"New Connections, New Contributions at the Smithsonian"
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Smithsonian Institution Secretary
Dr. G. Wayne Clough
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(text as prepared for delivery)

Good morning. Thank you, Lee, for the introduction. With 34 years of distinguished service in the Congress and a decade of exemplary public service since, you have made a deep and longstanding contribution to this country. As a former university president, let me say that anyone interested in public office would do well to study your career.

Thank you for inviting me here today, and thank you all for coming.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and I am delighted to be here. I come here from the Smithsonian "Castle," which, as many of you know, was the first home of the Wilson Center when it was created by an Act of Congress in 1968.

This is a unique time in the history of the Smithsonian. It was founded in 1846 thanks to a generous bequest from English scientist James Smithson, who never actually set foot on American soil. Today, at 163 years of age, the Smithsonian has a rich history, and with a bit of luck and careful planning, it should be here for many centuries to come and fulfill what should be a vital future. We are entering a new era, one of renewal and rethinking, and one that I am optimistic about. The Smithsonian has a vital role to play in the life of our country and the world. The Institution will specifically address three grand challenges: first, science, especially global warming and biodiversity; second, education; and third, issues of national identity—what it means to be an American. In doing so, we will reach out to new audiences in new ways and remain true to our mission, "the increase and diffusion of knowledge." And that's what I want to talk to you about today.

The Smithsonian Institution is the largest museum and research complex in the world. The Institution now has 19 museums and galleries, 20 libraries, numerous research centers, and the National Zoological Park. All except two of the museums are located in the Washington metropolitan area: Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum and the George Gustav Heye Center of the National Museum of the American Indian are located in New York City. We are open 364 days a year, and the Smithsonian is free to the public.

As Secretary, I have had the opportunity to see the Smithsonian in a way few have. Seeing an institution as diverse as the Smithsonian involves hitting the road and criss-crossing our country as well as making visits to Panama, Chile and Kenya, three of the 88 countries where we have operations. If there's anything I've learned in my first year, it is that the Smithsonian is surprising and inspiring, with brilliant, passionate people determined to make a difference in the life of this country and the world. This is a place where art, history, culture, and science all come together.

Taken together, the trips I just mentioned illustrate the diversity and global reach of Smithsonian science. Our science activities take place in numerous countries around the world, with physical bases for this work at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland, the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the National Zoo here in D.C., and its companion facility the Conservation Research Center at Front Royal Virginia, the Smithsonian Marine Station at Fort Pierce, Florida, a research center specializing in marine biodiversity and ecosystems, and in a number of sites in Panama at the Smithsonian Tropic Research Institution.

This month, I will travel to Wyoming to see the fieldwork of Smithsonian scientist Scott Wing, who has discovered unambiguous evidence for a period of sudden global warming that occurred millions of years ago. His work allows us to see what climate change really does to the planet as opposed to the speculation we hear so much of today.

Scott's work could not have been possible without the development of new scientific tools that allowed for deep analysis and sharing of knowledge across fields. What is all the more exciting is that new tools like this are opening knowledge vistas in a wide array of fields. At the Las Campanas Observatory site in Chile, the Smithsonian is working with an international consortium to build the Giant Magellan Telescope, a device that will allow us to see stars and universes 10 times more clearly than the space-based Hubble Telescope. The Giant Magellan Telescope and similar telescopes are like "time machines" in that what we see on Earth from deep space are light waves travelling from events that happened in distant time. The future discoveries from the telescope will speak to the origins of the universe and can change the way we see ourselves and think about our planet.

We have launched an innovative initiative to address the gaps in our nation's science knowledge and education, an online partnership, the "Encyclopedia of Life." Our biologists and life scientists are using new technology to do what would have been inconceivable a decade ago, launching a collaborative partnership that will have a Web page for each of the 1.8 million known living species on Earth. More than 160,000 species pages are already posted. On each Web page information is available to describe how the double helixes of the species come together to form the DNA strands that make them unique travelers on our planet. The Encyclopedia of Life is already serving as a place of convergence to allow conversations to take place that would not occur otherwise. K-12 science teachers are writing lesson plans and sharing them with others. Children are sending in pictures of species taken with their iPhones on field trips that allow our scientists to link them to the correct Web pages of the Encyclopedia of Life. These creative uses of the Web happen in large part because the Smithsonian is a trusted source of information and a trusted meeting place for those using cyberspace.

As science is a major part of the Smithsonian mission, I consider it one of my challenges to reposition and make much more visible the Smithsonian's science efforts, but to do this ways that respect the remarkable resources that the Institution offers through our arts, history, culture, and education programs. I like to think that we will not only celebrate the separate strengths of all these programs, but the exciting places where they intersect and where their boundaries can diminish through undertaking interdisciplinary initiatives. It is in these areas that the

Smithsonian can accomplish things that others with single missions cannot—particularly in education.

As President Obama said, "In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite." He also warned that "the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow."

We have more than 30 education centers across our Institution. While we have had impact, we also know that informal education is becoming increasingly recognized as an important component in the success of students and in helping faculty do their important work. This is where our future lies—to build a focus for our units so that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. Look for more from us in the near future as we develop the infrastructure we need to do the job ahead. For example…

In February, we held a free two-day seminar on Lincoln for teachers and students all across the country—and around the globe. So far, we've had more than 5,000 participants, logins from all 50 states, nearly 2,000 cities, plus 75 countries. It was a pan-institutional, interdisciplinary effort. A teacher from my hometown of Douglas, Georgia, said, "Thank you—next best thing to being there! The part of the conference that was so valuable to my students (and to me) was that the moderators commented on and responded to several of our comments. In high school lingo, that was 'cool.'" This pilot illustrates how the Smithsonian can fill important gaps that exist at the K-12 level by using new technology to share its work in art, history and culture, and science.

This fall, we'll have a second seminar within a more formal approach, this time focused on global warming, a topic where, as I mentioned, the Smithsonian science brings extraordinary resources. We have similar resources in history, art and culture.

As our country becomes more diverse, it is important to support and strengthen the cohesiveness of our society. Our artifacts and specimens tell wonderful stories illustrating the great American spirit through the eyes of the different groups making up our country. We are working with others through innovative collaborations to clarify what America means to our own citizens as well as to those around the globe. We have a significant contribution to make to the civic life of our nation.

For example, our Smithsonian American Art Museum exhibition, "1934: A New Deal for Artists," reminds us that we've survived tough economic times before. It celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Public Works of Art Program with paintings that are poignant and powerful. And to expand the scope of the exhibition, the museum also put its entire collection of 1934 paintings online allowing the viewer to see those paintings not chosen for the exhibit. These works have started a conversation that spans generations. It continues at our National Postal Museum with the exhibition "FDR & Stamps of the Great Depression."

The conversation continues at the newly reopened National Museum of American History with its "Star-Spangled Banner" exhibition. I have seen it 20 times and been thrilled every time. It is

much more than an exhibition, it is an engaging experience. Through light, artifacts, and interactive computer surfaces, you learn the inspiring story of how the flag and the anthem became dominate national symbols for us. I'm sure many of you have seen "The American Presidency" exhibition. There, visitors can look at some of the artifacts from Woodrow Wilson's presidency and discuss his impact on our nation and the world. If you have seen it before, please take another look because it is always changing.

When its doors open in the future in its special place on the National Mall, our latest museum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, will tell a story all Americans must hear. This story will stimulate a meaningful dialogue on race and memory, resilience and reconciliation, liberty and equality.

That's what the National Museum of the American Indian does as it tells the story of the land's first inhabitants to all our nation's inhabitants.

The challenge, as any good teacher knows, is to tell the stories in new and engaging ways to new audiences—to each new generation of Americans.

In San Francisco a few months ago, I was at a brainstorming session about the future of the Smithsonian with a group of "new millennials." I asked them how we could reach out to their generation given the way they communicated. It was a lively discussion and at one point a young woman looked me in the eye and said, "surprise me."

In January, we convened a two-day seminar, "Smithsonian 2.0." We assembled a group of technology experts, leaders in the world of new and social media, "digerati" such as… Bran Ferren, Clay Shirky, George Oates, and Chris Anderson. These folks met with an equal number of bright people at the Smithsonian who are leading the way in use of Web technology. Working together they produced a set of "mind maps" that gave us insights as to how we can link to new generations, and all those who use digital technology to learn and communicate.

During the seminar, one of the digerati met one of our "old-school" scientists, and told me, "Man, I met this cool old guy who explained the origin of the universe in five minutes!" Generations can relate to each other at the Smithsonian. And so can "different drummers."

The day before yesterday I was in a quite interesting and unusual meeting with… Mickey Hart, the drummer for the Grateful Dead; Margaret Geller, a senior scientist from the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory who "maps the universe"; and David Devorkin, senior curator at the Air and Space Museum, who sometimes wears a big wizard hat and carries a wand when he lectures, and who has designed a pinball game to explain how black holes work. Mickey Hart is working on taking light waves emanating from space and converting them to sound waves to capture the "sound of the universe." So Hart came to meet with our experts to brainstorm. Only at the Smithsonian.

And at the National Museum of the American Indian this past weekend we had a skateboard ramp set up on the ground floor to demonstrate the importance of that sport to native youth. Again, only at the Smithsonian.

But the larger point is that "surprise" comes from creativity, from different ways of looking at the world. With its vast resources, the Smithsonian is the place such surprising conversations can start and continue.

And the conversations are internal as well as we work on the final phase of a strategic plan. We can't predict the future but we can certainly plan for it. What will visitors experience five, 10 years from now? We know everyone can't come to us; we want to come to them and use technology to do so. We want to open up our vast and varied collections, 137 million objects and specimens in all, so that learners of all ages can benefit. We want you to be able to access our amazing experts. We don't want you to just visit; we want to start an educational journey, an ongoing dialogue. That's what we're thinking about.

The Smithsonian is entering a new era. We know we can help our nation and the world face many of the grand challenges that lie ahead in science, education, and issues of national identity. We have the capacity to tell the story of America and all its hopes, struggles, triumphs, creativity, contradictions, and courage—and that's what we intend to do.

Thank you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

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