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ELLEN FUTTER, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ON REFORMING SCIENCE EDUCATION

EMPHASIZES IMPORTANT ROLE OF MUSEUMS AS “POWERFUL CATALYSTS” FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION AND CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

NEW YORK, March 8, 2010— In testimony delivered Thursday, March 4, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science and Technology, Ellen V. Futter, President of the American Museum of Natural History, stated that it is essential that the federal government continue to support and fund museums and other science-related cultural institutions as “powerful catalysts” and key players in reforming K-12 science, technology, engineering, and math (or STEM) education. Futter said that effective partnerships should be fostered between formal educational institutions and non-school, science-based institutions by making both eligible for federal funding and grants, and by explicitly recognizing the role of informal science institutions, including in the upcoming reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act, for which the committee was hearing testimony.

“Communities across the country have access to an array of science-based institutions,” said Ellen V. Futter. “Some large, some small, some local, some regional—but nearly all housing resources and expertise to help schools improve science education while also advancing the instincts for inquiry and discovery that are precisely what drive innovation and will fuel our country’s global competitiveness.... We are pleased to join others, including the Carnegie–IAS Commission and Race to the Top, in pointing to museums and like institutions as catalysts of both STEM education reform and cross-sector partnerships.”

Joining Jim Simons, founder and chairman of Math for America; Gordon Gee, president of Ohio State University; and Jeffrey Wadsworth, president and CEO of Battelle Memorial Institute on the panel, Futter represented the sector of “informal science education” institutions which are increasingly playing a leadership role in science education throughout the country by building partnerships with schools and other entities. Through these partnerships, the resources of these science-based cultural institutions—including collections, working scientists, and interpretive and educational expertise—are being made accessible to schools to improve the teaching and learning of science.

Futter specifically mentioned several Museum programs, including successful courses for the professional development for teachers; the Science Generation Pipeline, a complete pre-K through graduate school continuum of exceptional out-of-school science-learning opportunities; and its leading the **Urban Advantage Middle School Science Initiative** in New York City as national models for public-private partnerships that boost science literacy.

(more)

Futter also expressed support for the development of common math and science standards that are “fewer, clearer, and higher,” as urged by the Carnegie–IAS Commission on Mathematics and Science Education’s 2009 report, *The Opportunity Equation: Transforming Mathematics and Science Education for Citizenship and the Global Economy*.

The Commission, on which Futter served, also pointed to museums and other similar institutions as key to improving science education in the United States. Futter also mentioned exemplary partnership programs at other informal science education institutions, including the Pacific Science Center’s Washington LASER (Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform) initiative, the Arkansas Discovery Network, and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences’ Daily Planet breaking news program.

URBAN ADVANTAGE

Urban Advantage is guiding teachers and students on how best to use the incomparable science resources and expertise of eight New York institutions: the **American Museum of Natural History, which spearheaded and also leads the initiative; Brooklyn Botanic Garden; The New York Botanical Garden; New York Hall of Science; Queens Botanical Garden; Staten Island Zoological Society;** and the **Wildlife Conservation Society’s Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium**, together with the New York City Department of Education and Chancellor Joel Klein, and launched with support from the New York City Council and Speaker Christine Quinn.

Urban Advantage, now under the umbrella of the David S. and Ruth L. Gottesman Center for Science Teaching and Learning at AMNH, has grown dramatically since its inception in 2004. It began with 60 teachers and 35 schools and now, in its sixth year, supports over 300 teachers in more than 150 middle schools—fully one-third of all New York City public middle schools—and serves more than 37,000 New York City students in all five boroughs. The Urban Advantage program directly addresses two major issues in New York City education: the critical shortage of teachers with adequate qualifications and preparation in science and the challenge of preparing 8th grade students for their science “exit projects,” a city-mandated performance requirement.

To read Ellen Futter’s full written testimony go to <http://science.house.gov/publications/Testimony.aspx?TID=15359>

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