Changing of the Castle Guard

The only non-scientist ever to head the Smithsonian will take charge this fall; one of his initial tasks will be to consolidate a far-flung research organization

For the first time in its 148-year history, the Smithsonian Institution is about to get a chief executive who is neither a scientist nor a certified scholar. Instead, the new secretary-designate—Ira Michael Heyman—is a lawyer who during the 1980s was chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley. A 63-year-old veteran of the academic battlefield, Heyman will become secretary of the Smithsonian on 19 September, replacing anthropologist Robert McC. Adams, who will step down at the end of a 10-year term.

Replacing a scientist with a lawyer might seem a controversial move for the Smithsonian, which was launched in 1846 with a gift from Britisher James Smithson as a center for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." Today it is a revered conglomerate of 24 museums and loosely affiliated research institutes scattered around the Western Hemisphere, with a science budget approaching $200 million a year and a scientific staff of 900. And the choice of Heyman did create some controversy. It upset none other than Vice President Al Gore, who promoted the candidacy of tropical biologist Thomas Lovejoy, partly on the grounds that a scientist would be best suited to the job of running a scientific institution. But the controversy appears to have been short-lived, since the choice of Heyman doesn't seem to be troubling the Smithsonian's scientific staff or its external advisers, many of whom say they welcomed the appointment.

Indeed, several top staffers and members of the Board of Regents, as well as outside research administrators, said the Smithsonian will need Heyman's active management style and fund-raising savvy to steer the institution through some rough fiscal waters. "In the past," says one congressional aide, "the Smithsonian got pretty much what it wanted," but now it will have to make "hard decisions." This is "not a matter of choice," says the aide: "It's what they have to do." In fact, federal funding has already gone flat, private income has declined, and the institution is under congressional orders to trim staff.

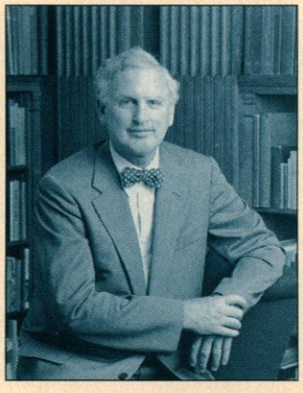
Heyman himself, in an interview with *Science*, said he has already begun thinking about ways to bring the Smithsonian's resources in line with its ambitions, perhaps by cutting outdated programs and developing better ways of raising private funds. "Everybody has to start facing up to the fact that some deliberate decisions have to be made with regard to cuts in the budget," Heyman says, without disclosing where those cuts might be made. At the same time, Heyman adds, "I fully intend to make effective, eloquent, forceful, substantial requests for public money."

The change of personalities at the helm may be dramatic. Adams, respected as a scientist and a thinker of "great thoughts," as one regent said, also seemed to this regent to be disengaged, "not focused on administrative problems." Adams presided over a period of great internal change. He committed the institution to diversifying the ethnic makeup of the staff, authorized a policy of "repatriating" Native American bones and artifacts, and pledged to build the National Museum of the American Indian on the Mall and a suburban support facility, which together will cost more than $200 million. But his hands-off management, which included summers at his ranch in Colorado, irked some. Heyman, in contrast, is described by colleagues at Berkeley as politically astute, ambitious, and—in a word that often comes up—"dynamic."

The vice president weighs in

The shift in administration—like a fast-moving weather front—was preceded by sudden squalls in the council rooms where the Smithsonian's future is planned. The first gusts came in March, when Heyman threw his hat into the ring. This raised some eyebrows because, up to that point, he had been serving as chair of the search committee convened last year at Adams's request to find a new secretary. Heyman had spent 3 years before that as a Smithsonian regent. He explained the sudden change of heart to *Science*: "I'd been worked on by two members of

No Scientist, But a Friend of Science



On familiar turf. Heyman oversaw major research programs in the 1980s.

"When I heard that 'some lawyer' had been chosen to head the Smithsonian," says Elizabeth Zimmer, a paleobotanist in one of the institution's three molecular biology labs, "I had visions of Alan Dershowitz" taking charge. But when she discovered the new boss would be Michael Heyman, a name she knew from grad school days at the University of California, Berkeley, Zimmer was delighted. Heyman was "incredibly supportive of the biological sciences" at Berkeley, she says.

As Berkeley's chancellor from 1980 to 1990, Heyman was considered a great fund-raiser, especially for science programs, and a champion of ethnic diversity. According to Brant Barber of Berkeley's development office, Heyman spearheaded a drive that netted over $465 million, including state contributions, "a record for a public university." The funds endowed more than 100 new faculty chairs and built three new biology buildings, a computer-science center, a chemistry building, a business-school complex, and a humanities center. At the same time, Heyman pushed minority recruitment, leading to an undergraduate student body at Berkeley that is now less than 50% white.

Heyman has recently been a negotiator of a commonwealth-status treaty for Guam and trouble-shooter for Bruce Babbitt, the Secretary of Interior. But this has not been his first stint in Washington, D.C. Before serving as an administrator and law professor at Berkeley, Heyman was chief clerk for chief justice of the United States Earl Warren, and before that, a U.S. Senate aide. He also worked for a law firm in New York City and has chaired Dartmouth College's board of trustees. He holds a law degree from Yale University. He has agreed to take the top job at the Smithsonian for 5 years.

–E.M.

the committee" who were eager to have him take over the institution.

Barber Conable, the former New York Representative and World Bank head who stepped in at the last moment to chair the search committee, said "I told Mike he had no prior claim on the job," and that the group would examine his flaws as well as his strengths. The panel interviewed Heyman along with "six or seven" other candidates and eventually endorsed Heyman by a vote of 4 to 1, Conable said, sending their recommendation to the regents.

STRI

Deep jungle. STRI pioneered tropical canopy studies.

Then came the second squall. According to Conable, Vice President Gore and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D–NY), who are themselves Smithsonian regents, lobbied the board to override the search committee's choice and appoint Lovejoy, the Smithsonian's assistant secretary for external affairs. Gore specifically argued that the Smithsonian needed a scientist.

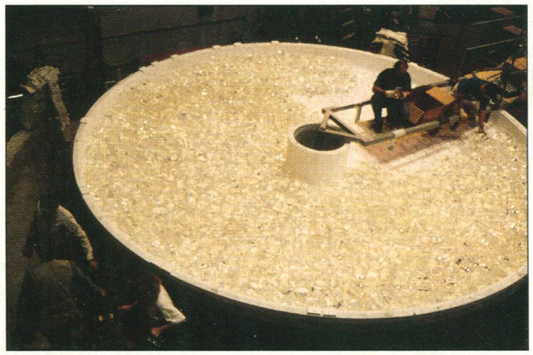
Conable describes Lovejoy as a "good environmentalist," a skillful popularizer of science, and possessor of "the best Rolodex in Washington." But Lovejoy had not run a large institution, and because of his youth (he is 52), according to Conable, the search committee was concerned that he might not be ready to make tough decisions to get the Smithsonian on track. On 25 May, the regents rejected Gore's and Moynihan's pleas and backed Heyman, the search committee's choice.

Needed: A balancing act

Ironically, the Smithsonian's scientists don't seem to feel as strongly as the vice president does about the need for a scientist in the top job. "We all have other criteria" than just scientific credentials for judging a leader, said Anna K. Behrensmeyer, associate director for science at the Natural History Museum, noting that "we will be watching to see if he is willing to spend time...learning what is going on with science." Douglas Erwin, a paleobiologist at the museum, said that, "if we get better representation within Washington and someone who can effectively make the case for what the Smithsonian does, I don't care if it's a scientist or not."

The acceptance may come in part because Heyman proved an able supporter of science at Berkeley, raising funds for new biology and computer-science buildings, encouraging a stronger emphasis on molecular biology, and helping to endow new professorships (see box, p. 728). Indeed, David Wake, director of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at Berkeley, and David Pilbeam, director of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University—both of whom sit on the science board of the Natural History Museum—offered the Smithsonian staff reassurances that Heyman was attuned to the needs of scientists. This is important in the context of Washington's budget battles, since the Senate appropriations committee has been hammering at Adams to agree that the Smithsonian's first responsibility is to be "the place where the nation's heritage is preserved"—not a place for esoteric research.

Heyman's most pressing task will be to come to grips with the Smithsonian's financial problems. The institution's latest annual statement reports a decline in income from revenue-producing activities (such as museum shops) and from investments, which last year hit the lowest point since 1987. And federal funding has not kept up with the cost of new commitments. Congress provided the Smithsonian an appropriation of $342 million in 1994, and this year the House and Senate bills are offering a total increase of 8% to 9%, including start-up of major construction projects, but only about 4% more for salaries and operations. In particular, Congress is expected to provide only half of the $40 million the Smithsonian requested for next year to begin construction of the American Indian museum. Most of the other income comes from trusts or contracts with strings attached, which limit innovation.



LORI STILES/SMITHSONIAN

Deep space. The Smithsonian gets a new 6.5-meter telescope mirror.

As one congressional aide notes, the Smithsonian has long been managed like a university—a collection of dozens of fiefdoms under the relatively lax administrative supervision of the secretary. Most of the research is concentrated in a handful of "bureaus," including the National Museum of Natural History, the Astrophysical Observatory (in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Mount Hopkins, Arizona), the Tropical Research Institute (Panama), the Environmental Research Center (Edgewater, Maryland), the National Zoological Park, the Conservation Analytical Laboratory, and the Museum Support Center.

Some enjoy more independence than others, though all are dependent on federal funding and approval. For example, the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute—which inaugurated new methods of research on tropical forest canopies and is one of the world's major supporters of marine studies—has built a sizable endowment from private gifts. This gives it more discretionary money to spend and "more flexibility" to initiate projects, says Smithsonian assistant secretary for science Robert Hoffman. In contrast, the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, survives mainly on contract funds and has less wiggle room to fund new projects independently. Yet none of these research bureaus can expect to be exempt from belt-tightening, says a congressional aide. This year, the Senate declined to put just $50,000 in start-up money into a proposed environmental research center in Kenya, and, the aide warns, it may be time to take a "hard look" at the rapidly expanding tropical research institute.

Congress is also demanding cuts in staffing and administrative spending. The combined effect, Hoffman says, is that "we have not been able to replace people who have retired," and public education programs are suffering. Hoffman says that the "biggest challenge" facing the new secretary will be to reshape priorities "within an essentially static budget." This will require decisions to close or merge certain research activities. And already, the science staff at the Natural History Museum has drawn up a scheme for merit-rating all new research proposals. Heyman says he intends to develop a strategic plan to rank priorities and hopes to get help from a Commission on the Future of the Smithsonian, chaired by Maxine Singer, president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, due to issue a report next January.

"Even though the Smithsonian is just a fiscal pimple on the budget," Heyman says, "it's not going to be easy to get [the Office of Management and Budget] and the Congress to fund us at a better rate." It would be great, Heyman adds, "if we were more of a recognized public good around the country. The Smithsonian is revered, but largely from a distance. I think that the institution delivers a lot of services" other than just the opportunity to visit the museums, Heyman says. "And I think we've got to let people know about it."

–Eliot Marshall