

To The Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency, The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform United States House of Representatives

Statement for the Record

Submitted by Sarah Weicksel, Executive Director, American Historical Association

July 21, 2026

Dear Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Garcia, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. My name is Sarah Weicksel. I serve as executive director of the American Historical Association. Founded in 1884 for the promotion of historical studies in the United States, the American Historical Association is the largest professional association of historians in the world, providing leadership for the discipline and promoting the critical role of historical thinking in public life. On behalf of the Association, I write today in defense of the Smithsonian Institution's independence.

The Smithsonian is a world-renowned institution with a commitment to scholarship and accuracy, and to telling the full history of the United States based on informed analysis of historical evidence. The Institution ardently pursues the purpose for which it was established more than 175 years ago: "the increase and diffusion of knowledge."

Historians, curators, and other museum professionals practice our craft with scholarly integrity, adhering to established standards of evidence, historical inquiry, and professional practice. We explore the past to understand how our nation has evolved, drawing on a wide range of sources to understand history from multiple vantage points. Our goal is neither criticism nor celebration; it is to better understand the past in ways that can help Americans shape our future.

The Domestic Policy Council report espouses a circumscribed definition of patriotism. Its authors overlook a central lesson of our nation's founding: The United States was forged by finding common purpose amid intense divisions, conflicts, and disagreements. Both the founders and subsequent generations of Americans embraced a patriotism that was capacious enough to encompass both pride in the nation's achievements and criticism of its shortcomings, challenging us to more fully embody as a nation those ideals set out in our founding documents.

The staff of the National Museum of American History develop exhibitions through established professional standards of historical scholarship and evidence-based interpretation. The museum collects and preserves the past of all Americans and encompasses the entirety of our nation's history. Yet the Domestic Policy Council report severely limits whose experiences count as important to American history and characterizes the inclusion of topics such as labor,

immigration, race, and gender as political activism. Analyzing these historical topics through artifacts and other forms of historical evidence is part of a museum's work in telling the full American story. Visitors from across the nation explore expansive exhibitions and collections in which they can find themselves, their families, their communities, and their nation represented. They encounter both our achievements and the painful moments of our rich and complicated past. Both are part of a shared history that is fundamentally American.

The Domestic Policy Council's report advocates for an unchanging consensus view of American history. But history is not a set of static facts or known certainties. History is an evidence-based interpretive discipline. The AHA's *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct*, widely regarded as the core set of shared values that professional historians uphold in the course of their work, explains that historical interpretation constantly evolves as historians analyze evidence in light of an ever-expanding body of scholarship that places that evidence in a larger context. A commitment to rigorous scholarship that deepens and enriches historical understanding requires recognition that our knowledge of the past evolves as new evidence is uncovered, new questions are asked, and new kinds of evidence are used to answer old questions. The advancement of historical understanding relies upon the ability of historians and other museum professionals to practice their craft with integrity—to undertake vigorous, evidence-based research and to interpret that evidence for the public according to well-established professional standards.

The American Historical Association supports an independent Smithsonian Institution—one that remains free from the ideological or political priorities of any administration and one that serves all the American people. Political interference in professional museum work threatens the accuracy of historical interpretation and stands to erode public trust in one of our nation's most important institutions. Museums must be evaluated using accurate information and based upon accepted standards of museum and historical practice. The AHA urges all public officials to value the professional integrity of the Smithsonian's historians, curators, and other museum professionals who bring their expertise to the public through research, exhibitions, programs, and educational materials.

The Smithsonian's credibility rests on its commitment to rigorous scholarship, professional expertise, and evidence-based interpretation. Congressional oversight should reinforce these principles while ensuring the Institution remains independent and a trusted educational resource for all Americans.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement.

Sincerely,

Sarah Weicksel
Executive Director
American Historical Association

Founded in 1884 and incorporated by Congress in 1889 for the promotion of historical studies, the **American Historical Association** provides leadership for the discipline of history. As the

largest membership association of professional historians in the world (over 10,000 members), the AHA serves historians in a wide variety of professions and represents every historical era and geographical area.