

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON SPEECH BY CRISTIAN SAMPER, ACTING  
SECRETARY OF  
THE SMITHSONIAN

SUBJECT: FACTS, FICTION AND THE FUTURE AT THE SMITHSONIAN

MODERATOR: JERRY ZREMSKI, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT

DATE: FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2007

(C) COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE.  
NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY  
REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY  
PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION  
CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION  
LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL  
REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT  
AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO  
ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT  
OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME  
AT 202-347-1400.

-----  
MR. ZREMSKI: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press  
Club. My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm the Washington bureau chief  
for the Buffalo News and president of the National Press Club.

I'd like to welcome our members and their guests who are joining  
us today, as well as the audience that's watching on C-SPAN. We're  
looked forward to today's speech, and afterwards I'll ask as many  
questions as time permits. Please hold your applause during the  
speech so we have as much time as possible for questions.

And, for our broadcast audience, I'd just like to mention that if  
you hear applause during the speech, it may be from the guests and  
members of the general public who attend our luncheons, and not  
necessarily from the working press. (Laughter.)

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests, and ask them to  
stand for a moment when their names are called. From your left -- or  
from your right, I'm sorry: Carl Hartman (sp), freelance writer and a  
Golden Owl member of the National Press Club; Coco Wittenburg (sp),  
of Current Newspapers; Sallie Burre (sp), editor of the University of  
Virginia College of Arts and Sciences Magazine; Bob Madigan, WTOP

Radio's "Man About Town;" Cynthia Smith, curator of Exhibition Design for "The Other Ninety Percent," Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, and a guest of the speaker; Judy Pomerantz, freelance writer and art critic; Dr. Ira Rubenaugh (sp), the Smithsonian's acting secretary for Science, and a guest of the speaker.

Skipping over the podium, Melissa Charbonneau, of CBN News, and the vice chair of the National Press Club's Speaker's Committee. Skipping over our speaker for just one moment, Marilou Donohue, producer and editor of "Artistically Speaking," and the member of the Speakers Committee that arranged today's luncheon; Camille Akeju, director of the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum, and a guest of the speaker; Chris Berry, president and general manager of News Talk 630, WMAL; Karinna Hurley (sp), host of "Fountain of Health," Hispanic Communications Network; Anne Yang, reporter for New Tang Dynasty Television, and a new member of the National Press Club; and Wesley G. Pippert, the Washington director for the University of Missouri Journalism Program. (Applause.)

You might say that our guest today, Acting Smithsonian Director Cristian Samper, has a tough act to follow. His predecessor, Larry Small, left the Smithsonian amid charges that he had turned what's nicknamed "America's attic" into a posh personal playpen. In addition to commercializing the Smithsonian's museums and collecting a \$900,000 salary, Small also charged the Smithsonian for chauffeured cars, private jets, top-rated hotels and catered meals. He resigned under pressure in March, and amid the wave of subsequent studies and hearings, Senator Diane Feinstein said, "The Smithsonian is an endangered institution."

Samper's task for now -- and maybe for much longer, is to right the Smithsonian's course. The Institution and its museums face many important issues. An External Review Committee recently said, "The Smithsonian's art institutions have reached a critical point. Drastically under funded, they are unable to lead the nation during a time when their creativity and high visibility gives them vast potential to affect the lives of our citizens."

What's more, the Smithsonian isn't just under the periscope of lawmakers and auditors, as Samper himself said, "At the Smithsonian, what you do, and what you don't do, is noticed by everyone. It's part of the price of being on the National Mall." Samper is on leave from his position as director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, a post he has held since 2003. As director of the Natural History museum, he was responsible for the managing of the

largest natural history collection in the world, with 126 million specimens and artifacts.

Mr. Samper was born in San Jose, Costa Rica and grew up in Colombia, and he holds dual citizenship from the United States and Colombia. With a doctorate in biology from Harvard, Samper is an expert in the ecology of the Andean cloud forests, conservation biology, and environmental policy. Now he's becoming familiar with a much different role, as a New York Times headline recently said, "What the Smithsonian needs at its helm is a bird-watcher who can schmooze."

(Laughter.)

Here to tell us a bit about both, perhaps, and about his vision for the Smithsonian's future, is Dr. Christian Samper, acting director of the Smithsonian Institution.

Dr. Samper, welcome to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. SAMPER: Thank you very much, Jerry, and thank you for the invitation to come and address the National Press Club.

As you heard from the introduction, I have a rather unusual background. My mother grew up in a small farm in up-state New York. My father grew up in Colombia. And about the only way you'd have girl from upstate New York meet a Colombian guy is that they both went to Cornell University 65 years ago. And I'm glad they met, and that's why I'm here before you today. (Laughter.)

And of course, as a small child growing up in Latin America, I had the opportunity on weekends to go out for hikes and look at this wonderful, lush, tropical nature. And it was that love for nature and the curiosity that led me to study biology. Only seven years ago I was actually working for the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute as a biologist studying the jungles of Panama. Now I find myself, as acting secretary of the Smithsonian, studying the jungles of Washington. (Laughter.)

At times I wonder which are easier to understand. The last six months have, no doubt, been challenging and rewarding for me. But in the end, what's clear to me is I probably have the best job in Washington. In what other job can you actually wake up in the morning and go and visit Tai Shan at the National Zoo, and the wonderful New Asia Trail, and learn about how our research has helped us save the pandas from extinction.

And then, in the afternoon, I can head out and see the Udvar-Hazy Center of the National Air and Space Museum, stand by this air shuttle -- the space shuttle and look at these 200 airplanes that have made such an important part of our history, and our nation and the world. But what's also become very clear to me in the last six months is that most people do not really understand the full breadth and the scope of what the Smithsonian is about. And that is what has led me today to title my talk, "The Smithsonian -- Facts, Fiction, and the Future."

Let me start with one very important fact, especially after that introduction. And the fact is, that the American people trust the Smithsonian Institution, and we are determined to honor that trust. We are often referred to as the "nation's attic," but the Smithsonian is a lot more than that. And I think a much better description about what the Smithsonian is came from historian David McCullough, who not long ago described the Smithsonian as "the storehouse of ideas."

Yes, we use our collections, and we have many of our treasures, but we use the collections to address and come up with new ideas. We generate that knowledge and it is those ideas that we can share with millions of visitors that come to our museums every year. We are the stewards of our nation's treasures. We have meteorites and moon

rocks; we have the Burgess Shale fossils and we have giant squid; we have the Lansdowne portrait of Washington and we have Henry Moore's sculptures on The Mall; we have the Wrights Brothers Flyer and we have SpaceShipOne; we have Lincoln's top hat and we have Kermit the Frog; and yes, of course, we have The Star-Spangled Banner.

We actually have pretty much everything, including the kitchen sink. And I actually mean that literally because we do have Julia Child's kitchen. But we use those collections, not only to document our history, and heritage, and our natural world, but we use them to ask questions. We use them to pursue ideas through the research of thousands of scientists on our staff, and our collaborators from, not only the Smithsonian, but from around the world.

Let me just give you a few examples that will probably surprise you, because most people don't understand how much research goes on. The scientists at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory up in Cambridge, Massachusetts at Harvard, for the last decade have been studying the universe -- looking out with different kinds of telescopes. And in the last 10 years alone, we have discovered more than 200 planets in other solar systems. Many of these planets are larger than Earth. And by developing new tools and new technologies that will allow us to go out there and capture photons, and use these photons to study the chemical composition of some of these planets, we may even gain insights that will lead us to maybe find even life in other planets in the future.

We also work in other fields like, what we call, DNA barcoding. This is a technique that we have developed with collaborators for the last few years, taking advantage of molecular genetics. It is the idea of developing a unique genetic fingerprint that could be used to determine, individually, one species from another.

And, as many of you have seen in the media and the wide coverage it has received last week alone, we announced that we had completed the DNA barcodes for more than 30,000 species of plants and animals. And the applications of this are enormous. Just to mention two examples, the Food and Drug Administration has been using the DNA barcoding to look at the identity of some of the shipments of food that are coming into the United States from Asia, and helping us improve food safety. We're also using these tools to look at mosquitoes -- the larvae and the adults -- and use them in the research that's helping us understand the role of mosquitoes as vectors of disease like malaria that affect the livelihoods of millions of people around the world.

My colleagues at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama about 20 years ago started a network of long-term plots to study the dynamics of tropical trees in these ecosystems. By having long-term data, we can actually start looking at trends over time by expanding this network into what is now 20 sites in Africa, Asia and Latin America, we're monitoring more than 6 million trees and beginning to look at the impact of climate change on these fragile ecosystems. I think we go beyond the science into the arts and the history.

Now one personal story of an exhibition that we had recently that

was very moving and I'm sure many of you had an opportunity to see was a fabulous exhibition at the Freer Sackler galleries about Portugal, an exhibition called "Encompassing the Globe." What this exhibition told us through these objects and this fascinating history was the impact that a country like Portugal had in the 16th and 17th centuries -- how the influence of Portugal reached distant corners of the world, whether it was Japan or China or Africa or even Brazil. And when you really stop to think about it, you realize that in the 16th century the oceans were the World Wide Web of this planet.

Now with our collections and with our research and these ideas, we take that to our other half of the mission, which is the increase and the diffuse of knowledge. We have the unique opportunity to take this information and share it with million of visitors -- not only the visitors that come to our museums in Washington, but we can take it around the world. Over the last year alone, we have had more than 25 million visitors to the Smithsonian Museums here in the National Mall and we have also had more than 150 million visits to our websites, many of them award-winning. Many of you were here this last summer during the Folklife Festival, one of my favorite events. I remember it for many, many years and this year was the 41st Smithsonian Folklife Festival, and it was featuring different parts of our world -- everything from the Mekong Delta, and you could actually come and meet the artisans and learn about the history and the heritage of these important regions, but you could also turn around and learn about Jamestown on our history here in the backyard in Virginia.

Today actually marks the third anniversary of the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian on the Mall. And I will never forget that parade. We had 35,000 Native Americans from all parts across the United States and the Americas parading on the Mall in their regalia. It was a celebration and they were cheered on by more than 100,000 people that were here to celebrate this window into the lives, the history and the heritage of these Native Americans that will be here on the Mall for generations to come.

Behind this core mission, all of these activities I am describing are possible thanks to the people at the Smithsonian. It is our people that make those collections come alive. They build the ideas and they share them with the public. Whether it's a curator, a designer, a scientist, an accountant, a security officer -- every one of them -- our 6,000 employees and more than 5,000 volunteers are working day in and day out to achieve the mission of the Smithsonian and fulfill our dreams. These are people. These are the real heroes of the Smithsonian. People like Camille Akeju, who's here with me -- the director of the Anacostia Community Museum. Last Saturday, my wife and I, with our small daughter, went out to Anacostia to celebrate the 40th anniversary of this community museum. We have been there in this part of Washington for 40 years, helping document and celebrate the cultures of this very important part of Washington.

And it is people like Cynthia Smith, who's also here with me today. Cynthia's a curator at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City. Many people don't realize the Smithsonian has a museum in New York City. But Cynthia was the curator for an exhibition that really moved me. It's a very important exhibition called "Design for the Other 90 Percent." This exhibition was about

how we can use design to improve the livelihoods of the other 90 percent of the people across the United States and around the world. Whether it is using design to come up with new shelter that are economic and functional in areas that are devastated by disaster like Hurricane Katrina or whether it is using design to develop a new straw -- a light straw that could actually be used individually by a person to have access to potable water. And as you know, more than 6,000 people die every day around the world because they don't have access to safe drinking water.

We have certainly come a long ways since 1846, when the Smithsonian was established. Since that original idea and at the bequest of James Smithson, who was a scientist that came here that donated his will to the people of the United States of America despite the fact that he never set foot in the United States. We have come a long ways over the decades and now we have the largest museum and research complex in the world with 19 museums, 19 research centers -- nine research centers and the National Zoo. And we could not have achieved this if it had not been for the support that we have received from the administration, from Congress, from our collaborators and our supporters. And there are great things ahead over the next year, and let me just mentions a few. Next summer we will be reopening the National Museum of American History after a two-year massive renovation. We have opened the central core of the museum to let light in and bring it alive. But as Brent Glass, the director, likes to say, it's much more than an architectural renovation. It is an intellectual renovation of this museum, showing new ways in shedding light into our history.

And of course, one of the massive stars of this will be the Star-Spangled Banner. Did you know that the Star-Spangle Banner actually weighs 46 pounds and is 34 feet long? If you didn't, please come and see it in what will be an inspiring setting to look back and reflect on our own history. A year from now, we will be opening a new ocean hall at the National Museum of Natural History, a project that is clearly very close to my heart. Oceans cover two-thirds of the surface of the planet and over 97 percent of the living biosphere of the Earth, and it is time that here on the National Mall of the United States we have a window to learn about the oceans and what they mean for the livelihoods of everyone. And of course, we're busy at work starting to design and build the concepts and buildings for what will be the Smithsonian's 19th museum, the National Museum of African-American History and Culture. But you don't have to wait for the building to open on the National Mall because the museum is already up and running and active through our web pages, showing the contributions of native -- of African-Americans to the history of this country.

The Smithsonian tells us the story of what it means to be an American. But it also provides a window of America to the rest of the world. And the fact is that the core activities of the Smithsonian -- the collections, the research and the education -- are going ahead very strong.

Now, let me turn to the second part of my talk about some of the fictions. As I mentioned, I've come to realize not everyone understands everything that's going on at the Smithsonian. My first

fiction is that what you see is all we have. I mentioned we have 137 million objects and specimens in our collections but the fact is that less than 2 percent of those collections are on display at any one point in time. Many of these collections are used for scientific purposes to carry out research, not only open to our scientists but from visiting scientists from across America and all over the world. Well, we recognize that we want new opportunities for people to go behind the scenes and one of our steps in that direction is an aggressive plan to digitize the collections at the Smithsonian Institution, including high resolution images to some of the most important collections that we have, so we will bring the collections of the Smithsonian to you at home, a mouse click away, whether it's at home or in your classrooms.

The second myth and fiction is that we're only a destination here in Washington, and as you have gathered from my comments the Smithsonian is a lot more than just a destination here. We have the largest traveling exhibition service in the world and every year we take more than 50 exhibitions to more than 5 million people across America. We have more than 150 affiliate museums that we collaborate with for exhibitions, we will loan them collections, we will help them strengthen their work, and these are found in 39 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Panama.

And the Natural Sciences Resources Center, which is a collaboration we have with the National Academies, is helping us improve the quality of science education in 25 percent of the schools across America, reaching more than 11 million students as we speak.

And now let me address the third fiction. As you heard from the introduction, the Smithsonian has been challenged over the last few months with a series of problems, and the perception is that the Smithsonian is endangered. But I'm actually here to tell you that nothing is further from the truth. I'm here to tell you that we have identified a number of weaknesses in our governance and the leadership as a result of what has happened.

But you also need to realize that many of these revelations were shocking to our own staff, including myself, and the important thing is that we have taken steps to improve the governance, the transparency, and the accountability of everyone in the Smithsonian Institution. I've always liked to say that where there is a crisis there is an opportunity, and I have absolutely no doubt that in the future we will have a much stronger Smithsonian as a result of the events that have taken place. The important thing is our mission is moving forward, we have turned that page, and now we're focusing on the future.

And that brings me to the third and final part of my talk today. For me, the fundamental question is to ask what are the major trends and tendencies in our society, and what is the role that we envision the Smithsonian Institution playing in helping us shape that future. If you stop to think about some of the major trends and the implications for us, just a few examples -- the population growth and the immigration into this country means that we will need to reach an increasingly diverse population across America and many other parts of the world. The globalization and trends and trade and what is

happening there is bringing the nations of the world closer together, and it means that we have an opportunity not only to take the Smithsonian to other remote corners of the world but to explain those parts of the world to our visitors here in America.

The economic growth and development that is taking place in the United States and other places provides an opportunity to secure additional resources and funding opportunities and partnerships to achieve our mission. But at the same time the environmental

degradation that is taking place in many parts of the world means that some of those species that we are studying are in danger of extinction in years to come and that we have a responsibility of using our research on our collections to help protect them in the future. But there are also new technologies and new opportunities -- areas such as molecular biology which are enabling us to ask new questions with new tools and understand the diversity of the planet, and areas like information technology where the costs are lower and the possibility of taking the Smithsonian to people across America and the world is much better.

I also stop to think about what is it that makes the Smithsonian so unique. We are the national museum of the United States of America. We have a long tradition of 161 years. We have the trust and the name recognition. But for me some of the things that make the Smithsonian really special is the fact that on the one hand we have a huge scope and diversity of our activities. We're not just devoted to one area of history or art or natural history. We do it all. We look at all this range of focus of work in science, in history, in art and the culture, and we can ask questions and look across disciplines. And, of course, we can bring the results of those questions to the people, and we bring it to the National Mall, to you, for free.

Looking ahead, I also stop to think about what should be our strategic priorities. Which are the kinds of areas where we can make the biggest contribution in the next generation or two? Clearly, there's an important role for us to play in terms of helping to document the history and heritage as well as the natural and cultural diversity of the world through our collections. But we also have the responsibility to continuing (sic) to ask new questions and to use new methods and approaches to advance our understanding as a collective society, and of course, we can take those and find new ways to share this knowledge with the audiences across America and our nations across the world.

If we're to achieve these objectives we need to make sure that we can train and recruit the next generation of our scientists, scholars, educators, and collection managers. We need to take steps to improve our physical infrastructure at the Smithsonian, a huge backlog that we're confronting, and make sure that we take buildings like the arts and industries building and bring it back to its former glory. We need to embrace new technologies in ways that can further our mission and, of course, in order to do this we need to secure the resources that we need to make it happen as a public/private partnership.

Now, let me just use one example that for me captures how all of these dimensions come together with a project that has been very close



to my own heart and that we announced this spring. On May 9th, we announced a new partnership of institutions to launch what we call An Encyclopedia of Life. This is a project that's an electronic encyclopedia of life and we'll have a website for every species found on the planet. That's about 1.8 million web pages. It's a gateway to the knowledge. It will allow you not only to learn about the species

but look at their distribution. You can link to it and actually connect with the collections behind the scenes at the Smithsonian, the libraries of the Smithsonian Institution, and you can pull it all together in a way that you can help understand this natural world.

And the only way we can do it is through partnerships because it's a project so large that it goes well beyond the Smithsonian, and we're fortunate to have the partnership with institutions such as the Field Museum in Chicago, the Marine Biological Laboratories in Woods Hole, Harvard University, the Instituto de Biodiversidad in Costa Rica, and many other institutions and scientists from around the world. And the power of this tool -- this electronic encyclopedia of life -- is boundless. Just imagine as two examples -- the first is in the area of citizen science. Invasive species are a major problem in our nation. They're showing up in our shores and they're taking over entire communities and leading to massive transformations in the communities and even our livelihoods.

We have the opportunity with an encyclopedia of life to actually mobilize thousands of collaborators -- students and adults alike -- and help them gather data that will allow us to ask questions in ways that we were never able to do before. And you can also take this information with you and take it anywhere you go and next time that you go to Panama to those jungles where I studied seven years ago -- whether you go with your child or your grandchild -- you'll be able to take out your cell phone, link to the web, look at a bug on a leaf and actually figure out what this is using this encyclopedia of life. You can become a tropical biologist and you can discover those jungles of Panama.

In closing, I just wanted to tell you that the state of the Smithsonian is strong. The Smithsonian is the repository of our nation's values, objects, memories and our aspirations. And at times when the image of America may be challenged and tarnished abroad, the Smithsonian is also known as a symbol of America -- our values and our virtues across the world. The Smithsonian is America's museum. The Smithsonian is your museum. And all I want to say is please come and see us again. We have many exciting things going on. And also look for us in your hometown.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay. We have a lot of questions -- some about the speech, some on other issue affecting the Smithsonian.

First of all --

MR. SAMPER: No kidding?

MR. ZREMSKI: Really. (Laughs.)

What can be done to raise the profile of the Smithsonian's research work?

MR. SAMPER: I think it started with the speech.

It's a very important question, because most people don't realize many of the things I told you, and that we do so much research behind the scenes. And I think one of the things that we're trying to build a lot more is some of this research out in our museums and also bringing it out on the web. And we will continue using every means we can to share this knowledge beyond our scientific peers and scholars.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay. One issue that you touched upon, if you could be a little bit more specific about, is the Smithsonian's capital improvement needs -- what the greatest needs would be and how you plan to address them in the next few years?

MR. SAMPER: This is indeed one of the biggest challenges of the Smithsonian. When I became acting secretary six months ago I said, "Explain this to me and show me what we have." As it turns out, we have more than 700 buildings across Washington and other places and many of these buildings are decades or even more than a century old. We have a huge backlog in terms of the maintenance and revitalization. We've actually estimated, through our studies and looking at what we need, that the backlog we're confronting is about \$2.5 billion total and at the current pace it would take us more than one decade to catch up.

We're looking at a whole range of strategies to be able to address this that will have to require a partnership between the federal government to help us with some of the facilities, and also partnerships with the private sector. We are developing a comprehensive plan that will include four or five options going ahead.

But we need to raise probably an additional \$1 billion for our facilities and probably an additional \$1 billion for our mission programs.

MR. ZREMSKI: Could you be a little bit more specific about the future plans for the Arts and Industries Building?

MR. SAMPER: the Arts and Industries Building, of course, is one of the jewels of the Smithsonian. It is such an important building in our history -- the second oldest building on the Mall -- and it has housed a number of activities over the years. And unfortunately, four years ago a decision was made to have to close it because of some of the structural problems.

What we're planning to do right now is we're about to issue a request for proposals to look at potential partnerships that would allow us to make the investment that is needed there, which we estimate will be in the order of \$70 million just to stabilize the structure and probably another \$100 million in scoping out either as a facility that could be used for visitor facilities or potentially partnerships with other museums. Whatever we do, we're going to be careful as to make sure it's something that will further our mission

and is fully compatible with the activities at the Smithsonian.

MR. ZREMSKI: Large private donors to the Smithsonian and most universities want to have buildings named for them. How can you attract donations for the repair and upkeep of existing buildings, and are there any plans for naming rights on buildings that are not yet named after someone or something?

MR. SAMPER: Some of our facilities have been named after particular donors going back in history -- just take the Hirshhorn Museum or the Freer & Sackler Galleries are good examples. And there's no doubt that private donors have been a fundamental part of the Smithsonian, starting with the bequest of James Smithson and over the years. We have started naming certain facilities -- and in particular, exhibition areas. And we do intend to continue exploring these, but in a way that will really respect sort of the mission and what our museums stand for.

I should also point out that we're also fortunate to have many important donors and people out there that will also contribute to the mission of the Smithsonian -- including facilities and others -- without naming. And these are some of the heroes of the Smithsonian as well.

MR. ZREMSKI: What do you plan to do with the study of the art museums of the Smithsonian? Will any of the recommendations be enacted and if so, could you tell us which ones?

MR. SAMPER: This was one of the surprises I found on my desk six months ago. (Laughter.) I knew there had been an external review of the arts. I'd actually not focused on studying this report. And it was very useful. I found it to be a document that actually reflected on the strengths and the weaknesses of our various museums across the arts. And it actually identified a series of very important questions that we certainly need to address. Issues like -- let me take one example -- the National Museum for African Art and looking at some of the potential expansion in areas like contemporary African art; looking at how we integrate, or not, areas like the Patent Office Building Museum, the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery.

I think there were many useful recommendations there. We're taking those aboard in some of the individual strategic plans of the museums. And there are some recommendations that we decided not to pursue. One of those clearly was that we are moving ahead with the recruitment of a director for the National Portrait Gallery and keeping a separate identity between that and the American Art Museum.

MR. ZREMSKI: What is the status of the internal task force on business ventures? What are the issues being considered by the task force and what are the hard issues that will be faced?

MR. SAMPER: Do we have an hour? (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Well, we've got 24 minutes.

MR. SAMPER: All right. Let me just start by saying that business ventures have been a very important activity at the Smithsonian for many, many years. A few days ago when we had the first meeting, we were recalling a history of the first business-ventures activities. And the first business venture that the Smithsonian had was actually a small booth in the Smithsonian Castle that was run by the widow of one of our employees -- back 150 years ago. The Smithsonian publishing business started more than 100 years ago in 1870 and it took us about 100 years to actually turn some profit in there, but we did it! (Laughter.)

But nowadays, when you look at it we actually have a whole diversity of activities, some of which are extremely important for our mission. Take the Smithsonian Magazine. It's a magazine that has more than 7 million readers every month and it's an opportunity to get some of our content out. The other big one, of course, is the retail operations in our stores, which is very important. And these

businesses, on the one side, generate income -- unrestricted income that furthers our mission -- but can also make a big impact in terms of the increase and the dissemination of knowledge.

There have been many critiques and questions in terms of the business ventures, whether some of them were appropriate for the mission of the Smithsonian or not, how the revenue from these was shared with the units and other aspects. So I have decided to -- appointed a task force which started working about six weeks ago. They have actually had their first face-to-face meetings just 10 days ago, and they're going to be looking at four fundamental questions. The first is which are the -- what is the role of business ventures in the mission of the Smithsonian?; a second one is which ones of those are activities we should do directly versus potentially outsourcing some of them? And a particular one we're looking at is the retail operations; a third one is what should be the revenue share model for these business ventures with the units; and a fourth one is what should be the governance and should Smithsonian business ventures continue to operate as a semi-autonomous one?

They will come back with our recommendations in December to the board of regents, and we'll make some decisions in a way that will help us and maximize the potential to contribute to the mission.

MR. ZREMSKI: Given the overall federal budget situation, what are your realistic expectations from Congress this year?

MR. SAMPER: One of the new things I've had to do in the last six months is spend a lot of time up on the Hill, and I have learned a lot. And we have a very active dialogue going on with Congress not only to address the short-term concerns related to governance and some of the issues that have received wide coverage, but more importantly really addressing this future of the Smithsonian and seeing how we address areas like the facilities.

Clearly, we're waiting. Our budget this year is in the air. We're waiting for the conference. We're very pleased that we had a good request from the president and the mark-up in the Senate is very important. That would actually increase the budget of the Smithsonian

to address some of our facilities' backlogs above the president's request. We have a challenge in the House budget that was approved -- that included a \$35 million cut. We are in conversations with them, hoping to come out with a strong budget not only for '08 but moving forward because this will require investment both of private and federal funds for the future.

MR. ZREMSKI: Given the Smithsonian's financial challenges, what are the chances that the Smithsonian museums will have to start charging admission?

MR. SAMPER: Admission is certainly something that, as far as I can tell, comes up every two or three years and I think it's been on the table for many years for many of the boards of regents, and we're always coming back to look at it. But in my view, I think one of the things that really makes the Smithsonian special is the free access. I think it is the opportunity to share these collections with millions of visitors that come from all over the world, and we'll certainly do anything we can to try and look at other options so we don't have to look at charging admission. It is an option that we may put on the table, but personally I certainly hope we will never go there.

MR. ZREMSKI: How are you improving oversight at the Smithsonian -- sorry. How are you improving oversight at the Smithsonian?

MR. SAMPER: Right.

The oversight at the Smithsonian is one of the areas that has received a lot of attention, and the Smithsonian has a unique governance structure. As you know, it's actually set up as a separate legal entity -- as a trust instrumentality of the United States and it has a board of regents that has 17 members -- that actually has the oversight over all of our facilities. And it is that board of regents that appoints the secretary of the Smithsonian. We have identified a number of areas and taken steps to aggressively improve the operations of the Board of Regents. At their meeting last Monday, they actually modified the bylaws of the regents to -- for example, establish a position of a chairman of the board that will be separate from the position of the chancellor of the board, and that will go into effect later this year. They have established additional committees to look at some of the key issues, such as the Facilities Committee.

And we're also looking at ways that we can not only use the board of regents, but the advisory boards that we have in all of our museums. We're fortunate to have about 27 different advisory boards for all of our museums with extremely talented people committed to the mission of the Smithsonian, and we want to make sure that there's a constructive dialogue between the regents and others.

So these are just some of the examples of the steps that we're taking going forward.

MR. ZREMSKI: Since the Smithsonian is largely federally funded and given the recent financial problems attributed to former Secretary Small, shouldn't the Smithsonian be subject to regular routine audits by the Government Accountability Office?

MR. SAMPER: We -- we're subject to all kinds of audits all the time, including the Government Accountability Office. (Laughter.) As a matter of fact, we've worked very closely with GAO on areas like our facilities. We've had two studies done by GAO. There's currently a study that we're looking at in terms of our overall governance and ways to improve it. So we have that. So there's a number of ways that we can do it, and of course improving our communication and the oversight that needs to take place by the United States Congress. And that is something that's happened in the last few months with the hearings that we've had, and it is an opportunity to identify our problems, to make some of the points and the needs that we have and to make sure that we take the steps to strengthen these institutions.

MR. ZREMSKI: Why have no regents resigned?

MR. SAMPER: It's a valid question in terms of the regents. The board of regents has clearly received a lot of criticism over some of the events that led to the resignation of Secretary Small, and I think what's been impressive to me is that many of these regents have actually stepped up and said, "Absolutely, we should have been looking at this." But what I admire is that most of these regents, instead of just resigning and saying, "We're leaving," have actually recognized the problems and are trying to fix those problems. And that's what we have seen. Going forward, we will have -- and we do have some openings coming up in the board of regents because of term expirations or nonrenewals, and we look forward to appointing two or three new regents over the next year that will strengthen the board of regents.

MR. ZREMSKI: Does the Smithsonian still have former Secretary Small on the payroll in any way? Do they -- do you owe him any payments on the buyout of his employment contract?

MR. SAMPER: The answer is no.

MR. ZREMSKI: How will the public and the press know that the original goals and values of the Smithsonian's mandate to increase the -- and diffuse knowledge to mankind that this goal has been resurrected?

MR. SAMPER: Well, I hope some of the public is listening to the speech. (Laughter.) But it is clearly -- I think the most important thing is that the employees of the Smithsonian that are working every day and our volunteers -- those 6,000 employees and 5,000 volunteers are committed to the mission. Many of these are people that have worked at the Smithsonian for 20 and 30 years, and the reason they're there is they care for those values and they care for that mission. So you have our commitment that even through these moments when there's been criticism and others, the core mission is moving forward and that's exactly the point of my speech.

MR. ZREMSKI: One member of the audience writes on a slightly different topic, "I remember visiting museums as a child that could be very interactive. Could you address what the Smithsonian is doing to make the experience of visiting a museum a more dynamic and memorable activity?"

MR. SAMPER: I think it's clear that the paradigm and the approaches of museology have changed, and I think we've come a long ways from the old Victorian museum where you displayed specimens in cases. And we're looking at precisely doing a lot more interactive kinds of activities. I'm always amazed with small children that come into the museums and others -- how they love different kinds of interactivity, including electronics and other tools. Certainly some of the new exhibitions that we're planning have a lot of interactive features. Take, for example, the ocean hall that I mentioned. One of the features that we're going to have in that is a globe -- a six-foot globe of the planet that's called "Science and the Sphere" that will allow us to project layers of data about the oceans and can be used in an interactive way so people can ask questions and get answers there. So we're looking at different ways of introducing elements across all the museums.

MR. ZREMSKI: As the World Wide Web evolves and where technology becomes available, how will the Smithsonian's websites adapt over time?

MR. SAMPER: The Web is exploding and it's a wonderful tool and a resource for us. As I mentioned, during the last year alone we had more than 150 million Web visits to the Smithsonian webpages. And this growing at a rate of somewhere between 30 and 40 percent per year. The actual growth rate is much faster in the Web than in our destinations. The challenge is making sure we provide more of that content there in interactive ways -- not just passively -- so people can use this information going forward. And I think it is steps like the Encyclopedia of Life or like of some of the tools that are being done by the Postal Museum in displaying some of their collections on the Web that will allow us to do it. Our challenge is making sure

that all of the content goes up there is peer-reviewed and really represents the best scholarship so that we know that our brand and our trustworthiness will still be there on the Web.

MR. ZREMSKI: Many great museums like St. Petersburg's Hermitage in Russia store vast reserves of treasures in their basements, which patrons rarely see. How much does the Smithsonian have tucked away and where do you keep it? (Laughter.)

MR. SAMPER: Well, as I mentioned, about 98 percent is tucked away behind the scenes. Most of the collections at the Smithsonian are right on the National Mall at our various museums, but we have a facility in Suitland, Maryland called the Museum Support Center where we have been moving an increasing number of our collections to state-of-the-art facilities. Let me give you one example that we just completed this year. We finished the expansion of the Museum Support Center with what we call the Pod Five. This is a state-of-the-art facility that can be used to store collections of specimens that are stored in alcohol. If you're looking at fish or frogs or reptiles and salamanders, they're usually preserved in jars with alcohol, and this of course is not -- it's great for the specimens, but it's not good when you have millions and millions of gallons.

These had been stored in the National Mall, and we recognize that it was not only good for the collections but also our visitors to move

them out so we've started the process of moving 6 million specimens out to this facility. And as I mentioned, we're looking at new ways not only to store them but to hopefully allow the visitors to look behind the scenes through a variety of ways, including the -- (inaudible).

MR. ZREMSKI: What would Mr. Freer think about the changes in his gallery? Would he approve of the Sackler? (Laughter.)

MR. SAMPER: Very good question. I think -- I trust that he would actually. As you know, the original Freer gallery -- we were fortunate to have an extraordinary bequest and collection but also a number of constraints in terms of that collection, and people still wonder about the scope of what we do there. But the Sackler, I think, brought a very important addition in terms of the scope of activities, not only in nation art but Middle East and others, and I think when you look at an exhibition like Portugal and some of the connections between the two you can weave the Freer and Sackler together very well. So I think if Mr. Freer had actually walked through Freer-Sackler this summer and seen Encompassing the Globe he would have been proud.

MR. ZREMSKI: What have you learned through the renovation of the portrait gallery and the American art gallery that you can take away as you're looking toward renovating other Smithsonian properties?

MR. SAMPER: Renovating a building like the old Patton office building tells you, first, that it's not easy to renovate an old historical landmark in a way that'll really preserve what it stands for -- the architecture and others. Quite often it's easy to just knock down a building and build a new one. What we're looking at is bringing them back to their former glory. That's what we have done with the portrait gallery and I think it's been extremely successful, and we intend to do that with some of our other facilities like natural history and down the road, arts and industries.

MR. ZREMSKI: As a biologist, how concerned are you about climate change and what can the Smithsonian do in terms of public education on that issue?

MR. SAMPER: There's two sides of me and my answer there. As a scientist, I'm intrigued by the potential impact of climate change and the role that it has played in shaping the evolution of the planet. Climate change has actually had a huge impact for millions of years in the livelihoods and the evolution of many groups of organisms, and some of our research even suggests that part of why we are here as human beings has been our capacity to respond to climate change in the past.

As someone interested in environmental issues, I am concerned about the impact of climate change in some of these communities and the capacity to respond to this change, which is happening at very fast rates. What the Smithsonian can do, in my mind, is help us bring this knowledge, use the collections, and use what we have both past from the fossil record and present through areas like the Center for Tropical Forest Science and the -- (inaudible) -- I mentioned to bring



this knowledge in a way that will help us address these questions going forward.

MR. ZREMSKI: The public perception, I think, is that the Smithsonian is largely a Washington institution.

What more can the Smithsonian do to reach out to the rest of the country to share its collection and its treasures?

MR. SAMPER: I mentioned during my speech a few of the areas that we're working on. Clearly, we have the traveling exhibition service that's reaching across America, the affiliations program, but I think there's great potential in expanding -- in terms of expanding our collaboration for educational programs. There's an incredible opportunity here to bring some of our content out there into the classrooms and there is of history, art, culture, and others and help improve the quality of education. So one of the steps we've taken in that direction is we've signed an agreement with the Council of Chief State School Officers in a way that will allow us to bring the content out there in ways that can be tied in with the school standards for each of the states.

MR. ZREMSKI: More than one speaker who's visited us this year has expressed concern about young Americans not necessarily wanting to go into the sciences, and that there's a long-term impact to that. I was wondering what your thoughts were on that and anything more beyond what you just mentioned that could be done to address that issue.

MR. SAMPER: I think all the data that we have clearly shows that we need to focus on improving the quality of science education. It is that education -- those young scientists and engineers that will make a difference in terms of the development of this nation. We have an important role to play in there, both by taking our content and helping improve education to classrooms but also by providing opportunities so we can have students come to the Smithsonian and carry out research. That's why one of my priorities as acting secretary has been improving the number of fellowships and augmenting the number of fellowships and internships that we do for people coming from not only across the United States but other countries in the world.

MR. ZREMSKI: Clearly, you have a lot of plans, proposals, things you're going to be looking at, especially along the realm of capital improvements. How long do you think it will be before the Smithsonian catches up on its capital improvement backlog and gets to where it really wants to be going?

MR. SAMPER: It will depend entirely on our capacity to mobilize additional resources. At the current pace, we're investing somewhere

in the order of \$150 million a year in improving this. We have a clear plan. We've made a number of improvements in different facilities and we're focusing on those facilities that house the largest number of collections or where we have safety issues for the public -- the largest number of visitors. But it's clear that at the current pace and the level of investment of \$150 million we will not be able to catch up. That's why we're making the case to the

administration, to Congress, and to private donors that we need to increase that base investment by at least \$100 million a year to really catch up.

MR. ZREMSKI: How do you think the Smithsonian's development efforts, say, over the past ten years have gone and has that impacted where you stand today?

MR. SAMPER: When you look back at the history of the Smithsonian, development activities were almost nonexistent 10 or 12 years ago, and I think we've really come a long ways from where we were 15 years ago in developing and capacity there. We are fortunate to have a number of donors and people that believe in what we do and we've been building this aggressively, and there's no doubt that we have to expand that. We have been very fortunate to have just received the figures for our fundraising for this year and we're doing very, very well. Our initial target of private gifts and fundraising for this year was \$115 million and we will close in around \$140 million in gifts plus \$100 million in grants and contracts. We have come a long ways but we will continue expanding in that area.

MR. ZREMSKI: Are you enjoying the job and would you like to drop the word acting from your title? (Laughter, applause.)

MR. SAMPER: Yes, I am enjoying the job, especially now. The first three months were a bit of a rocky ride but the important thing is I have more time to go out there and see what we're doing. I feel very proud of the Smithsonian, of its employees, and of what we're doing, and it would certainly be an honor to serve as secretary.

MR. ZREMSKI: We're almost out of time, but before I ask the last question let me just mention a couple of other important matters. First of all, let me remind our members of our future speakers. On Monday, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, will be here via video link for the first ever video link luncheon here at the National Press Club. On the 26th Pauline Frommer, creator of the new Pauline Frommer guidebooks for adult budget travelers will speak at the 2007 Eric A. Friedheim Travel Journalism Awards. And on September 28th, a week from today, Congressman Steny Hoyer, the House majority leader, will be here to talk about the fight to live within our means -- why Democrats are working to restore fiscal responsibility and ensure America's prosperity.

Secondly, just like the Smithsonian, the National Press Club is a place of much history and tradition, and part of the tradition is that all of our speakers come away with a plaque and --

MR. SAMPER: You spelled it right. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: We did. And it's not quite a historical artifact but we all -- we all make sure that you get a National Press Club mug.

MR. SAMPER: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: And lastly, a question that really doesn't fit in context very well with the rest of the questions but I thought I'd ask it anyway. When do you expect Tai Shan to start dating? (Laughter.)

Or is it rhymes with dating?

MR. SAMPER: John Berry, the director of the zoo, tells me Tai Shan is a curious guy and I'm sure we'll do it -- we'll do our best to get him a really nice girlfriend and hopefully we'll have many more pandas in years to come thank you. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much, Dr. Samper. I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booz, and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also, thanks to the NPC library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club's broadcast operation center. Press club members can also access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website, [www.press.org](http://www.press.org), and nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio, and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please contact us at 202-662-7511.

Thank you very much. We're adjourned. (Applause.)

####

END