

Written Statement of Eva Longoria Bastón

United States Senate Committee on Rules & Administration

Hearing to Review S.959, Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act; and S.1267, National Museum of the American Latino Act

Tuesday, November 17, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Klobuchar. It's my honor to be here alongside my fellow witnesses and community leaders, Danny Vargas, Cici Rojas, and Jane Abraham.

As a woman, a Latina, and a proud, ninth-generation American, I come before you as a citizen who lives at the intersection of the opportunities that we've gathered to discuss: the establishment of the National Museum of the American Latino, and the National Women's History Museum.

If you look at our history textbooks, national monuments, and celebrated statues, they only reflect one kind of American hero, one that looks like our Founding Fathers: white and male. There are many other extraordinary Americans who are responsible for scientific breakthroughs, military feats, civil rights accomplishments, artistic achievements, and landmark legislation. But when you don't have representation in the official record, these contributions are effectively erased.

Tens of millions of people visit Smithsonian museums each year, and they are presented with an incomplete picture of our nation's history. When we allow this to go unaddressed, we maintain the status quo in which women and Latinos are left out of our collective perception of American history, relegated as sidekicks to white, male heroes. Our history is only shared as a footnote or in relation to someone else's story, like Dolores Huerta to Cesar Chavez, or Eleanor Roosevelt to FDR. That's why this legislation is presented to you today. To correct the record.

For women's history, the story of one statue sums this up: In February 1921, the National Woman's Party presented Congress with a statue of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott, three white pioneers of the women's suffrage movement. The statue's inscription included a quote that asked for: "Justice, not favor; men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less."

Congress deemed the inscription "blasphemous" and removed it from the statue – then moved the statue to the basement of Congress, where it remained for 76 years, out of public view and the eyes of three generations of American girls. Three generations of young women who could have benefited from the display of this statue because of what it represented: women, claiming their place in America's future.

Thanks to decades of work by Congresswomen Carolyn Maloney and other dedicated women on both sides of the aisle, this monument now lives in the rotunda of the US Capitol, alongside statues of Martin Luther King, Jr. and George Washington.

And this statue, of three white women, is just one part of the story. It's not the whole story, which includes centuries of labor by Black, white, Latina, Asian, and indigenous activists. This struggle for recognition mirrors the battles we continue to fight today, two centuries after the Women's Suffrage Movement began.

A lack of representation of women's place in history prevents us from moving forward on the gender equality issues of today, from the wage gap, to reproductive freedom, to representation in boardrooms

and government. If America can't recognize our past contributions, America cannot respect our present significance.

We won't achieve full gender equality until generations of girls AND boys have the opportunity to see the complete picture of women's accomplishments, historic feats, and innovations - which represent half of our nation's story.

I'm here today not only as a woman, but as a Latina. 18% of Americans identify as American Latinos, the largest minority ethnic group in the country.

As Dr. Rudy Acuña wrote, "History is not supposed to be ideological. It's truth deduced from known facts." For the Latino community, the facts are missing.

Because there is no story in American history that does not include American Latinos. We have been here since before the Mayflower, since before the colonies, since before the Declaration of Independence. We have a broad and diverse community, from indigenous Latinos, to Black and Afro-Latinos, to Caribbean Latinos. We have built this country, brick by brick, railroad by railroad, from seed to harvest. And we did this alongside the folks who already have their place in our history books and museums. Often those people were the very same who oppressed us – and yet it's our story that isn't told.

Now have the chance to correct the record, to present a fuller, clearer picture of our diverse nation. And the Smithsonian Institution – the official record of our history and culture – has the opportunity to recognize the fact that Latinos are as essential to America's history as they are to America's future. Our

institutions must be large enough to hold the truth and the expanse of American history. And large enough to offer representation, inspiration, and the promise of bright future to all of our nation's people.

When I served on the National Museum of the American Latino Commission, we traveled the country, holding town halls from Phoenix to Philadelphia. It was no surprise that there was very little representation of Latinos in our greatest museums. With each stop, members of the community offered heartfelt testimonials about the art, and the artifacts, and the stories that should live in a National Museum of the American Latino.

But more than what it should contain, they shared what it would represent: finally, an acknowledgement that we too, are heroes in American history. We too, are patriots. We too, take pride in the country we have all built together.

Without the Museum, it is all too easy for some to write off the accomplishments of Latinos and our place in this nation. Too easy to vilify us, and hold us back from claiming our place in history and our full equality as American citizens.

To establish this museum on the National Mall – the place where we inaugurate our presidents, honor our veterans, exercise our freedom of speech, and conduct the business of our nation in Congress – would send the message that we belong among our nation's most important monuments. That we value the experience and contributions of Latinos to the great American experiment.

So we titled our final report to Congress, "To Illuminate the American Story for All."

Because the benefits are not just to our Latino community. I believe that creating these museums – both the National Women’s History Museum and the National Museum of the American Latino – would help address one of the greatest challenges of our time: the division of American society.

Because by offering each and every American the opportunity to fully understand and appreciate women’s and Latinos’ contributions, we can collectively work towards the highest ideal of our nation: *e pluribus unum*. Out of many, one.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.