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May 29, 2001

Natural History Museum Head Resigns

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By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filed at 7:48 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The director of the National Museum of Natural History has resigned, saying he could not see through to the end a lengthy project to reorganize the Smithsonian Institution's science units.

"This process will require the leadership of a management team committed to pursuing its success over the long haul. I do not feel that I can make that commitment enthusiastically," Director Robert W. Fri said in a statement Tuesday.

Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence M. Small last month announced plans to reduce the budget and reorganize the science units, including closing the Conservation and Research Center, part of the National Zoo. Small scrapped the plan to close the facility after criticism from scientists and members of Congress.

Scientists have expressed concern that the institution is increasingly focusing on attendance and endowment at the expense of scientific study.

Fri said in the statement he anticipates leaving at the start of the new fiscal year, which is in October.

In his five years as director, the museum's attendance figures have increased from 5.3 million in 1996 to 9.5 million last year.

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