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NATIONAL MUSEUM of
NATURAL HISTORY
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

August 31, 1996

Mr. Floyd Johnson
Office of the Coroner
1766 Fowler Street
Suite D
Richland, WA 99352
FAX: 509-586-4732

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Dr. James Chatters of Applied Paleoscience in Richmond, Washington, has informed me of the recent discovery of the well preserved skeleton of a First American. Human remains from this time period are extremely rare and must be considered a National Treasure that deserves careful study and documentation. As a forensic anthropologist at the Smithsonian Institution with more than twenty years of experience working with human remains from both modern and archaeological contexts, I feel it is important to emphasize the importance of this discovery and its significance to further understanding of our national heritage.

The Smithsonian has a long tradition of working closely with law enforcement agencies requiring assistance with the examination and documentation of human skeletal remains. In this regard, I am offering to help with the evaluation of this skeleton. Further, the National Museum of Natural History, has arranged to provide airfare for Dr. Chatters to personally bring the remains to the Smithsonian Institution for evaluation. A roundtrip airline ticket has been purchased for Dr. Chatters for Sunday, September 8 with return on September 11.

This skeleton can provide a great deal of information about the earliest people in North America. The request to rebury these remains is regrettable and makes it extremely important that the remains be carefully documented before any decisions of this nature are made. Comprehensive analysis of ancient remains is best handled through a team approach involving experienced forensic scientists. Radiographic equipment, stereozoom microscopy, professional photography and other resources are readily available at the Smithsonian. In addition, Dr. Dennis Stanford, Chairman of the Department of Anthropology, is internationally known for his archaeological research on First Americans.

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The proposed work concerns basic osteological data recovery, that can help establish biological affiliation. The skeleton will be examined to obtain age, sex, information on skeletal and dental pathology, cranial and postcranial measurements, and dietary and taphonomic information.

A standardized set of cranial measurements will be taken using a radiometer and other calipers. Craniofacial morphology has a strong genetic component and can provide a basis for identifying population affiliation. The measurements taken on the skeleton will be compared to other groups using multivariate biological distance statistics to evaluate relationships with prehistoric and historic groups. The measurements will be added to a reference database for North American populations that also includes extensive data for a number of world populations including archaeological samples from Europe and Asia. In the case of First American remains, a worldwide perspective needs to be considered because they often show features seen in archaic caucasoids.

This work is detailed and labor intensive. It will require a team approach in order to complete basic documentation and evaluation of this set of remains. Dr. Richard Jantz, Full Professor, University of Tennessee, will assist with the craniometric analysis. Our methods rely on visual assessment, radiography, and measurement, and are nondestructive. Copies of the completed data forms will be provided upon completion of the analysis. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Douglas W Owsley

Douglas W. Owsley
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Anthropology
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cc Dr. Dennis Stanford