

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 19, 2019

Office of the Regents
Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Drive SW #113
Washington, D.C. 20560

Dear Members of the Board of Regents:

As chairs of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), known collectively as the Congressional Tri-Caucus, our members represent some of the most diverse communities in the United States. Many that also face systemic under-representation in many aspects of life.

Over the years, the Smithsonian has made tremendous progress in incorporating diverse and inclusive exhibits, programming, research, and public outreach across the Institution. However, we believe more progress is necessary. Thirteen white men have served as Secretary of the Institution since its establishment in 1846. We believe it is time the top leadership structure of the Smithsonian begins to look more like the country it serves today.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women make up nearly 50.8 percent of the U.S. population. Latinos are the largest ethnic group, totaling nearly 18.1 percent, while Black and African Americans represent 13.4 percent, and Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders represent six percent.^[1] These figures will only continue to grow in the years to come. By 2045, estimates predict that the United States will become a majority minority nation.^[2]

Unfortunately, these communities are often under-represented in the arts and culture. We believe that a commitment to diversity will open the doors of hope and opportunity for populations that do not see themselves properly or accurately reflected in the arts and culture. It has also proven to be a wildly lucrative and beneficial for those who embrace it. However, that commitment must start at the top of every organization.

The Board of Regents will soon make a consequential choice about the future of the Institution when choosing its next Secretary. The person chosen will send a strong message about the importance of a diverse and inclusive Smithsonian, and the Institution's commitment to reaching audiences that have historically been under-represented. It will also send a strong message about developing and training a new and diverse generation of curators, researchers, and scientists.

Therefore, we urge you to cast a wide net in your search by making female candidates and candidates of color a top priority. There is no doubt that there are a wide array of diverse candidates that would represent the Institution well and lead it toward its next phase of greatness, but those candidates must be given an equal opportunity to compete, and the experiences they bring to the role must be taken seriously. We strongly endorse the historic selection of a woman or a person of color to lead the Smithsonian Institution.

^[1] <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045217>

^[2] <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/>

We appreciate your consideration of this important request and wish you well as you search for the right candidate. Should the Board of Regents wish to consult with members of the Tri-Caucus, we welcome the opportunity to arrange such a meeting. Please contact Alma Acosta, CHC Executive Director, at Alma.Acosta@mail.house.gov; Kevin Harris, CBC Executive Director, at Kevin.Harris2@mail.house.gov; and Krystal Ka'ai, CAPAC Executive Director, at Krystal.Kaai@mail.house.gov at your convenience.

Sincerely,

 

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress
CHC Chair

Karen Bass
Member of Congress
CBC Chair



Judy Chu
Member of Congress
CAPAC Chair