

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 29, 2012

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inouye, Vice Chairman Cochran, Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We write to respectfully request that the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee include in its Fiscal Year 2013 appropriations bill the following language:

The committee strongly supports the creation of a future Smithsonian American Latino Museum, and in the meantime supports the Smithsonian Latino Center and its goal of promoting the inclusion of Latino contributions in Smithsonian Institution programs, exhibitions, collections and public outreach. In accordance with the recommendations provided to Congress and the President of the United States in the May, 2011 report by the National Museum of the American Latino Commission (created by P.L. 110-229), the Committee urges collaboration between the Smithsonian and appropriate federal and local organizations to increase Latino programming, exhibitions, collections and outreach at the Institution.

It has been eighteen years since a Smithsonian Institution Task Force on Latino Issues first formally documented that Latinos were the only major contributor to our nation not permanently recognized at the landmark museum complex. A few years later, in 1997, the Smithsonian's Board of Regents established the Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC) as a pan-institutional unit that would work with the entire network of Smithsonian museums, research centers, the National Zoo and over 140 affiliates across the nation to foster the understanding and appreciation of Latinos' contributions to American history, society and culture.

While the creation of the SLC marked an important step forward, the progress of representing Latinos' contributions to the U.S. has not kept pace with the progress of a community that is now more than 50.5 million strong, represents over 16 percent of the U.S. population, and carries over five centuries of contributions to our great nation.

For this reason, in 2003, we introduced a bill to explore the potential creation of a national museum in Washington, D.C. recognizing the contributions of Latinos to the United States. The bipartisan act of Congress (P.L. 110-229) was enacted on May 8, 2008, establishing a bipartisan commission of 23 leaders tasked with researching recommendations for a plan of action to establish and maintain such a museum.

The National Museum of the American Latino Commission submitted its report to the President and Congress in May of 2011, and in November of that year introduced a bipartisan, bicameral bill to move forward the Commission's recommendations – the Smithsonian American Latino Museum Act (H.R. 3459/S. 1868).

As the Commission eloquently declares in its report, "At this moment in our country's history when cultural understanding could not be more important to the enduring strength of our democratic ideals, we ask that you consider the importance of creating The Smithsonian American Latino Museum not only as a monument for Latinos but as a 21st Century learning laboratory rooted in the mission that every American should have access to the stories of all Americans... Some might ask in these very difficult economic times how we can afford such an endeavor. The real question is how can we afford not to."

We hope you'll join us in supporting the commission's well-researched recommendation that the time has come for us to help illuminate the American story for all. Let us start by expressing our support for the Smithsonian Latino Center and a future Smithsonian American Latino Museum in the FY 2013 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Rabert Merendy

Mr. R

Tom Udare

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Harry Reid

Chuck Sch

Rebekah Starow

Dean Heller