

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 15, 2012, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

The Executive Committee (“Committee”) of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution met on March 15, 2012, beginning at 11:00 a.m. Participating were Executive Committee and Board Chair France A. Córdoba, Vice Chair Patty Stonesifer, and Committee member Shirley Ann Jackson.

Also present by invitation of the Committee were Counselor to the Chief Justice Jeffrey Minear; Chief of Staff to the Secretary Patricia Bartlett; Chief of Staff to the Regents John K. Lapiana; General Counsel Judith Leonard; Director of Communications and External Affairs Evelyn Lieberman, and Director of Government Relations Nell Payne.

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Córdoba called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 27, 2012 MEETING

The Committee approved the draft minutes of the February 27, 2012, meeting without modification.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Smithsonian Journeys/Cuba. Dr. Córdoba noted that the Secretary was unable to participate in the meeting. In his absence, Ms. Bartlett, Ms. Lieberman, and Ms. Payne updated the Committee on the current status of the planned Smithsonian Journeys Cuba trips. Dr. Córdoba noted that the Executive Committee is closely monitoring the issue and has encouraged the Secretary to reach out as directly and personally as possible to our congressional Regents and other key members of Congress to get a sense of their concerns. The Committee had advised the Secretary on the risks of sponsoring the travel through informal conversations over February and early March. She also noted that four Cuba trips are scheduled this year: two in May, one in late November and one in early December.

Ms. Bartlett reviewed the steps taken to advance trip planning since the previous Committee meeting. She said that the Secretary was conducting outreach to priority members of Congress and the Executive Branch. The Secretary met with both Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, both of whom have been critical of the planned trips. Ms. Bartlett noted that Rep. Diaz-Balart was concerned that travelers would not benefit from a balanced portrayal of Cuban life and suggested that meetings with dissidents be made part of the trips’ itineraries. She said the Secretary stressed that the trips are consistent with United States Government policy and that the Smithsonian is sensitive to the Cuban-American community’s concerns. Consequently, Ms. Bartlett said, the Smithsonian is attempting to include further opportunities, possibly immediately before departure and/or while in Cuba, to engage with dissidents of the

current Cuban government. [The Smithsonian was eventually unable to schedule such meetings in Cuba for the May 2012 trips.] Ms. Bartlett and Ms. Payne said that congressional Regents have been briefed about the trips and the modifications to the itineraries.

Members discussed how best to weigh the benefits against the risks of conducting the trips, in particularly the likely opposition from some legislators and the Cuban-American community. Some universities, members noted, have reconsidered offering similar trips following congressional and public criticism. The Committee noted that U.S.-Cuba policy elicits strong “passions” and that the opposition to the trips may be deep in Florida and in the Congress, if not particularly broad across the nation.

Ms. Lieberman shared the following observations: that it was the Smithsonian’s obligation, as an educational leader, to “be in places” like Cuba, as it had been in the Soviet Union and China, when such travel was controversial; that the Cuba “people-to-people” trips allow Americans to “open their eyes” to the everyday Cuban life places in an uncensored way, and to come home and be able to describe first-hand the human rights and economic situation in Cuba; that the travelers will serve to educate Cubans on American life with its attendant “freedom and liberty.” Overall, she concluded, these trips had a strong mission-related basis and that concerns of the Executive Committee had been taken “very seriously” in developing a forward-looking strategy.

Ms. Bartlett added that Smithsonian Enterprises will contact participants after the trip to evaluate the effectiveness of the itinerary.

At Dr. Jackson’s request, Ms. Bartlett briefly reviewed Smithsonian communications made with potential substitute trip operators. She said discussions were held with two major Washington, D.C.-based candidates before the Secretary determined to continue. She noted that the time had passed to contemplate transferring operational responsibility for the planned May trips.

Senior Level Searches: Ms. Bartlett provided a status report on multiple senior level searches of interest to the Committee:

- **Chief Information Officer:** Deron Burba was selected by Under Secretary for Finance and Administration Al Horvath to be the Chief Information Officer.
- **National Museum of American History:** The search committee, chaired by Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture Richard Kurin, was moving toward a “very good” short list of candidates with diverse strengths. Regent input will be solicited in the process.
- **National Museum of Natural History:** Members of a search committee have been identified for the new director of the National Museum of Natural History. The search is being led by Under Secretary for Science Eva Pell. Spencer Stuart has been retained to assist in the process.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Regent Emeritus Designation. Mr. Lapiana and Ms. Leonard were invited to attend the initial portions of the executive session, where the Committee discussed and approved the following motion:

VOTED that the Executive Committee recommends that the Board of Regents confers the title of Regent Emeritus on Alan G. Spoon with deep gratitude for the outstanding service he has provided, and will continue to provide, to the Board of Regents and the Smithsonian Institution.

Regents-Only Session. The Committee then conducted a Regents-only session.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

France A. Córdova
Chair