Religious perspectives on the science of human origins – Was anything left out of the exhibit? How was this panel assembled?

This video was recorded at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History on March 21, 2010

Connie Bertka: 00:16 Go ahead.

Audience member: 00:16 I'm John Swallow, Arlington, Virginia. The Smithsonian needs to be highly complimented for starting its second century with the opening of the exhibit for assembling this panel, and David Koch most of all, and that all relates to this. How in any exhibit like that, especially with a governmental institution, there had to be a lot of stuff that was kept out because of conflict or whatever, and then also, how was this panel assembled, and to be so cordial with each other and all that?

Connie Bertka: 00:54 Rick.

Speaker 3: 00:57 Right.

Rick Potts: 00:57 [crosstalk 00:00:57] I'll try to address that briefly so we don't take away from the insights of the panelists here. With regard to any kind of outside input, we had an internal content team work out absolutely everything that was in the exhibit. There was absolutely no outside influence. No review by donors, for example. I think that may have been one of the implications. However, we did have more than 100 scientific researchers and science educators from around the world to have input and largely having to do with fact correcting, and fact-checking, and things like that. We deeply appreciate that external input, but none other from any kind of what you might think of outside influence that could try to assert an influence. We did not have any of that, and that's consistent with Smithsonian policy. (02:02) The second part of your question was about how this team, how this committee, was organized. It's because of my own involvement with the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences, a program of dialogue on science, ethics, and religion. I was part of that group for six years and got to
know Connie Bertka and Jim Miller in that regard and became very, very impressed by the effort of one of the foremost scientific organizations in this country to bring together scientists, and theologians, and professionals on the science, and religion, and ethics, and philosophy interface that it was just extremely intellectually stimulating to me. (02:55) One of the things that was most important to me, when I was at a university and I taught, I would never say to my students, "You just have to pass the exam." Okay, that would kill me to say that what I felt I was doing as partly of uncovering new knowledge about the world that's meaningful and should go beyond just the classroom. That's one of the reasons why I came here to the Smithsonian. And I felt that in with regard to the subject of human evolution because of the way that it has in certain areas reverberated through American society in its own special way with regard to science and understanding of science that it was important to constitute a committee, and I invited Jim and Connie to develop this independent body of external advisors.

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