

February 5, 2020

Congresswoman Grace Meng  
Statement to the House Administration Committee

Hearing: *Oversight of the Smithsonian Institution: Opportunities for Growth by Honoring Latino Americans and Asian Pacific Americans*

Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss my bill, H.R. 4132 – the “Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture Act,” a bill that I have proudly introduced each of the past three Congresses.

I come before you today to emphasize the need to weave the narrative of the Asian Pacific American communities into the greater American story. After all, the past shapes who we are, just as it also strengthens how we move forward.

There is no doubt that Asian Pacific Americans are the fastest growing ethnic population in the United States, and our community is becoming an increasingly powerful and visible force in all aspects of American life. From entertainment to medicine; from academia to entrepreneurship; from social justice to innovation—our community has made invaluable contributions to every facet of our nation. But, too often, our community is excluded or forgotten in history – *our* American history.

As long ago as 1850, men were recruited from the Asia Pacific region to the U.S. to work in mines, factories, farms, and on the construction of railroads. Since then, APAs have immeasurably contributed to the advancement of our country.

From the Chinese Americans who fought at the Battles of Antietam and Gettysburg during the American Civil War to the Japanese Americans who comprised the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team during World War II, and who became the most decorated unit in the history of the U.S. Military; from the Chinese Exclusion Act to the Japanese American internment camps; and from the first wave of Southeast Asian refugees on our shores to the Filipino Americans who helped found the farmworker labor movement – these events have left an indelible mark on our American story. Shamefully, too often, these stories are starkly missing.

From these Halls of Congress to every American classroom, we also cannot forget our APA heroes who fought for human and civil rights and social justice with their every breath, including: Grace Lee Boggs – a human rights activist for seven decades; Larry Itliong – the quintessential leader for labor rights and justice; Col. Young Oak Kim – the highly decorated U.S. Army combat veteran of World War II and the Korean War; Dalip Singh Saund – the first Asian American elected to Congress; and Patsy Mink – the first woman of color elected to Congress, and whose name is synonymous with Title IX.

Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, museums are gateways for Americans and the world to see our country’s rich history, challenges it overcame, and potential for greatness. That is why a commission to study the potential creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American history is the first step in elevating the APA experiences. Doing so would ensure that Americans of all ethnicities and generations can learn about the impact our community has had in our nation’s values, traditions, culture, and history. After all, the Asian Pacific American story *is* the American story.

Thank you again for this opportunity to come before your committee. I ardently hope we can work together to preserve the unique histories of *all* Americans, including Asian Pacific Americans, for future generations.