

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 12, 2011, STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PROGRAMS COMMITTEE MEETING

The Strategic Planning and Programs Committee (“the Committee”) of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution held a meeting on September 12, 2011, at 11:00 a.m. Participating were Committee Chair France Córdova* and Committee members Judy Huret*, Shirley Ann Jackson*, John McCarter*, and Paul Neely. Committee member Senator Patrick Leahy was unable to participate. Staff in attendance included Secretary G. Wayne Clough; Chief of Staff to the Secretary Patricia Bartlett; Assistant Secretary for Education and Access Claudine Brown; Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture Richard Kurin; Chief of Staff to the Regents John K. Lapiana; General Counsel Judith Leonard; Liaison for Senator Patrick Leahy Kevin McDonald*; and Under Secretary for Science Eva Pell.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m.

REPORT OF THE CHAIR

Dr. Córdova called the meeting to order and provided an overview of the meeting’s goals. She noted that although no action items were on the agenda, staff would provide updates on a series of key strategic initiatives and that she will in turn brief the full Board on the initiatives at the Regents’ September 19, 2011, meeting.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

Secretary Clough then led an overview of issues of interest to the Committee with Under Secretary for Science Eva Pell and Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture Richard Kurin.

Race Exhibition. Dr. Pell noted recent media interest in this well-received travelling exhibition on view at the National Museum of Natural History. The exhibition will close on January 8, 2012.

Rapid Eye Opportunity. Dr. Pell and Ms. Leonard discussed the Smithsonian’s interest in leading a group to own and/or operate a bankrupt German satellite company, Rapid Eye. Dr. Pell noted that the United States Government was encouraging Smithsonian leadership in the endeavor, but that, in the end, insufficient funding was identified to move forward within the timeframe set by the German bankruptcy court.

Director Search (National Museum of American History). Dr. Kurin provided a short update on the search committee’s composition and the firm, Heidrick and Struggles, that has been hired to conduct the search for the new director of the National Museum of American History. Dr. Kurin encouraged the Committee to identify potential candidates for the search committee’s consideration.

International Gallery Planning. Dr. Kurin discussed preliminary plans for converting the International Gallery (underground next to the Castle) as exhibition space for the Freer and

** participated by teleconference*

Sackler Galleries and the National Museum of African Art. The space now is centrally administered and used for traveling exhibitions, Latino Center exhibitions, and Asian Pacific American Program exhibitions. Dr Kurin said that the latter two programs would likely get more prominent gallery space in the National Museum of American History (NMAH).

Exhibition Updates. Dr. Kurin then briefed the Committee on the status of four exhibitions of continuing interest: *HIV/AIDS* (NMAH); *9/11* (National NMAH); *Shipwrecked* (Sackler Gallery of Art), and *Hide/Seek* (National Portrait Gallery exhibition reorganized by the Brooklyn Museum of Art).

American Folk Art Museum Collection. Dr. Kurin alerted the Committee that he and Smithsonian American Art Museum Director Betsy Broun would be meeting with members of the board of the American Folk Art Museum on September 15, 2011, about the possibility of the Smithsonian acquiring (with a New York partner) that museum's collections. He noted that the Smithsonian was looking into options regarding the museum's Lincoln Square facility if the collection is acquired. Following this discussion, Mr. McCarter stepped off the teleconference.

Hirshhorn Inflatable Structure. Dr. Kurin predicted that the success of the proposed facility "will come down to money." The goal of the inflatable structure—colloquially referred to as the Blue Bubble—is to host forums and programs on a variety of cultural issues. He said that by the end of October 2012, the Smithsonian will need to let contracts for the structure's design and fabrication, but that the funds to support those contracts have not yet been secured. In response to a member's question regarding the unique design of the Bubble, Dr. Kurin noted that the Commission on Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission, as well as leading architectural commentators, have all praised the proposal. In response to an inquiry by the Chair, Dr. Clough said that annual operating costs are being estimated and that the Committee would be advised as the structure's construction and operating budgets are more concretely identified.

International Museum Professional Education Program. Dr. Kurin said that no reportable progress has occurred on this issue since the Smithsonian submitted a draft pilot program term sheet to Abu Dhabi in the fall of 2010. He added that all parties remain interested in moving forward, although current economic uncertainties may delay action. In the meantime, the Smithsonian is conducting training and workshops in Abu Dhabi and has signed a contract with the government of Singapore to provide similar museum training there.

National Museum of African American History and Culture. A brief fundraising and building update was presented by Dr. Kurin. He noted that the biggest concerns regarding maintaining momentum to open the museum in 2015 center on the firmness of the Federal commitment to match private funding.

National Museum of the American Latino. Dr. Kurin noted that no specific progress has occurred on this initiative since the Committee's May 2011 meeting. He noted that Board Chair Patty Stonesifer has offered to meet with congressional members over the fall to state the Smithsonian's position that the museum, if established, should follow the same path as the

National Museum of African American History and Culture—with Federal appropriations for operations and a 50/50 Federal/private match for construction.

EXHIBITION CALENDAR

Secretary Clough and Drs. Kurin and Pell presented the proposed exhibition calendar. A pan-institution exhibition calendar was proposed in the wake of the *Hide/Seek* exhibition controversy as a way to identify potentially sensitive and/or controversial exhibitions at an early stage.

Dr. Kurin highlighted two exhibitions for Committee members, both of which relate to Thomas Jefferson and could generate controversy. The first is the display of the “Jefferson Bible” at the NMAH, beginning in November 2011. This display will focus on a private text assembled by Jefferson in 1820, using excerpts from the Four Gospels of the New Testament in Greek, Latin, French, and English. His aim was to tell a chronological version of Jesus’ life and to distill his moral teachings, excluding those aspects which appeared to him “contrary to reason.” Jefferson titled the work *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*.

Dr. Kurin said that the museum anticipates that there may be some criticism of the display of a document by a deist Founding Father that deletes references to any divine actions contained in the Gospels. Both Dr. Kurin and Committee members noted the exhaustive efforts that recently were devoted to the conservation of the book and its relevance to the mission of the museum. Dr. Kurin noted that the term “Bible” was not Jefferson’s, but is attributed to the Smithsonian curators who acquired it.

The second Jefferson-related exhibition will focus on the slave families at President Jefferson’s Monticello plantation. A joint effort of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello, the exhibition entitled *Jefferson and Slavery at Monticello: Paradox of Liberty* will open in January 2012. Dr. Kurin said the exhibition will reflect the “paradox” of the early republic—which stated that “all men are created equal” while protecting slavery—and is not intended to disparage Jefferson. Dr. Clough described the Smithsonian’s preparations for any controversy that may arise from the exhibition.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chair thanked the Committee members and staff for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
France Córdoba, Chair