

**Written Statement of Raul “Danny” Vargas**  
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**U.S. Senate Committee on Rules and Administration**  
**301 Russell Senate Office Building**  
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**10:00am**

Good morning Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As someone who grew up in the most austere of circumstances in the streets of Brooklyn, as an Air Force veteran, an entrepreneur and as a dad, it is truly humbling to be before you today. However, today I am also representing our board of directors, our staff, our Chairman’s Advisory Council, our Regional Leadership networks across the country, 100+ national partners, our hundreds of thousands of supporters and nearly 61 million Latinos in the United States today. We have received many letters of support and I would ask that they please be entered into the record.

As you can imagine, I am proud of my family’s heritage and I am a proud, patriotic American who loves this country and wants us to reach our fullest potential as a nation. I believe that if we hope to get where we need to be in the future, we need to understand where we are today and where we came from in the past. Sadly, much of what is in our history books and in our national museums is incomplete. Latinos have been instrumental in the founding, the building, the shaping, and the defending of this nation for over 500 years, but most Americans are unaware of these indispensable contributions.

Our mission is to create a museum that illuminates the American story for the benefit of everyone, for a more complete and accurate telling of American history.

For example, we are taught in elementary school that the American story begins when the British arrive in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 to establish the first permanent British settlement. Well, as far as I am concerned, that is historically inaccurate. The American story actually begins at least 114 years before that in 1493, on Columbus’ second voyage to the new world, when he arrives on the shores of what is now U.S. territory in Puerto Rico. So the story of American expansion does not go from Virginia to the north and to the south; it goes from the Caribbean, up to Florida, on to Alabama and Mississippi, Texas and California, as far north as Wyoming. So, by the time the British get to Jamestown in 1607, there has already been a bunch of Latinos saying “bienvenidos, what took you so long”. In fact, the oldest continually inhabited city in the mainland United States is St. Augustine, Florida, settled in 1565. The oldest state capital city in the United States is Santa Fe, New Mexico, established in 1610. Our three largest states today have Spanish names (California, Texas and Florida).

America would not look the way it looks, would not have thrived the way it has and would be unrecognizable, without the centuries worth of Latino contributions. Among those contributions are those in our military. Latinos have fought in every war we have ever had. Spanish General Bernardo de Galvez, Governor of Cuba and the Louisiana Territory, along with thousands of Spanish troops, helped stem the advance of the British from the south, fighting battles in places like Mobile, Pensacola, New Orleans and more. George Washington declared that these efforts were a deciding factor in the outcome of the Revolutionary War.

The first full Admiral in the U.S. Navy was David Farragut who famously said, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" The over half million Latino troops that fought in every theatre of World War II were vital to our success. One of the most highly decorated combat units during the Korean conflict was the U.S. Army's 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the "Borinqueneers" of Puerto Rico. Of whom, General MacArthur wrote, "They are writing a brilliant record of heroism in battle and I am indeed proud to have them under my command. I wish that we could count on many more like them".

If we go down Constitution Avenue to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, we will see thousands and thousands of Hispanic surnames etched on that wall and there are young Latinas and Latinos serving and sacrificing on our behalf in the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. And there are 60 Hispanic Medal of Honor recipients. As an Air Force veteran, I can tell you, that Latinos take a backseat to no one in the defense of liberty.

And our community has had a lasting impact in every single aspect of society. From arts, to science, to business, sports, politics and more. Imagine major league baseball, America's pastime, without the strong cadre of Latinos players on virtually every team. An era of Latinos in baseball that was ushered in by one of my personal heroes, Roberto Clemente, who excelled despite facing discrimination because he was both Latino and black. Innovator Desi Arnaz, in his famous television show "I Love Lucy", came up with the idea of a three-camera shot and a live studio audience. Speaking of television, ground-breaking actress, Lynda Jean Cordova Carter, also known as Lynda Carter, television's Wonder Woman in the 1970's, who changed the face of strong women on television.

Imagine if we still had school segregation in America. We don't have to, because, Felicitas Mendez, a Puerto Rican woman who moved to California and married a Mexican immigrant, when she tried to send her three kids to a good school, was denied because the children's skin was too dark and they had Hispanic surnames. She filed a lawsuit against the school district in federal court, in the famous case, Mendez v. Westminster. That case became the template which was used by future supreme court justice Thurgood Marshall in Brown v. Board of Education, which ended school segregation in this country. Imagine the absence of Latino workers in our farms and in our factories, in our hotels and in our hospitals, in our restaurants and our research laboratories, in our sanitation departments and our supreme court of the United States, in our music studios and in our movie sets. Well, we don't have to, because for over 500 years we have been relying on Latinos

to fight our wars and run our businesses, tend our fields and mend our wounds, teach our kids, patrol our streets, write our laws and share the word of God. Contrary to what some might have you believe; Latinos are not a recent patch being sewn onto the tapestry of America; we are an essential/foundational thread woven into the very fabric of America.

Regrettably, the stories of these contributions are generally missing from our national museums. It is for these reasons that we need an American Latino museum on the national mall as part of Smithsonian institution, so we can celebrate and commemorate the over 500 years of contributions.

And that is not all. We also need to enlighten the public about the wonderful complexity of our community today; the incredible mosaic that is our community. We are over 60 million people, we are 18 plus percent of the population, 25 percent of the population under the age of 18. We are two trillion dollars in purchasing power. We are a remarkably diverse population too. We are Afro-Latinos, we are Asian Latinos, we are blonde-haired and blue-eyed, we are mulatos and mestizos and native Americans and everything in between. We are not a race; we are a culture. We are Republicans, Democrats, and independents. We are a community made up some very foundational, fundamental shared values around family and faith and freedom and opportunity and optimism and pride and passion and those are the qualities most needed in our country today.

And lastly, we also have a responsibility, we have a duty to inspire future generations. We know that the Census Bureau tells us that by the year 2060, Latinos will make up about 30 of the population, so if we hope to remain a strong, thriving and vibrant nation, that segment of the population needs to feel acknowledged, engaged and invested in our future. The truth is that is about honoring our ancestors and inspiring our descendants.

The good news is that we are closer than we have ever been to making this dream a reality and advancing this initiative. This initiative began in earnest in 1994. 26 years ago, when the Smithsonian itself organized a task force to see how they were doing in terms of portraying Latino stories. Well that task force did its job; they did their research, and they came back with their report. The title they chose for that report was "Willful Neglect", saying that not only was the Smithsonian doing a poor job as if they were doing it on purpose. Among the 10 recommendations in the report was the creation of an American Latino museum.

Fast forward several years in 2008 congress passed a bill to create a commission to study the feasibility of creating such a museum. That bill was signed into law by President Bush. I was appointed to this 23-member commission by John Boehner. We came from different backgrounds and different political parties, but we came together as a family and did our work in a bipartisan or nonpartisan way. In 2011 we delivered our report to congress and President Obama saying three basic things. Number one, there was a clear and pressing need for this museum. Number two, it really should be part of the Smithsonian Institution. And number three, it really ought to be on the

national mall, our nation's back yard. That same year was when we first introduced a bill to authorize the Smithsonian to create this museum, with the support of the Friends of the National Museum of the American Latino. Well, several congresses later in several iterations of that bill later, fortunately this year on the 27th of July the House of Representatives passed the American Latino Museum bill unanimously on a voice vote after having garnered 295 bipartisan co-sponsors. We now have 45 cosponsors for the Senate bill.

We urge the committee to advance the bill and urge the full Senate to pass the House bill by unanimous consent. The House bill was amended in committee to include language ensuring the diversity of political viewpoints.

The language of this important amendment reads as follows: “ENSURING DIVERSITY OF POLITICAL VIEWPOINTS IN EXHIBITS AND PROGRAMS.—In carrying out its duties, the Board of Trustees shall ensure that the exhibits and programs of the Museum reflect the diversity of the political viewpoints held by Latinos of the United States on the events and issues relating to the history of Latinos in the United States.”

Meaning this would be the first and only Smithsonian museum in the institution’s 174-year history, where its founding/charter document would require the representation of various points of view, including the conservative viewpoint. Also, in addition to statutory members, the bill requires the appointment of a bipartisan Board of Trustees. The language reads as follows: “Two Members of Congress, one from each political party, designated by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Conference.” Also, another 13 individuals will be appointed by the Board of Regents, after taking into consideration, “efforts to have a politically and geographically diverse representation on the Board of Trustees”

We have also been fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. As Secretary Bunch stated in the hearing in the House Administration Committee in February of this year, ““What the National Museum of African American History and Culture has demonstrated is that the experiences of any community offers a lens to better understand our collective national identity. Its stories are the stories for everyone. It can teach any visitor something about themselves, about their history and their country. By sharing the experiences of more communities, the better we can understand each other and our shared history. As new museum legislation is debated within Congress, it’s essential that the Smithsonian not wait to provide its visitors with a broader more inclusive history.” We stand on the shoulders of the leaders who created that museum as well as the National Museum of the American Indian. We have learned from their experiences and we are confident in our ability to raise the funds needed to build a world class institution.

I will close with this. I have been involved in this initiative for 13 years because for me it's a labor of love, it's a passion project, it's a legacy initiative. As I said earlier, we are about to family and this is

for my family. Because one day I want to be able to walk into this museum with my two sons, Daniel and David, and my future eventual grandchildren and I also have a vision of a young Latina that's born today somewhere in the USA. And on her sixth grade field trip she can go to Washington, D.C. and she can marvel at the monuments and she can visit capitol hill, she can go to the national museums including the American Latino museum and she can see all these stories that I've been talking about and she can leave that museum proud not only to be a Latina but proud to be an American.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any question you might have.