

**WASHINGTON** – Today, the Committee on House Administration received testimony from management and board members of the Smithsonian Institution on the museum’s progress in restoring effective governance practices. The Smithsonian is undergoing transformative changes to achieve a heightened level of transparency and ethical conduct following the departure of former Secretary Lawrence Small earlier this year.

The Committee’s Ranking Republican Member, Rep. Vern Ehlers, R-Mich., lauded the efforts of the museum to re-establish effective management controls including increased involvement by its Board of Regents, but continued to sound a cautious note regarding Smithsonian Business Ventures (SBV), the museum’s revenue-generating unit. “If I were in charge, I’d want the person in charge of Smithsonian Business Ventures to be in the office next to me,” said Ehlers. The Committee held an oversight hearing looking into SBV under Ehlers’ leadership in the previous Congress in response to growing concern surrounding Smithsonian on Demand, the Smithsonian Business Ventures’ partnership with CBS/Showtime Networks, Inc.

To provide renewed oversight into Smithsonian Business Ventures, Acting Secretary of the Smithsonian Cristián Samper announced that he had appointed Tom Ott, president of Smithsonian Publishing since October 2005, as acting chief executive officer of the unit. Samper further committed to “reviewing broader strategic issues,” within the museum for additional reforms. Former Comptroller General Charles Bowsher conceded that, while much progress had been made, “there are certain areas that need review,” and suggested additional hearings in early 2008 as a way to ensure that the board and management of the museum were on track to meet their goals.

Said Ehlers, “I’ve long supported conducting activities such as today’s proceeding to assure the American public that ‘The Nation’s Attic’ is not being looted by those who would put personal gain above the interests of the Institution.” He added, “We’ve already seen evidence of positive steps being made toward stronger governance by the Board of Regents into the museum’s operations. The Board’s increasingly ‘hands-on’ role into these matters is an important line of defense in safeguarding the Institution, and a crucial first step towards fully restoring the museum’s health. Also, the stronger role for the Inspector General provides even greater oversight.”

Museum officials seemed confident that, while their work was not yet done, significant progress was being made. Once reforms are fully in place, Samper said, “the Smithsonian will emerge a stronger institution.”

For more information, please contact the Committee press office at (202) 225-8281.