

Written Statement of Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
Review of Smithsonian Institution Current Facilities and Future Space Needs
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
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Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the current and future facilities needs at the Smithsonian.

My tenure as the 14th Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution is just beginning. However, my relationship with the Smithsonian spans many years. I originally joined the Smithsonian in 1978 at the National Air and Space Museum. Since then, I have served as associate director of curatorial affairs at the National Museum of American History. Most recently, I was honored to serve as founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. I am pleased and humbled to assume my role as the Secretary of this Institution, one that I love so much.

For most of our visitors, their first impression of the Smithsonian is of our iconic buildings on the National Mall, home to some of our nation's greatest treasures. What they may not realize is that the Smithsonian extends far beyond the Mall. Since our founding, the Smithsonian has been a local, national, and global institution, doing work that you might not expect. The global team that captured the first image of a black hole was directed by Smithsonian scientists at our Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge Massachusetts. Researchers at the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute work to reintroduce species that had gone extinct in the wild back to their native habitats. Experts at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center track and monitor invasive species for every port in the United States. Though I have spent most of my professional life at the Smithsonian, even I am constantly learning about the amazing accomplishments of my colleagues.

All of these incredible achievements are enabled by our facilities, which face tremendous challenges. Much of Smithsonian's infrastructure is aging, with systems that have exceeded their useful lives. As a result, many of our facilities fall short of industry best-practices for their care and maintenance. Currently, we have a maintenance backlog just over \$1 billion. This is the result of an accelerated growth in Smithsonian buildings over several decades.

A billion-dollar backlog may sound insurmountable, but it is not. Since becoming Secretary, I've had a chance to look at it with fresh eyes. In order to be more strategic in our approach, I have directed our staff to begin analyzing our projects in a new way. Rather than seeing our backlog in total, we will be analyzing our maintenance projects building by building. With this approach, we'll be better able to communicate our existing priorities, develop a better sense of where our limited federal dollars are best spent, and find opportunities to address maintenance needs as part of our capital revitalization projects. The strategic combination of capital projects with steady growth in maintenance from Congress will yield greater results. I believe that addressing our maintenance backlog is of paramount importance to the future of the Institution. We have been fortunate to receive the support of Congress, in addressing our most recent and pressing infrastructure need, the renovation of the National Air and Space

Museum. Because of this support, we are on track. Exhibits in the western half of the building are on schedule to reopen in 2022, and to fully reopen in 2025.

Beyond Air and Space, we are beginning to plan for a revitalization of two of our oldest buildings, the Castle and the Arts and Industries Building. This project will address physical deterioration, replace obsolete systems, install seismic protection, and incorporate modern accessibility and safety standards. Planning for this project is an opportunity for us to develop a vision for how to best use these historic landmarks to better serve our visitors.

Projects like this are a highly visible component of our facilities needs, but many of our greatest needs are behind-the-scenes. We care for 155 million objects in our collections. These items are not limited to our on-display artifacts. They are actively used research objects for historians and scientists worldwide. Our collections support the work of dozens of federal agencies to perform their missions. Whether they are used to identify invasive species or to prevent planes from making a potentially deadly bird strike, our collections are an essential resource for the country. Sadly, about 47% of our collections space is inadequate. To address this problem, we have been implementing a Collections Space Framework plan. Under this plan, we are engaged in an ongoing cycle of constructing state-of-the-art facilities, relocating at-risk collections, and revitalizing sub-standard spaces.

We are making steady progress on our collections needs. We recently finished a collections space at the National Air and Space Museum's Udvar Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia. It was immediately put to use as the swing space for artifacts removed from the Air and Space Museum on the Mall during its revitalization. Upon completion of that project in 2024, the Udvar Hazy storage space will enable us to move and restore aviation collections currently in poor condition at the Garber facility in Suitland, MD.

In the same Suitland campus, we are also in the planning phase of an additional collections Pod at the Smithsonian Museum Support Center. For this project, we have been collaborating with the National Gallery of Art to share the costs of construction and operations of the facility. This is a win-win for both institutions, and a great value to taxpayers.

As we gain capacity in these new spaces, we can begin to empty our inadequate spaces, and ultimately demolish and redevelop the site. We are currently master planning for the future development of the Suitland campus. Through this steady progress, we can improve our existing collections care and prepare for collections needs into the future.

As we look at potential future facility needs, there are many knowns, but also many unknowns. We do know that our collections will grow. Research continues to advance, and history unfolds before our eyes every day. To continue appropriately telling the story of America, it's paramount that we collect the objects that tell our ever-evolving story.

We also know that protecting the artifacts and buildings we have now will become more difficult. We live on a planet with a rapidly changing climate, and our facilities are not immune from it. The Washington D.C. Metro area will be impacted by intensification of precipitation, increased storm surge, and a rising Potomac. According to National Park Service projections, much of the Mall will be at risk of severe flooding after a major storm by 2030.

We are assessing this threat throughout our facilities and have already implemented some preventive measures. For example, the archives of the National Air and Space Museum have been relocated to the

Udvar Hazy Center, where flood risk is significantly reduced. Similarly, objects have been removed from first floor storage at the National Museum of American History, our building with the most severe flood risk.

This assessment also impacts how future buildings are designed. When the site of the National Museum of African American History and Culture was selected, we knew from the beginning that there was an elevated flood risk, so water protection measures had to be incorporated into its design. Should the Smithsonian be mandated to construct any new museums, climate considerations will be a crucial part of any site selection and planning.

The prospect of new museums being created is the great unknown for the Institution's future. The current proposals for a National Museum of the American Latino and a National Women's History Museum enjoy bi-partisan support here in the House of Representatives. As I have said to you and many of your colleagues, if Congress deems it in the public interest to move forward with these proposals, we will believe it is critical that any additions to the Smithsonian do not negatively impact Smithsonian's pressing infrastructure and collections space needs that demand our immediate and on-going attention as I have outlined for you today.

A new museum requires funds for both the creation and long-term operations of the facilities, the care and preservation of its collections, the safety and protection of our visitors, and the on-going success of its programs. It is my great responsibility to ensure that all of our museums, research centers, libraries, and educational centers are appropriately cared for. Only then can we create new museums that exceed our imaginations and build on the standards of excellence set by the Smithsonian.

The desire for new museums reflects a need to ensure that our Nation's cultural institutions provide a complete and inclusive representation of the American experience. While Congress deliberates, we will work diligently to tell a broader and more complete narrative with the resources already at our disposal.

An example of a current effort to expand inclusivity is the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, *Because of Her Story* which launched in 2018. *Because of Her Story* represents a pan-institutional embrace and celebration of women's history as an integral part of the American story. Three *Because of Her Story* exhibitions have opened this year, and five more are slated to open within the next two years. *Because of Her Story* funded 10 internships in summer 2019. Additionally, there are 14 public programs or educational efforts currently funded. This is only the beginning of a transformative way of thinking about our content. I want to thank Congress for their on-going support and commitment to this important priority.

The Institution has been working diligently for more than twenty years to increase the Latino presence throughout the Smithsonian's museums, collections, research, and programs. The Smithsonian Latino Center was created in 1997 to promote Latino presence within the Smithsonian. The Center is not represented in one physical location; rather, it works collaboratively with the Institution's museums and research centers, ensuring that the contributions of the Latino community in the arts, history, national culture, and scientific achievement are explored, presented, celebrated, and preserved.

Our museums and programs have increased their collections and mounted scores of exhibitions and programs that relate to Latino American history. Currently, the Smithsonian Latino Center is preparing to unveil the first Latino gallery to open on the National Mall. The new permanent Molina Family Latino

Gallery will open in the National Museum of American History in the fall 2021. The Latino Center currently has fifteen curators and nine curatorial assistants who we have added to our Museum staff in the last several years. We expect that many more diverse staff will be added in the future.

The Smithsonian also founded the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) in 1997 which has served to further the inclusion of Asian Pacific Americans across the Smithsonian's collections, research, exhibitions, and programs. APAC aims to bring the diversity and complexity of Asian Pacific America—the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. with a population of almost 20 million—to the Smithsonian. The Center is currently fundraising for the first permanent gallery dedicated to Asian Pacific American history, art, and culture in the Smithsonian.

The Smithsonian's museums are more than a space to mount exhibits, to conduct research, or to educate visitors. They are powerful symbols of our shared cultural values. The buildings lining the National Mall tell the world what it means to be an American. They represent our history, our ingenuity, and our creativity. You need only ask the people of Brazil, who lost their National Museum, or the people of France who now must rebuild Notre Dame. Our cultural institutions are greater than the sum of their parts, they are more than brick and mortar.

Because of that, I thank you for taking the time to hold this hearing, and making our facilities such a priority. It is a privilege to testify today, and I welcome any questions you may have.