

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4305

August 8, 2025

The Honorable John G. Roberts, Jr.
Chancellor
Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Drive SW
Washington, DC 20560

Dear Chancellor Roberts:

We write to raise serious concerns regarding a potential violation of the Anti-Lobbying Act by the Smithsonian Institution in connection with recent attempts to obstruct the passage and implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which was signed into law on July 4, 2025.

This legislation includes a provision directing the NASA Administrator to transfer a space vehicle to an area involved in the Commercial Crew Program.¹ Public reporting suggest that the Smithsonian Institution has taken affirmative steps to oppose the passage and implementation of this provision.² These steps reportedly include contacting staff of the Senate Appropriations and Rules Committees to express opposition, as well as engaging members of the press to generate public resistance to the provision's enforcement.

These activities raise significant concerns under the Anti-Lobbying Act, which prohibits the use of appropriated funds for communications intended to influence members of the public to pressure Congress regarding legislation or appropriations matters.³ The Act also places limits on direct or indirect lobbying efforts funded by federal appropriations unless an express statutory exemption applies.⁴ As the Smithsonian Institution receives annual appropriations from Congress, it is subject to the restrictions imposed by this statute.

The statutory exceptions to the Anti-Lobbying Act, such as those permitting public speeches, incidental expenditures for public education, or communications or activities unrelated to legislation or appropriations, are not applicable to the conduct at issue. Should it be determined that appropriated funds, including but not limited to staff time or public relations resources, were utilized to support efforts opposing the legislatively mandated transfer provision, such actions may constitute a violation of federal law and an impermissible use of public funds under 18 U.S.C. § 1913 (2018).

¹ Pub. L. No. 119-21 (2025).

² Zach Vasile, *Smithsonian Pushing Back on Plans to Relocate Space Shuttle*, FLYING MAGAZINE (Jul. 11, 2025), <https://www.flyingmag.com/smithsonian-pushing-back-on-plans-to-relocate-space-shuttle/>.

³ 18 U.S.C. § 1913 (2018).

⁴ *Id.*

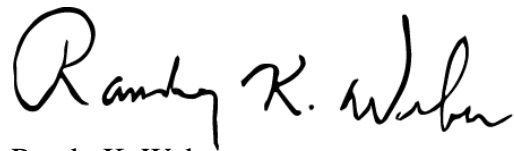
Accordingly, we urge your office and the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents to conduct a comprehensive internal review of the Institution's communications, expenditures, and outreach activities related to the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Should the review reveal that appropriated funds were used in a manner inconsistent with the prohibitions outlined in the Anti-Lobbying Act, we respectfully request that immediate and appropriate corrective measures be implemented to ensure the Institution's full compliance with all applicable statutory and ethical obligations.

The Smithsonian Institution holds an esteemed place in American public life. Its credibility depends on an unwavering commitment to legal and ethical standards. To uphold this trust, we urge a prompt and thorough investigation into the matter and appreciate your careful attention to the integrity of the Institution.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of John Cornyn in black ink.

John Cornyn
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Randy K. Weber in black ink.

Randy K. Weber
United States Representative