

NEWS RELEASE

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Commercial Alert Tells Smithsonian to Stop Promoting Oil Drilling in Alaska

Commercial Alert demanded today that Smithsonian Institution stop acting as an "advocacy arm of the oil industry," and quit distributing a four-page National Museum of Natural History "Museum Guide" with a full-page ad from Phillips Petroleum Company. In the ad, Phillips touts its environmental record in drilling for oil in Alaska.

Commercial Alert made its demand in the following letter to Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence Small.

Dear Secretary Small:

As you know, the question of oil drilling in Alaska is a contentious political issue. Just this week-end, President Bush renewed his call to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil development. People concerned about the environment strongly object to this move. Congress will be embroiled in the issue in the weeks ahead.

So now we open the four-page "Museum Guide" for the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and what do we find on the back? A full-page pitch from the Phillips Petroleum Company on the virtues of oil drilling in Alaska. The ad shows a polar bear cub nestling safely on its parent. When Phillips drills in Alaska, the ad copy touts, the environmental impacts are so minimal that "it's like we've never been there at all."

Secretary Small, have you no shame? First you turn the Smithsonian into a mouthpiece for corporate hucksterism, featuring, for example, the "General Motors Hall of Transportation." Now you are turning it into an advocacy arm of the oil industry as well. (If you think the Phillips ad has nothing to do with the current fight over drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, then we have a bridge we'd like to sell you.)

The mission of the institution you now direct is not to increase the amount of oil drilling in our nation's wilderness areas, nor is it to seek the further diffusion of Big Macs, SUVs and other corporate products into the nation's culture. It is, rather, to promote the "increase and diffusion of knowledge."

If you have different ideas, then you should not be leader of the Smithsonian. If you wish to promote corporate political agendas and products, then perhaps you should work for a corporation. But since you still are the Secretary of the Smithsonian, you should uphold the mission of this great institution.

Stop the distribution of this lobbying flier disguised as a museum guide. At once.

Sincerely,

Gary Ruskin
Executive Director

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A copy of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History "Museum Guide" is available at: <<http://www.commercialalert.org/smithsonian/NMNHmuseumguide.html>>.

In January, Commercial Alert and a coalition of 170 scholars and activists sent letters to the Smithsonian Institution's governing Board of Regents, asking them to protect the Smithsonian from commercialism, and to fire Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence Small for commercializing the Smithsonian. The text of that letter is available at: <<http://www.commercialalert.org/smithsonian/commercialism.html>>.

Background materials on commercialism at the Smithsonian are available at: <<http://www.commercialalert.org/smithsonian/index.html>>.

Commercial Alert's mission is to keep the commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy. Commercial Alert's website is at <<http://www.commercialalert.org>>.