



Smithsonian Institution

Board of Regents September 28, 2007

The Chief Justice
of the United States,
Chancellor

Vice President
of the United States
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The Honorable
Thad Cochran

The Honorable
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The Honorable
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The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairman, Committee on Rules and Administration
United States Senate
305 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Via Facsimile 202-228-3953

Dear Chairman Feinstein:

Thank you for your letter of September 27, regarding the draft report of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on Smithsonian Institution facilities management. I regret that your reading of the draft report led you to such negative conclusions. In my view, much of the report was very positive with regard to the Smithsonian's management of its facilities, and we are pleased that GAO recognized the many improvements that have been made.

The report does detail several specific problems with Smithsonian facilities, which you and I have discussed in private and during your June 2007 hearing. I urge you to bear in mind, however, that while these problems are real, they should be taken in the context of the more than 600 buildings and structures managed by the Smithsonian. We face challenges in all our buildings, but the GAO review found that, while improvement is still possible in some areas, overall we are doing excellent work managing our facilities with the resources we have. Further, as the report points out, repairs projects are either underway or budgeted for the coming year to fix all the problems listed.

In addition to listing some of the facilities problems recently encountered, the GAO report discussed at some length the various ways in which the Smithsonian has improved its facilities management since the last GAO report on this subject in 2005. Specifically, GAO states that the Smithsonian has made significant efforts to:

- Rehabilitate the historic Patent Office Building
- Revitalize some parts of the Zoo (Asia Trail I)
- Construct Pod 5 to replace collections storage on the Mall
- Observe key security practices to protect assets
- Improve real property data inventory
- Develop performance metrics
- Refine the capital planning process, incorporating all elements of OMB guidance
- Centralize facilities maintenance and security
- Create a 5-year prioritized maintenance plan
- Improve communications with museum and facility directors
- Make initial efforts to address the facilities funding shortfall

Smithsonian Institution Building
1000 Jefferson Drive SW
Washington DC 20560-0016
202.633.1869 Telephone
202.786.2515 Fax



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Indeed, our excellence in facilities management has been recognized by the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers, who gave the Smithsonian their Award for Excellence in Facilities Management in 2006, and by the Office of Management and Budget, which gave the Smithsonian the highest possible scores in their Program Assessment Rating Tool evaluations for both the Facilities Capital and the Facilities Operations and Maintenance programs.

With respect to our security operations, while GAO rightly points out an unfortunate decrease in the number of security guards at certain museums, I want to stress that our overall security record is commendable. Incidents of theft and crime are extremely rare, as evidenced by our Total Recordable Crime Rate, which is well below the average for museums and zoos. To address the shortage of officers, we are commissioning a study of the security staffing levels in our facilities that will yield a plan outlining appropriate staffing levels for high- and low-risk operations. We have begun a program to hire college students to serve as gallery attendants. We are also implementing expedited procedures for recruitment of security officers. Design elements and planning for natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other major incidents adhere to the highest standards, leading other organizations to cite our Glass Hazard Mitigation Program and our Mall-Wide Perimeter Barrier program as benchmarks in the field.

Your letter states that GAO's 2005 report suggested eight non-federal funding options. That is not correct. GAO's 2005 report's sole recommendation was that "the Smithsonian establish a process for exploring funding options with the Administration and Congress, leading to the development and implementation of a strategic funding plan to address the Smithsonian's revitalization, construction, and maintenance needs." The Smithsonian accepted this recommendation, and began to implement it by creating a Regents' *ad hoc* Committee on Facilities Revitalization. It is this Committee, which was made a permanent standing committee in June 2006, that produced the original list of eight non-federal funding options, not GAO.

The new GAO report faults the Smithsonian for conducting insufficient analysis of these non-federal funding options, but this misconstrues the actual purpose of that phase of the Regents' work. The option papers commissioned by the Regents were never designed to be comprehensive. Rather, they were intended to facilitate initial discussions among the Regents. These initial discussions will result in a shorter list of options that the Regents deem worthy of more in-depth analysis, with the goal of producing a business plan to fund the facilities maintenance backlog that can be discussed with all stakeholders. At your June 2007 hearing, you asked for such a plan by the end of the calendar year, and the Regents will meet your original deadline.

I look forward to the hearing this November, and welcome the opportunity for the Regents to provide a status report on the progress of the business plan to fund the facilities maintenance backlog. More broadly, I appreciate the opportunity to work with you to find a solution to the facilities maintenance backlog.



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Thank you for your interest in the Smithsonian Institution.

Yours truly,

Roger Sant
Chairman, Executive Committee

cc: Cristián Samper

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