

Responses to Questions for the Record
Hearing on H.R. 3525, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Dr. Theodore S. Gonzalves, Acting Director
Asian Pacific American Program, Smithsonian Institution

Mr. Gonzalves, as you're aware, Congress recently passed legislation to establish the National Museum of the American Latino and the American Women's History Museum under the Smithsonian's umbrella. Recognizing that H.R. 3525 just establishes a commission to study the potential creation of a national museum of Asian Pacific American history, can you speak to the decision-making process that will lead to the selection of a site?

HR 3525 legislates that the Commission would report on potential locations for the Museum in Washington DC and its environs. The Commission established by this legislation is advisory in nature and provides recommendations to the President and Congress including possible sites for consideration.

The following criteria were used by the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of the American Latino: The proximity to the National Mall, Washington DC icons and quality of the visitor experience; the ability of the site to meet the museum's program; the costs for the construction, demolition, relocation and other related development costs; site accessibility by pedestrian, vehicular, and transit modes, parking and service access; congressional support and approval to develop the sites; the size of the site to accommodate initial and future development; and the ability to address environmental impact issues and sustainable design initiatives.

Given the challenges in finding adequate space for new museums, Congress may wish to amend HR 3525, directing the Commission to establish selection criteria and not specific site recommendations. A Commission would not have the ability to conduct comprehensive site analysis with traffic studies, environmental impacts, accessibility, and other site risks. Naming potential sites without confirming their viability could set unrealistic expectations for supporters.

Ultimately, the decision on site selection resides with the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian based on the authority delegated in the legislation.

Mr. Gonzalves, the Smithsonian is currently facing a significant maintenance backlog. What led to this backlog in the first place?

The Smithsonian, like all large institutions, has accrued a backlog of maintenance issues. As the Interim Director of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, my expertise lies in the programmatic elements of the institution, and not with its infrastructure challenges. I know my colleagues in Smithsonian Facilities, and the central leadership of the Smithsonian take this issue seriously and would be glad to discuss it with you and the Committee in greater depth and detail than I could provide.