


James L. Oberstar

H.R. _____,

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

January 16, 2009

Madam Speaker, my colleagues and I join together today to introduce H.R. _____, the “Smithsonian Institution Facilities Authorization Act of 2009”.

I thank my colleagues, including Committee on House Administration Chairman Brady, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Ranking Member Mica and Subcommittee Chairwoman Norton, Majority Leader Hoyer, and the Congressional Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, Mr. Becerra, Ms. Matsui, and Mr. Sam Johnson of Texas, for joining me as cosponsors of this important legislation and for their continued efforts to move these authorizations of critical Smithsonian facilities forward.

H.R. _____ authorizes the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution to design and construct laboratory space to accommodate the Mathias Laboratory at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (“SERC”) in Edgewater, Maryland, and to construct laboratory space to accommodate the terrestrial research program of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (“STRI”) in Gamboa, Panama. The bill also authorizes the Board of Regents to construct a greenhouse facility at its museum support facility in Suitland, Maryland.

Section 2 of H.R. ____ authorizes the Board of Regents to design and construct laboratory and support space to accommodate the Mathias Laboratory at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland. The bill authorizes \$41 million to design and construct the facility. SERC is a global leader in the study of ecosystems in the coastal zone. The 52,000-square-foot replacement laboratory will be connected to the existing structure to provide an operationally efficient and environmentally sustainable laboratory facility for SERC's research programs. The project will eliminate the use of temporary, unsafe trailers, address substandard, inefficient laboratory facilities, and will substantially reduce the facility's energy use and maintenance costs.

Section 3 of H.R. ____ authorizes the Board of Regents to construct laboratory space to accommodate the terrestrial research program of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Gamboa, Panama. The bill authorizes \$14 million to construct the 53,283-square-foot facility. STRI is the principal United States organization devoted to research in tropical biology. Tropical biology is critical to finding untapped resources to add to the important supply of food, pharmaceuticals, and fiber of tropical regions. STRI has outgrown the space available at its current facilities and this bill provides for construction of a new lab in Gamboa, Panama, on the east bank of the Panama Canal. Gamboa is protected by geography from the encroachment of civilization and pollution. The terrestrial research program is critical to understanding the role that tropical plants and soils play in global climate change models and for enriching knowledge of tropical biodiversity.

Section 4 of H.R. ____ authorizes the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution to construct a greenhouse facility at its museum support facility in Suitland, Maryland. This bill

authorizes \$12 million for the construction of a new greenhouse facility. This facility will support the Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations (“OFEO”) of the Horticulture Services Division (“HSD”). This office provides services for the Smithsonian museums and units through planting for exhibits and special events, and through development and management of the Smithsonian public gardens.

In the 110th Congress, I introduced two bills to authorize the facilities authorized by this legislation. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure reported H.R. 6627, the “Smithsonian Institution Facilities Authorization Act Of 2008”, a bill to authorize the SERC and STRI facilities on September 15, 2008. The House passed this bill by voice vote on September 17, 2008. The Committee reported H.R. 5492, a bill to authorize the greenhouse facility in Suitland, Maryland on March 10, 2008. The House passed this bill by voice vote on March 11, 2008. Unfortunately, the Senate did not complete action on these bills in the 110th Congress.

I look forward to continue working with the Smithsonian as the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure moves to address the enormous repair and maintenance backlog of the Smithsonian Institution facilities and ensure that its facilities meet the highest standards of energy efficiency and conservation.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. _____, the “Smithsonian Institution Facilities Authorization Act of 2009”.