

**Chairwoman Debra Haaland
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
October 17, 2019**

- **Thank you all for attending the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on the National Museum of the American Latino Act – a proposal I am proud to cosponsor along with over 200 of my colleagues.**
- **I would like to extend my gratitude to Representative Serrano, the bill's sponsor, as well as the other Members of Congress joining us today to testify on behalf of this important legislation.**
- **I would also like to welcome our witnesses, many of whom have traveled a long way to speak to the personal and national significance of this proposal.**
- **For over 500 years, Latinos have played an important role in shaping the history, culture, and art of this nation.**
- **In my home state of New Mexico, the influences of Hispanic and Latino culture can be found in everything from our food and festivals to our art and architecture.**

- **Although Latinos represent the largest ethnic group in the nation, their innumerable contributions to American culture and history are often ignored by our history books.**
- **And, unfortunately, many stories of our country's rich and diverse Latino heritage remain untold or forgotten over time.**
- **H.R. 2420 seeks to recognize and honor the countless contributions of Latinos to our nation's history and culture by establishing the National Museum of the American Latino within the Smithsonian Institution – ensuring that the American Latino story is preserved and shared.**
- **This bill presents us with an important opportunity to create a more inclusive and representative story of America by illuminating the diverse experiences of Latino Americans that have been overlooked for far too long.**
- **It is especially fitting that we consider this proposal today, as this Tuesday marked the end of National Hispanic Heritage Month – a time when we celebrate our country's proud Hispanic heritage and pay tribute to the numerous achievements of Hispanic Americans.**

- **From the establishment of the first permanent settlement in the United States in 1565 to the millions of Latinos who have served our nation, the experiences of Latino Americans are woven into every aspect of American society.**
- **It is time that our national institutions elevate the historically marginalized stories of Hispanic and Latino Americans and present a more inclusive and complete image of American history and society – especially considering the increase in hateful rhetoric targeting the Latino community in recent years.**
- **As we have seen with the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the National Museum of the American Indian, the establishment of a museum dedicated to the experiences of the American Latino will provide Americans and visitors from across the world with a deeper and richer understanding of the diverse voices that shape this nation.**
- **I would like to thank Representative Serrano again for championing this important legislation as well as the witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimony.**