



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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In Wake of Troubling New GAO Report, Chairman Feinstein Calls for Further Review of Smithsonian Institution Operations

Washington, DC –U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Chairman of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, has called on the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents to respond to the latest news of continued maintenance and security issues at their facilities, which were detailed in a new Government Accountability Office report released today.

Chairman Feinstein also expressed concern over the GAO's report that the Smithsonian Institution continues to expect federal funding to cover its \$2.5 billion facilities maintenance backlog. Senator Feinstein has repeatedly called on the Smithsonian to come up with an alternative strategy to raise private funds.

"It is clear that without a comprehensive plan to raise private funds to address these issues the Smithsonian facilities will continue to decline, putting the treasures in its collection at great risk," Senator Feinstein wrote in a letter sent yesterday to Smithsonian Board of Regents Chairman Roger Sant.

Chairman Feinstein has scheduled a Rules Committee hearing for Wednesday, November 7, to discuss the GAO report.

The following is the text of Chairman Feinstein's letter to Mr. Sant:

September 27, 2007

Mr. Roger Sant
Chairman, Smithsonian Board of Regents
2100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Roger:

I read with interest the draft GAO report on facilities management at the Smithsonian that I understand will be publicly released tomorrow. While I was heartened to see that the Smithsonian has made some facilities improvements since 2005, I am concerned about the continued deterioration documented by the report.

The report details failing temperature and humidity control at the National Air and Space Museum storage facilities that has caused corrosion of historic airplanes. It documents inadequate electrical systems that have forced the National Air and Space Museum to occasionally close its popular galleries to visitors. It catalogues leaking roofs that endanger the Smithsonian's collections at the Sackler

Galleries and the National Museum of African Art, and leaking pools at the National Zoo that cause an average loss of 110,000 gallons of water every day at a cost of \$297,000 annually.

The GAO also found that despite increased funding for security at the Smithsonian, basic security needs have gone unaddressed. According to the report the Smithsonian's two most visited museums have decreased their security presence by 31% since 2003 and museum directors have attributed the absence of security officers to cases of vandalism and theft.

The GAO ascribes the ongoing maintenance, revitalization and security issues at the Smithsonian to the continued budget crisis at the Institution. Despite the growing pressure to address deteriorating infrastructure, the GAO found that the Smithsonian has given little thought to the eight non-federal funding options offered in the GAO's 2005 report. What evaluation they did find was limited, and the analysis of each funding option was incomplete.

Perhaps most troubling is that Smithsonian officials informed the GAO that the \$2.5 billion backlog only includes costs for which the Smithsonian expects to receive federal funds. Time and again I have conveyed to the Regents that the Smithsonian can not rely on the federal government for this magnitude of funding. Other, more creative partnerships must be explored to address maintenance issues at the Smithsonian.

The GAO's recommendation that the Board of Regents submit a comprehensive funding strategy to address the \$2.5 billion facilities maintenance backlog at the Institution echoes my own repeated appeals to the Board. It is clear that without a comprehensive plan to raise private funds to address these issues the Smithsonian facilities will continue to decline, putting the treasures in its collection at great risk.

It is my intention to hold a hearing of the Rules Committee regarding the GAO report on November 7, 2007. At that time I will expect that the Facilities Committee be prepared to testify on the Board of Regent's strategy to close the \$2.5 billion backlog that I requested at the Rules Committee hearing on June 26, 2007. I know that the Committee has been meeting to develop a fundraising strategy and I look forward to an update on their progress.

Thank you for your continued dedication to the Smithsonian Institution. I trust that you and the rest of the Board of Regents are working hard to solve this difficult problem.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
Chairman

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