



**Testimony of Don Wildman, Host, Travel Channel's *Mysteries at the Museum*
On behalf of the American Alliance of Museums (www.aam-us.org)
To the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
In Support of the IMLS Office of Museum Services
May 15, 2014**

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Moran, and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Don Wildman, and for six highly rated seasons, I've had the extreme honor of hosting a television show, *Mysteries at the Museum* (Thursday nights on the Travel Channel), which tells the stories behind artifacts in museum collections. My testimony today is presented on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums, the largest organization of museums and museum professionals in the world, and we are respectfully asking the Subcommittee to provide \$38.6 million for the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), its fully-authorized amount, in fiscal year 2015.

Museums are among our nation's most popular, most trusted and most beloved institutions. There are approximately 850 million visits to American museums each year, more than the attendance for all major league sporting events and theme parks combined. Museums also spend over \$2 billion on educational programming, and a total of \$21 billion in their local economies. Clearly museums are economic engines and job creators.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports the museum field, and OMS awards grants to help museums digitize, enhance and preserve their collections; provide teacher training; and create innovative, cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary programs and exhibits for schools and the public.

It's no surprise that the appropriations bill that funds education supports this agency, because museums are indeed key education providers. They design exhibitions, educational programs, classroom kits, and online resources in coordination with state, local and common core curriculum standards in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies. Museums also offer experiential learning opportunities, STEM education, mentoring, and job preparedness.

Whatever education looks like in the future, one component will certainly be the development of a core set of skills: critical thinking; the ability to synthesize information; and the ability to innovate, to be creative and to collaborate. Museums are uniquely situated to help learners develop these core skills.

In late 2010, legislation to reauthorize IMLS for five years was enacted (by voice vote in the House and by unanimous consent in the Senate). The bipartisan reauthorization included several provisions proposed by the museum field, including enhanced support for conservation and

preservation, emergency preparedness and response and statewide capacity building. The reauthorization also specifically supports efforts at the state level to leverage museum resources, including statewide needs assessments and the development of state plans to improve and maximize museum services throughout the state. The bill (now Public Law 111-340) authorized \$38.6 million for the IMLS Office of Museum Services to meet the growing demand for museum programs and services. The fiscal year 2014 appropriation of \$30,131,000 represents a nearly 15% decrease from the fiscal year 2010 appropriation of \$35,212,000.

Grants are awarded in every state, but perhaps the best way to demonstrate the importance of the IMLS Office of Museum Services is to highlight just a few of the grants awarded in 2013 to museums in states represented by Subcommittee members:

Public Programs and Energy Efficiency—Reiman Gardens, Iowa State University of Science and Technology (Ames, IA) was awarded \$95,040 to develop a comprehensive landscape design, architectural, and engineering plan. Designs will address community programming needs, visitor experience, facilities and maintenance needs, and energy efficiency standards.

Recognizing Excellence—The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (Cedar Rapids, IA) received \$5,000 and the 2013 National Medal for Museum and Library Service. When the worst disaster in state history destroyed entire areas of Cedar Rapids in 2008, the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library was instrumental in leading its devastated ethnic neighborhood in recovery, rebuilding, and revitalization.

Youth Programs and Collections Care—The Kansas African American Museum (Wichita, KS) was awarded \$149,950 to create a public history youth program in partnership with the University of Kansas Libraries, serving 60 youth and training 25 volunteer docents annually. The museum is also using the grant to upgrade its collections management system and to address its most critical collections care and security needs.

Environmental Science— The Calvert Marine Museum Society (Solomons, MD) was awarded \$142,500 to develop and install an exhibit on the ecosystem of the Patuxent River and Chesapeake Bay. They are partnering with local schools and community groups to facilitate lifelong learning of scientific concepts and environmental stewardship.

Collections Care— The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (Birmingham, AL) was awarded \$74,277 to safeguard its collections to ensure that they will be available for use by current and future students, the general public, researchers and staff.

STEM Education— The University of Alabama/Alabama Museum of Natural History (Tuscaloosa, AL) was awarded \$99,998 to create the Discovery Learning Lab to give middle and high school-aged students access to “geek” mentors who will guide them in explorations of digital technologies not readily available at home or school in low-income areas. This program exposes teens to STEM disciplines, skills, activities, and software at the lab and in a cyberspace environment.

Science and Ocean Literacy—The Seattle Aquarium (Seattle, WA) was awarded \$103,821 to design, implement, and evaluate an aquarium classroom program. The museum will develop the program in cooperation with practicing scientists, emphasizing both the scientific process and content based on sea otter and ocean acidification research. The project will also produce materials to help interpret its findings both in the museum and in the larger community.

Cultural Identity—The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (Seattle, WA) was awarded \$150,000 to produce a newly designed tour program that emphasizes community storytelling and audience engagement. The Chinatown International District is Seattle's lowest-income neighborhood, and will benefit from increased museum attendance and enhanced community involvement.

Recognizing Excellence—The Delta Blues Museums (Clarksdale, MS) was awarded \$5,000 and the 2013 National Medal for Museum and Library Service for its work celebrating and nurturing this American art form. Participants young and old, from diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds participate in the museum's popular music classes while its travelling trunk exhibit inspires blues appreciation nationwide.

3D Printing—The Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, IL) was awarded \$25,000 to reach audiences of all ages by using 3D printing technologies. The museum will evaluate the potential impact of this technology on engagement with museum collections, and will develop guidelines to be shared with other museums and educators.

Collections Care—The Hermann-Grima and Gallier Historic Houses (New Orleans, LA) were awarded \$22,830 to develop a plan to improve their interior environments to better conserve collections and the historical buildings.

Professional Development—The Newport Art Museum and Art Association (Newport, RI) was awarded \$24,028 for an initiative that orients high school students to cultural administration careers through classroom learning, site visits, and mentoring. The grant will allow the museum to expand the reach of this initiative and establish paid internships for students, helping them develop their interests and build valuable skills for the future.

Mobile Science Classroom—The Discovery Center at Murfree Spring (Murfreesboro, TN) was awarded \$103,849 to convert a school bus into a mobile science classroom for elementary school students.

Digitization—The Country Music Hall of Fame (Nashville, TN) was awarded \$150,000 for a digitization initiative to preserve and increase access to the museum's unparalleled collection.

Collections Care—The University Museum, University of Arkansas (Fayetteville, AR) was awarded \$31,464 to improve its zoology collection and make it more accessible to researchers.

I am aware that this subcommittee wants to ensure that its investments in federal grant programs have measurable and significant impact. I believe that the grants listed above demonstrate the value of investing in museums as a means of investing in our communities. Further, it should be noted that each time a federal grant is awarded, additional local and private funds are also leveraged. Two-thirds of IMLS grantees report that their Museums for America grant positioned the museum to receive additional private funding.

Even the most ardent deficit hawks view the IMLS grant-making process as a model for the nation. Each grant is selected through a rigorous, peer-reviewed process. And due to the large number of grant applications and the limited funds available, many highly-rated grant proposals go unfunded each year.

- Only 28% of Museums for America/Conservation Project Support project proposals were funded;
- Only 15% of National Leadership project proposals were funded;
- Only 15% of Sparks Ignition Grants for Museums project proposals were funded;
- Only 46% of Native American/Hawaiian Museum Services project proposals were funded; and
- Only 31% of African American History and Culture project proposals were funded.

On a final and personal note, the interviews I conduct with museum professionals for my television show have confirmed for me what I've known since I was a kid—that museums are cool, *really* cool. If there's one thing Americans young and old love, it's a good story about America and that's what museums have to offer.

American museums do this job and they do it extremely well. They collect the stories by preserving and curating the objects—documents, inventions, clothing, paintings, sculptures and skeletons—which explain who we've been, who we are and how we survive.

I was raised outside of Philadelphia. Without museums, I'd have never walked through the left ventricle of the super-sized heart in the Ben Franklin Institute. But for the Academy of Natural Sciences, I'd have never understood the difference between a stegosaurus and a triceratops. I wouldn't have had that first encounter with Vincent van Gogh at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It's impossible to imagine my childhood without museums or to imagine my adulthood. They're our lifeline to the past—and an inspiration for the future.

We hope you'll support our cause, and provide at least \$38.6 million in fiscal year 2015 for the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), its fully-authorized amount.