

One Hundred Nineteenth
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
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Ranking Member Joe D. Morelle (NY-25)
Committee on House Administration
“Oversight of the Smithsonian: Radical Revisionism at the National Museum of American History”
July 22, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. ET
Opening Statement, as prepared for delivery

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

“We are here because the President believes he is entitled to determine what is true about America’s past. He is not.

“To understand what is happening at the Smithsonian we need to step back—because this is not where it started.

“This President has spent his term reaching into the institutions that keep our national memory, trying to bend them to his will.

“He fired the Archivist of the United States—the keeper of the Nation’s records—without a stated reason.

“He fired the Librarian of Congress, claiming she put ‘inappropriate books’ in children’s hands—at a research library that doesn’t even lend books to the public.

“He purged the Kennedy Center’s Board, made himself chairman, and renamed it for himself—until a court deemed it illegal.

“He ordered exhibits about the horrors of slavery stripped from national parks.

“Each time, the same move: take a best-in-class institution built to serve the public and corrupt it into one that serves him. The Smithsonian is just the latest.

“In March 2025, he issued a directive ordering his Vice President to ‘remove improper ideology’ from the Smithsonian. And this month, his White House issued a hyperpartisan report portraying a museum beloved by millions of annual visitors as one that hates America.

“Perhaps some actual history would be useful here. The Smithsonian is not part of the executive branch. Congress created it in 1846. Its seventeen-member Board of Regents is chaired by the Chief Justice of the United States.

“The President can neither appoint nor remove a single Regent.

“The Organization of American Historians called the report an effort to coerce the Smithsonian into telling an inaccurate story that fits the President’s political agenda. They’re right.

“When Orwell wrote that whoever controls the past controls the future, he meant it as a warning. The President took it as a mission statement.

“We have seen this before:

- The Soviet Union airbrushed purged officials out of photographs until they vanished.
- The Tiananmen Square massacre appears nowhere in China’s textbooks and is scrubbed from its internet.
- In Hungary, the recently ousted Viktor Orban—the man Vice President Vance called a model for the United States—dictated the history taught in its schools.

“And we don’t need to look abroad. We don’t even need to leave this room.

“This committee has developed a pattern. Donald Trump reaches a conclusion unmoored from reality. The Majority concocts a record to match, and he uses that record as proof Congress agreed.

“Take January 6th. Last Congress, this committee told the country the REAL wrongdoing wasn’t the attack—it was the investigation.

“A month later, the President pardoned nearly sixteen hundred people, including those convicted of assaulting police. Today, the White House website cites this committee’s report on a page blaming Capitol Police for the violence.

“Or, take elections. This committee built a record on voter fraud that virtually does not exist—witnesses without evidence, findings without proof—which the President uses to undermine confidence in elections with claims that crumble in court.

“Which brings us to today: once again, this committee is attempting to put the congressional stamp of approval on one man’s manufactured grievance.

“In reality, the Smithsonian already has the safeguards the President claims to be imposing. A year ago, the Board of Regents reaffirmed the Smithsonian would remain, ‘free from political or partisan influence.’ The Secretary issued a binding policy requiring all exhibits to be grounded in scholarship, balanced, and non-partisan.

“The White House report never mentions it.

“Before we appoint Donald Trump the de facto curator of American history, remember: this is a man who looked at the world’s preeminent museum complex and concluded its problem is dwelling too much on, ‘how bad slavery was.’

“A President who still cannot admit he lost the 2020 election.

“A President whose White House issued a self-contradictory report claiming the Founders were erased from a museum displaying Jefferson’s desk, Washington’s uniform, and the Star-Spangled Banner.

“A report that condemns exhibits about people—I quote— ‘foreign to the United States,’ then names those foreigners: Mexican Americans and Filipino Americans. In other words, Americans.

“The Smithsonian is where a free nation tells its full story—triumphs AND struggles. That story belongs to no President. It does not need saving from the historians who tell it. It needs saving from the ignorant, ill-informed man on the other side of Pennsylvania Avenue.

“I yield back.”

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