

Panel blasts planned cuts at Smithsonian to help finance war

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Bush administration plans to help pay for the war on terrorism by slashing the Smithsonian Institution's budget and eliminating its three most important scientific research centers drew an angry outcry Friday from the independent science commission appointed to reform its research program.

Mitch Daniels, director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, justified the proposed cuts by saying security concerns required the administration to "make all the necessary adjustments in order to fund those new imperatives." At a news conference Friday in the Smithsonian Castle on the National Mall, Smithsonian Science Commission Chairman Jeremy Sabloff said the White House action "would cut at the heart of some of the Smithsonian's unique and important contributions to science. ... This would irreparably undermine the fundamental scientific mandate at the Smithsonian."

Speaking on background, another Smithsonian official said: "If America can't maintain the Smithsonian Institution and fight the war in Afghanistan at the same time, then this nation is in serious trouble."

'Irreparable harm'

Thirty-two members of Congress, led by Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.), a Smithsonian regent, and including Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), have sent a letter to Daniels protesting that "any such treatment of the Smithsonian budget will cause serious and irreparable harm to that organization and its programs."

Matsui, Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and the other four congressional Smithsonian regents met with Daniels to press the institution's case, but Daniels informed all concerned Friday that the White House would not budge on the cuts.

Established by Congress in 1846, the largely taxpayer-funded Smithsonian operates 16 museums and seven research centers and is the world's largest complex of its kind.

The cuts would reduce the Smithsonian's \$497 million budget by \$27 million and force it to use some of the remaining money to pay for increased security measures. The proposal also would eliminate the Smithsonian's Tropical Research Institute, Environmental Research Center and Astrophysical Observatory, turning those functions over to the National Science Foundation, an

agency that largely makes grants.

According to director Ira Rubinoff, the Tropical Research Institute, headquartered in Panama, is involved in studies dealing with global warming, the El Nino weather phenomenon and oxygenation of Earth's atmosphere by the diminishing tropical rain forest.

"The OMB put through these cuts without consulting anyone at the Smithsonian," he said.

Other funding requests denied

The White House also denied requests for new funding to complete the restoration of the historic Old Patent Office Building, which houses the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery.

New funding also was denied for the National Air and Space Museum Center under construction at Dulles International Airport and for the National Museum of the American Indian. The Dulles center was to become home for the nation's first space shuttle and the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, at the end of World War II. The OMB action will reduce the exhibits on display by half, according to museum officials.

The Smithsonian budget was reduced for one year each during the Civil War, World War II and the Korean War, but then substantially increased beyond previous levels during the remainder of those conflicts.

The budget was increased during the Spanish-American War, in both years of U.S. involvement in World War I and in all 10 years of the Vietnam War, going from \$17 million to \$92 million during that conflict. It received substantial increases during the years of the Persian Gulf war and the Kosovo campaign as well.

