

Prepared Statement of U.S. Senator John Cornyn

U.S. Senate Committee on Rules and Administration Hearing to Review S.1267, National Museum of the American Latino Act

November 17, 2020

Thank you Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and Members of the Committee for holding this hearing, and for the invitation to join you.

As a proud Texan and the Senator of a border state, I've been fortunate to experience the tremendous influence of Latinos on our country throughout my life. From learning the stories of brave soldiers who fought in the Texas Revolution, to experiencing the vast influence of Hispanic culture on my hometown of San Antonio, I am incredibly proud and appreciative of the Latino influence on American life.

Unfortunately, for many Americans, the contributions generations of Hispanic Americans are largely unknown, and I hope this Committee will soon take action to right this wrong by advancing legislation to establish a National Museum of the American Latino.

This effort has been underway for more than 25 years. In the 1990s, the Smithsonian Institution commissioned a report to examine the relationship between the museum complex and Latinos. The report was titled, "Willful Neglect," and those two words adequately sum-up the findings. For everything from the lack of exhibits, to curators, to staff, Latinos were excluded at virtually every level of the world's largest museum complex. And according to a 2018 report by UCLA, not much progress has been made. Latino representation within the Smithsonian Institution is still far from where it should be, even as the Latino population in the United States has doubled.

One of the recommendations in that initial 1994 report to improve representation of Latinos was through the establishment of a museum dedicated to the contributions of Latino Americans. That was more than 25 years ago, and Congress has yet to authorize this critical museum. With the support of this Committee, I hope that will soon change.

Every year, millions of Americans visit the Smithsonian museums to learn about our nation's complex story the men and women who wrote it. These museums teach us about American Presidents, soldiers, artists, astronauts, innovators, icons, and heroes of every breed. They house priceless pieces of American history, from the Star-Spangled Banner which inspired the National Anthem, to the hat President Lincoln wore on the night he was assassinated.

For too long though, these museums haven't accurately represented the diversity of the American story. That's slowly changing thanks to the recent additions of the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. But we still have a long way to go to ensure underrepresented and often-

untold accounts of American history can be preserved and shared with generations of Americans.

The process of creating a National Museum of the American Latino began in earnest in 2008 when President George W. Bush established a commission to study the feasibility of a museum, and again when their report was released in 2011. Now that it's been nearly a decade since the Commission formally recommended this museum be built, it's time to take action.

The *National Museum of the American Latino Act* authorizes the Smithsonian Institution to create a museum honoring American Latinos here in Washington – a bill I am proud to have introduced with my colleague Senator Menendez since 2011.

This Congress, Nearly 300 members of the House of Representatives co-sponsored this legislation, and it unanimously passed the House earlier this year. The bill has 46 co-sponsors here in the Senate, and I hope this Committee will favorably report this bill to the floor, so we can approve it and send it to the President's desk before the end of this Congress.

It's been more than 25 years since the effort to establish this museum began. It's time to honor the contributions of generations of Hispanic Americans by providing a brick and mortar home for their stories here in Washington.

Thank you again to the Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of Committee for the opportunity to join you today. I'm happy to answer any questions.