

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

I write to express my deep opposition to your attempt to undermine the curatorial independence of the Smithsonian Institution. You have no authority to dictate how the Smithsonian Institution—a storied institution that enjoys public confidence and trust—meets its mission to increase and disseminate knowledge.

Your Administration’s August 12, 2025 letterⁱ to Secretary Bunch posits a timeline for three individuals with no relevant experience to make decisions on what American history is displayed—and how information should be conveyed. These political appointees serve at your will and the American public has no reason to believe they have any role but to serve your interests.

The Smithsonian is more than a collection of museums. It’s an American treasure. It tells the story of our country (and our world) in a way that no book or documentary ever could. It aims to tell that story truthfully and completely—the good and the bad, the tragic and triumphant, forever reflecting our nation’s diversity, dynamism, and complicated past. Your blatant attempt to rewrite or recast history disregards the struggle, sacrifice, and social change that were driving forces behind the unity, progress, and values that make our country great.

The American Alliance of Museums’ Code of Ethics for Curators states that “Public trust is earned and granted to museums by the people they serve, and is based on the idea that museums exist to serve the public and will act in the public’s best interest.”ⁱⁱ It further states that curatorial work is guided by the values of serving the public good, “by contributing to and promoting learning, inquiry, and dialogue, and by making the depth and breadth of human knowledge available to the public.” Curators are also required to practice excellence, honesty, and transparency.

There is nothing in your letter to Secretary Bunch to suggest that you have any interest in practicing excellence, honesty, and transparency. Instead, it seems clear that your real interest is in trying to control another foundational cultural institution. In a democracy, one person does not rule our thoughts, values, and beliefs, nor dictate how history should be recorded and interpreted.

I strongly urge you to rescind this proposed review and instead work to advance the curatorial independence that has served the Smithsonian Institution well for over 175 years and made it an Institution the public can trust.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related
Agencies

ⁱ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/08/letter-to-the-smithsonian-internal-review-of-smithsonian-exhibitions-and-materials/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.aam-us.org/2009/01/01/a-code-of-ethics-for-curators/>