

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-6074
MINORITY (202) 225-6051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

October 28, 2026

Mr. Lonnie G. Bunch III
Secretary
Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Drive SW
Washington, D.C. 20560

Dear Secretary Bunch:

The Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency is concerned that the Smithsonian Institution (Smithsonian) does not properly review proposed exhibits in its museums. The Subcommittee held a hearing on July 21, 2026, that examined failures of the National Museum of American History to properly review exhibitions, including ones with blatantly politicized and sexually explicit content.¹ At that hearing the Subcommittee requested information regarding the Smithsonian's content review process.² During her hearing testimony, Director Anthea Hartig stated that she would confer with the Smithsonian's General Counsel about providing requested documents. To date, the Committee has not received any follow-up communication regarding that request.³ The Subcommittee writes to you directly now to seek documents and information regarding the Smithsonian Institution's content review process.

The Smithsonian implemented Directive 603 (SD 603) to govern the institution's review of proposed sensitive exhibits with public interest.⁴ It is instrumental to preserving the Smithsonian's reputation as a trusted source for Americans.⁵ A Smithsonian Inspector General report released in June 2026 reviewed the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum (Cooper Hewitt) exhibition entitled *Making Home-Smithsonian Design Triennial*.⁶ This exhibition was an installation at the Design Triennial, which was originally proposed to showcase 10 New York City buildings compressed into a single room.⁷ This originally uncontroversial proposal was turned into a display of homes destroyed by American made munitions in various military

¹ *Rewriting American History: Examining the Smithsonian's Efforts to Reshape the Past*, 119th Cong. 2 (July 21, 2026), available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=961Mclohmi8>.

² *Id.* at 1:53:38.

³ *Id.* at 1:45:44.

⁴ SMITHSONIAN OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL, OIG-E-26-01, OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN SMITHSONIAN'S CONTENT REVIEW PROCESS, 3 (June 30, 2026) [hereinafter "OIG-E-26-01"].

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* at 8.

engagements against ISIS and other terrorist organizations.⁸ Organizers explained they wanted to portray American military doctrine and even America's founding as being intertwined with "domicide," defined as "the massive and deliberate destruction of homes in order to cause human suffering."⁹

The Inspector General's report found that SD 603 fails to lay out an appropriate purpose or procedure for the review process.¹⁰ The Smithsonian responded to the report by noting that some changes had already been made to the policy and others were in-progress as of 2026.¹¹ The Smithsonian's written response to this report asserted the following regarding its responsibility over content review.

...management review of content at a scholarly institution ... is a complicated matter. We must meet our obligations of accuracy and relevance to the public we serve We must do so without discouraging inquiry and the creativity of our scholarly community.¹²

Beyond the procedural issues with SD 603, the Subcommittee is concerned that the Smithsonian has cultivated a scholarly community that supports insinuations that the deliberate destruction of homes to intentionally cause human suffering is intertwined with the military doctrine of the United States. The Smithsonian Institution was founded for the increase and diffusion of knowledge.¹³ Its content review procedures need to be sufficiently robust to prevent blatantly partisan and inaccurate exhibitions. The Subcommittee is keenly interested in the content review policy updates from the Smithsonian and that they be robustly designed to prevent the kind of inappropriate exhibits discussed at the July hearing and foster a scholarly community that is truly non-partisan.

To assist the Subcommittee's oversight of this matter, we request the following information, covering the time period January 1, 2025 to the present, unless otherwise indicated, as soon as possible but no later than November 11, 2026:

1. All Smithsonian Directives;
2. A timeline for the completion of any planned revisions to SD 603;
3. All documents and communications related to revisions of SD 603;

⁸ Press Release, SITU, "Patterns of Life", a new installation with SITU Research & journalist Mona Chalabi, debuts at Cooper Hewitt (Nov. 4, 2024).

⁹ Cooper Hewitt, *Making Home with Data* | Mona Chalabi and SITU in Conversation with Christina L. De León (Jun. 3, 2025); and U.N. OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, A/77/190, THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING DURING VIOLENT CONFLICT, 4-5 (July 19, 2022).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 10.

¹¹ *Id.* at 24.

¹² OIG-E-26-01, *supra* n. 4.

¹³ 24 U.S.C. § 41

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4. Facilitate access to the following records at the Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA):
 - a. SIA Accession 17-019 Subject Files;
 - b. SIA Accession RS00342 Subject Files;
 - c. SIA Accession 18-028 Smithsonian Issuances;
 - d. SIA Accession 19-201 Administrative Records;
 - e. SIA Accession 17-094 Administrative Records; and
 - f. SIA Accession 20-019 Curatorial Records.

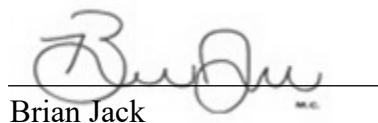
The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. To arrange for the delivery of records or to ask any related follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Tim Burchett
Chairman

Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency



Brian Jack
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Melanie Stansbury, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency

The Honorable Robert Garcia, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform