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Smithsonian Institution's Under Secretary for History, Art, Culture Promoting New Book in Pierre on May 5

PIERRE, S.D. – Dr. Richard Kurin, the Smithsonian Institution's Under Secretary for History, Art and Culture, is making three live appearances in Pierre on Monday, May 5, to promote his new book, "The Smithsonian's History of America in 101 Objects."

"As an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, we are delighted to bring Richard Kurin to South Dakota," said Jay Smith, director of the Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center. "He brings with him a message about the value of saving and preserving artifacts which is an important part of the mission of the South Dakota State Historical Society. We will be discussing some of our future plans with him as well, so this is an exciting opportunity for our museum as well."

Kurin's 7 p.m. CDT presentation at the Capitol Lake Visitor Center will be the primary opportunity for the public to interact with him. The evening will include a presentation by Kurin as well as questions and answers with the audience, followed by a book signing. Books will be available for purchase at the Capitol Lake Visitor Center.

South Dakota residents will also have the opportunity to view the presentation live on their home computers thanks to South Dakota Public Broadcasting by visiting www.sdpb.org/live on May 5 at 7 p.m.

In addition, any organization, institution, library or business that has access to video-conferencing technology may also watch the program live. Anyone wishing to attend via video-conference must call or e-mail Jay Smith at (605) 773-3798 or jay.smith@state.sd.us at least two days in advance to assure the connection.

Kurin will also be the featured speaker at the Pierre-Fort Pierre Rotary Club at Noon on May 5.

From 1:30-2:30 p.m. on May 5, Kurin will be signing his book at the Cultural Heritage Center. There is no admission fee to come to the book signing, though no formal presentation is planned at the afternoon event.

"The Smithsonian's History of America in 101 Objects" is published by The Penguin Press. The 762-page book chronicles America—from prehistoric times to the present—through national treasures found in the Smithsonian's vast collections. From Martha the last passenger pigeon, to a fragment from Plymouth Rock, to Julia Child's kitchen, Kurin says these, along with 98 other objects, are important parts of America's story.

“Narrowing down the list from millions of objects to 101 was a challenge,” said Kurin. “But using objects to tell the story of the nation presented a great opportunity. Rather than learning history by memorizing names and dates, objects have a way of conveying historical times and events in a dramatic but tangible way.”

The objects selected for the book are presented in full-color photographs and paired with history, facts and often-surprising narratives that illustrate the events that shaped America. The Smithsonian houses the world’s largest collection of museum objects—137 million items, as well as more than 20 million images and recordings, and tens of millions of archival documents.

Additional information about the events will be available on the South Dakota State Historical Society’s web page at history.sd.gov. The Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society has been a Smithsonian Affiliate since January of 2013.

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About the Author

Kurin serves at the Smithsonian’s Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, responsible for many of its museums and educational programs. Trained as a cultural anthropologist, he is a former Fulbright Fellow who earned his doctorate from the University of Chicago and for two decades directed the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Kurin is the author of several books, including “Hope Diamond: The Legendary History of a Cursed Gem,” and his scholarship and museological work has been recognized by the International Council of Museums, UNESCO and Harvard’s Peabody Museum. Awarded the Smithsonian Secretary’s Gold Medal for Exceptional Service, he serves as the Smithsonian’s liaison to the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the White House Historical Association and numerous other boards.

About the Smithsonian

Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian Institution is the world’s largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, nine research facilities and 20 libraries. There are 6,500 Smithsonian employees and 6,300 volunteers. Approximately 30 million people from around the world visited the Smithsonian in 2013.

About Smithsonian Affiliations

Established in 1996, Smithsonian Affiliations is a national outreach program that develops long-term collaborative partnerships with museums, educational and cultural organizations to enrich communities with Smithsonian resources. The long-term goal of Smithsonian Affiliations is to facilitate a two-way relationship among Affiliate organizations and the Smithsonian Institution to increase discovery and inspire lifelong learning in communities across America. More information about the Smithsonian Affiliations program and Affiliate activity is available at <https://affiliations.si.edu>.

About the State Historical Society

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.