, I will emphasize those aspects of the report that are pertinent to the management of the Institution. I thank you, on behalf of the Commission, for the opportunity to describe our findings.

Sincerely,

Maxine F. Singer
Maxine F. Singer

MFS/sb

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[For a copy of this report, contact the Office of Public Affairs, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560. The report is also available on the Smithsonian's World Wide Web site (@www.si.edu).]