

TESTIMONY OF I. MICHAEL HEYMAN, SECRETARY

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

before the

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR

AND RELATED AGENCIES

MARCH 10, 1995

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am pleased to appear before the committee today for the first time since assuming my role as Secretary in September of last year. I entered the office of Secretary with great enthusiasm for this extraordinary institution and I can honestly say that my first five months have been more than challenging.

The Smithsonian is a unique and dynamic institution which belongs to the citizens of the United States. Each secretarial era reflects unique circumstances and poses its own opportunities and problems. When I was selected for the position of Secretary, I began to explore in detail the opportunities and problems facing the Institution and how I could best address these issues during my tenure. I identified four areas where I believe I should focus my energies in the coming years. To address these issues, I first implemented a reorganization which included the creation of a provost to oversee all programmatic areas. This will allow me to more actively and effectively manage the Institution as a whole and ensure a greater level of oversight and accountability over the diverse components which make up the Smithsonian.

The greatest challenge presently facing the Institution, along with the rest of the Federal establishment, is the constraint on resources. In the past, the Smithsonian could count on increased resources from Congress and the Executive Branch in discharging its mission. Those times are past and if the Institution is to continue as one of the world's premier cultural and scientific institutions, it must begin to rely more heavily on private support from individuals and corporations. A systematic effort to increase private support started very well under my predecessor and I intend to accelerate this initiative as quickly and effectively as possible.

This new era also demands from public, as well as private, organizations increased fiscal accountability. We must use our resources efficiently and intelligently both to husband them and to underscore our credibility to those who provide them -- the government and our donors. I believe that frugality also has a positive side. For example, it will require us to agree more specifically than in the past on the dimensions of our mission.

Second, we must take a hard look at the role of the Smithsonian as the nation's museum and at the goals of our exhibitions and public programming. As you are all too well aware, we have suffered through the long controversy surrounding the National Air and Space Museum's proposed exhibition which included a portion of the Enola Gay. There were mistakes made in the development of this exhibition which, in the end, made its presentation doomed to failure. This, and a small number of exhibitions over the past few years, have raised important questions concerning the Institution's responsibilities in presenting historical and analytical treatments to the public. Even before I made my decision to replace the original Enola Gay exhibition with a scaled-down display, I announced that we would undertake an assessment and review of the processes and criteria used in determining what subjects to cover and how they are to be addressed. I expect this review to be completed later this year and that it might well call for the establishment of guidelines to be used across the Institution regarding exhibitions and public programs. I will gladly report back to the committee with the results of this review and on those steps I plan to take in response to it.

Third, I am committed to developing, across the Institution, the ability to make our collections and information available to the public through technology. With the great advances in information technology during the past decade, we now have the opportunity to take our collections, via electronic media, to virtually every city and town in the nation, and ultimately, to almost every household. I have made this a priority of my tenure.

Within a few months the Smithsonian will go on-line on the Internet with a full and constantly updated information service with "home-pages" for our museums and research centers. This will become a Smithsonian without walls, bringing our vast resources home to Americans and offering a perennial field trip for students, young and old. This reach should increase considerably in the near future as the private sector merges means of communication and provides access to "ordinary" homes throughout the country.

I am told that one day soon emerging technologies will allow on-line visitors to look at 3-D images and, in essence, to "hold" an item in their hands, turning it through all its dimensions. We have already made plans to open a trial 3-D digitizing lab at the National Zoo to test the possibilities for the entire Smithsonian. I am excited by what this technology can mean to us in extending the reach of our historic mission -- the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." At the heart of the information revolution is something far more than an advance in technology; it is the fulfilling of one central promise of democracy: to make knowledge available to as many citizens as possible, and to allow that access to be shaped by their needs. I see it as James Smithson's mandate reborn for a new century and a new generation of Americans.

On-line exhibitions can do things we cannot do through conventional means. Take, for example, the major exhibition "Ocean Planet," which will open at the Museum of Natural History in April before going off on a national tour. I am sure that no one who actually visits the exhibition will easily forget the experience. It is state of the art in the presentation of important questions regarding the health of the Earth's oceans. Noteworthy, however, is that this is the first exhibition that we are developing in parallel form on-line, in collaboration with scientists from NASA. That prototype will be available over the Internet. The on-line version will feature an interactive floor plan of the exhibit and will incorporate all of its elements. Its "resource room" will provide an interactive bulletin board and instantaneous connections to many sources of oceanographic information available on the Internet. It will feature a variety of special programs, including discussion sessions, demonstrations, curricula for elementary and high school courses, and meet-the-curators opportunities in real time.

New information technologies will also greatly enhance the benefits of our research programs. For instance, we are putting in digital form systematic collections of biological information in the National Museum of Natural History which can be shared among scientific researchers worldwide. Access to this information and these collections will not require a special trip to Washington in order to undertake or continue research activities.

Hence, greater access to our collections through advanced technologies will make a trip to the Smithsonian as easy as turning on a personal computer. The potential benefits of this electronic outreach to the American public are inestimable.

Finally, we must continue to take care of the most important asset of the Institution -- the national collections. Numbering more than 140 million objects, the collections are the foundation for all that the Institution does. From its myriad research programs to the hundreds of exhibitions and public programs we present to the public each year, the collections are what distinguishes the Smithsonian from other educational and cultural institutions. The primary target of increases in our request for this Fiscal Year is in the management and conservation of the collections. It would be impossible, however, for me to discuss these priorities without first commenting on the recent action taken by this committee with regard to FY 1995 rescissions.

The rescissions of FY 1995 Smithsonian funds recently approved by this committee cut right to the heart of our ability to care for the collections. The effect of these rescissions, and their impact on our FY 1996 request, is to allow the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Air and Space Museum to continue to deteriorate with the potential for permanent damage or loss. In both instances, the need for new storage and conservation space is clearly demonstrable. I would like to discuss each case in some detail.

With regard to the NMAI Suitland collections center, this component is critical to both the preservation of the collection and the success of the Mall museum. The Smithsonian, after many years of discussion and negotiation, and with the guidance and ultimate direction of Congress, agreed to accept the transfer of the Heye collection -- the single largest and most important collection of Native American artifacts in the world -- and to take the necessary steps to preserve it. Upon Congressional authorization the Smithsonian entered into a legally binding agreement with the Heye Foundation and the State and City of New York for the construction of three facilities which would comprise the NMAI. One of these facilities, the Suitland Collections Center, would replace the antiquated and wholly substandard Bronx storage facility at which the Heye collection is now housed. Specifically, the legislation authorizing the Suitland facility prohibits any of the Heye collection from being commingled with any existing Smithsonian collections. This is a key provision of the agreement. It is the Smithsonian's obligation to care for this collection. Without the construction of an acceptable facility, we fail to meet this obligation.

Another component of the NMAI legislation is the Mall Museum. As spelled out in the legislation, this facility is a public/private partnership. The Smithsonian is responsible for raising one-third of the costs of this museum from private sources. I am pleased to report that we have already raised \$26.7 million towards the \$36.7 million goal. The pledges - ranging from the 71,000 members of the NMAI national campaign who contribute a minimum of \$20 a year to the \$10 million gift from the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation of Connecticut -- have been secured with the expectation that the planning, design and construction of the Museum would proceed in accordance with the legislation. The rescission of FY 1995 planning and design money for this component will result in a delay or possible termination of the Mall Museum and will be viewed by donors and supporters as a broken commitment on the part of Congress and the Federal government. Sadly, one of the best examples of public/private partnership will be seen as a failure at precisely the time we need to demonstrate its potential as a future resource to the Institution.

Finally, the rescission of FY 1995 planning and design money for the NASM extension at Dulles will have two immediate results: placing the collections in jeopardy as they continue to be housed in substandard facilities at our Garber facility; and the likelihood that the significant commitment from the Commonwealth of Virginia which includes infrastructure improvements to the site (estimated at \$30-40 million), a \$3 million dollar interest free loan and the issuance of up to \$100 million in bonding authority, will lapse or be withdrawn. As we have stated on the record, with the exception of the initial planning and design money which totals \$8 million, the funding for the construction of this extension would derive from non-Federal sources. This would seem to be a wise investment on the part of the Federal government in which \$8 million of Federal funds could leverage more than \$100 million of non-Federal funds.

I felt the need to discuss these three projects in some detail as our request for FY 1996 includes funding for all three. It would be a great setback for the Institution if these projects did not move forward and a real impediment to our being able to properly care for the collections.

I am fully aware of the difficult situation which faces this committee specifically, and Congress as a whole. Reductions in the Federal budget now, and in the near future, are a reality. Making decisions about what programs and activities the Federal government should or should not support are difficult indeed.

On this, the eve of the Institution's 150th anniversary, I would like to remind the members of the committee that the Smithsonian Institution was created by Act of Congress and has evolved into a unique and revered institution which represents the best of America and its people. The Smithsonian is the mirror in which we, as Americans, see our history and culture from the past, in the present, and towards the future. I would venture that the vast majority of Americans believe the Federal funds which support the Institution are a worthy and rewarding expenditure of resources that provides direct benefits to all citizens.

I thank you and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have regarding our FY 1996 request or any other topic.