

Written Statement of Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
Oversight of the Smithsonian Institution: Opportunities for Growth by Honoring Latino
Americans and Asian Pacific Americans
U.S. House of Representatives
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Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee again today.

When I was last before the Committee, we touched only briefly on the topic of creating additional museums within the Smithsonian, so I am grateful that you have decided to dedicate this time to explore the topic in greater depth.

As the founding Director of our most recent addition to the Smithsonian, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, I am happy to share the insights I gained standing up a museum that began without a staff, a building, or a collection of its own.

What the National Museum of African American History and Culture has demonstrated, is that the experiences of any community offer a lens to better understand our collective national identity. Its stories are stories for everyone. It can teach any visitor something about themselves, their history, their country. By sharing the experiences of more communities, the better we can all understand each other.

As new museum legislation is debated in Congress, it is essential that we recognize that the Smithsonian is actively providing its visitors with a broader and more inclusive history. We had hoped to be joined today by Eduardo Diaz, Director of the Smithsonian Latino Center. Unfortunately, he has been pulled away on family matters. I am however pleased to be joined today by Lisa Sasaki, Director of the Smithsonian Asian-Pacific American Center. Together we can share how these centers make the Smithsonian more effective, vibrant, and meaningful by embracing an inclusive vision of our history and culture. I know that you share our vision of telling a complete history of our nation.

While my memories of opening the National Museum of African American History and Culture are vivid, so are my memories of how difficult it was. I quickly realized that the opening was still just the beginning of a long journey.

As head of the Institution that will be responsible for any new museums, it's my obligation to make sure that Congress is fully aware of what it means to place this responsibility on the Smithsonian.

Any new museum must meet the expectations the public has for a national museum. This means an appropriate size, programming, and collections. We must contemplate the needs of housing staff and collections for a museum and determine if those needs can be met on site.

There must also be a suitable location for a new museum. These buildings are powerful symbols of how we, as a nation, value the contributions of the people they represent.

While I know everyone would like to know how much a new museum would cost at the onset, we simply do not have enough information at this time to provide a precise answer. The costs of construction are intimately tied to site selection and any challenges the location might present. Given expected construction cost increases and the challenges of the preferred sites, a comparable new museum will likely exceed the costs of building the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

It's also important to note that the costs do not end with construction. The annual operation costs of a museum alone are significant, but the true costs are spread throughout the Institution. Many functions of the Smithsonian are centralized, such as maintenance, security, and general counsel to name a few. We must also consider our intellectual capacity. We cannot let additional museums detract from our ability to appropriately staff and support the work of all of our museums, galleries, and central support units.

Finally, it is important that Congress understands the impact new museums could have on our ability to maintain our aging infrastructure. Several of our iconic buildings are slated for, or are currently undergoing, extensive revitalizations. Others are in need of renovations, but work has been deferred due to competing priorities. As this Committee is well aware, our backlog of maintenance costs has exceeded \$1 billion and many of our facilities continue to fall behind. I would like to thank you for the bipartisan support you have shown in helping us manage this problem and supporting a more sustainable path for the Institution. We are looking for new ways to assess and address the backlog. Congress must understand that bringing a new museum to fruition will significantly increase these challenges, and we must plan for that from the onset.

When building the National Museum of African American History and Culture, I saw Congress and the Administration as essential partners in its success. As Secretary, I would take the same approach. If Congress deems that it is time to move forward on any new museums, it is imperative that we work collaboratively to ensure we can meet all of our challenges, new and old.

As the founding Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, I know firsthand that there is never a perfect time for adding a new museum to the Smithsonian. If Congress deems it time to move forward on any new museum proposals, it must be done in a way that does not place additional burdens on our existing priorities. Creating a new museum is an exceptional commitment, and Congress must fully understand what that means as they deliberate proposals.

Thank you again for holding this hearing, for your ongoing support of the Institution, and your commitment to sharing the experiences of all Americans. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.