

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 3, 2024, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

The Executive Committee (“Committee”) of the Board of Regents (“Board”) of the Smithsonian Institution (“Smithsonian”) conducted a meeting on September 3, 2024. Participating were Board and Executive Committee Chair Risa J. Lavizzo-Mourey, Vice Chair Barbara M. Barrett, and Committee member Franklin Raines.

Also present by invitation of the Committee were Secretary Lonnie Bunch; Counselor to the Chief Justice Robert M. Dow, Jr.; Chief of Staff to the Secretary Greg Bettwy; Deputy Chief of Staff to the Regents Kate Forester; Special Assistant to the Regents Mallory Gianola (recorder); Chief Legal Officer Jennifer McIntyre; Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer Meroë Park; and Counselor and Chief of Staff to the Regents Porter Wilkinson.

CALL TO ORDER

Board and Executive Committee Chair Risa J. Lavizzo-Mourey called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee approved the draft minutes of the August 13, 2024, meeting.

OCTOBER BOARD MEETING

Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey led a discussion on the upcoming meeting of the Board of Regents to be held on October 28, 2024. The Board will discuss key matters at the Smithsonian, including the America 250th celebration, digital transformation and artificial intelligence, and the 2025 Board Leadership Elections.

REGENTS’ PUBLIC FORUM

As part of the Smithsonian’s ongoing commitment to transparency, the Regents typically host an annual public forum to provide an opportunity for direct interaction with the public. Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey reviewed the format of the Regents’ annual public forum to be held on October 28, 2024. The event will be webcast and will provide an opportunity to introduce members of the Executive Committee. The public forum will also focus on key matters at the Smithsonian, including preparing for and welcoming a new pair of giant pandas, Bao Li [BOW-lee] and Qing Bao [ching-BOW], to the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

The Secretary updated the Committee on the state of the Smithsonian. He first addressed an item related to the Smithsonian’s budget, to include the repayment of loans from units to the central Trust budget.

Secretary Bunch also briefed the Committee on funding from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (“NASA”) for the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (“SAO”), which supports the Chandra X-ray Observatory. Secretary Bunch informed the Committee that NASA plans to fund the Chandra X-ray Observatory in fiscal year 2025, which begins on October 1. The funding will enable NASA and the Smithsonian to collaborate on a path forward and prevent the immediate deorbiting of the Chandra X-ray Observatory, the most sophisticated X-ray observatory built to date. The Committee discussed the potential for a public private partnership, and engaging Congress on the future of the Chandra X-ray Observatory in collaboration with researchers at other institutions in the United States and around the world.

The Secretary also updated the Committee on efforts underway to prepare for and welcome a new pair of giant pandas, Bao Li [BOW-lee] and Qing Bao [ching-BOW], to the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute (“NZCBI”). The Smithsonian expects the pandas to arrive by the end of the year. Ahead of the new giant pandas’ arrival, NZCBI is seeking \$25 million in public and corporate donations to be used over the next 10 years. These funds would enable one-time renovations to the Zoo’s indoor and outdoor panda exhibit, Giant Panda Cam upgrade and maintenance, and associated operating costs, as well as support vital conservation research that protects biodiversity in the giant pandas’ native habitat. The Committee also discussed the timeline and logistics for welcoming the new pandas, including quarantine periods and acclimation periods.

To conclude, Secretary Bunch led a discussion with the Committee on fundraising for the America250 celebration. The Smithsonian will be supporting the Semiquincentennial in 2026 on multiple levels: through the work of individual units and pan-institutional initiatives as well as in Washington, D.C. and across the country. The Institution is pursuing principal gifts from individuals, foundations, and corporations in support of America250 programming and events. The Smithsonian programming will begin in 2025 and anchor America’s celebration throughout the 2026 anniversary year.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Committee moved into an executive session at approximately 1:23 p.m. to discuss confidential business and personnel matters.

ADJOURNMENT

With no other business to consider the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:40 p.m.
Respectfully submitted,

Risa J. Lavizzo-Mourey, Chair