

December 7, 2021

Congresswoman Grace Meng
Statement to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests,
and Public Lands:

Chair Porter, Ranking Member Rosendale, and distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss my bill, H.R. 3525 – the “Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture Act.”

I would like to acknowledge the witnesses, Dr. Theodore Gonzalves, Ms. Lisa Ling, and Dr. Russell Jeung for their time and testimony today. I also want to recognize my colleagues Rep. DeSaulnier and Rep. Katko and encourage the movement of all of our bills through this hearing.

I come before you today to emphasize why we should establish a national museum dedicated to Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) history and culture in our nation’s capital.

Museums are gateways for Americans and the world to see our country’s rich history, the challenges we overcame, and our potential for greatness. They offer space to reflect on the past, present, and future – a collage of all that has transpired and all that we continue to fight for. Indeed, a physical space located in the nation’s capital is a powerful image that can inspire our youngest to pursue their dreams while educating visitors on our history. AAPI history is long and storied, and a national museum dedicated to it is overdue.

As long ago as the 1700s, AAPIs have shaped the fabric of our country with contributions to infrastructure, our economy, selfless military service, and so much more. But, too often, our community is excluded or forgotten in history – *our* American history.

Chinese Americans fought for the Union at the Battles of Antietam and Gettysburg during the American Civil War and Japanese Americans comprised the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II, which became the most decorated unit in the history of the U.S. Military. While Chinese and Japanese Americans have demonstrated valor and bravery, they have also faced institutionalized disenfranchisement that manifested in US laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and Executive Order 9066 that ordered the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Yet, from the first wave of Southeast Asian refugees on our shores to the Filipino Americans who helped found the farmworker labor movement – AAPIs have left an indelible mark on our American story.

From these Halls of Congress to every American classroom, our AAPI heroes such as Grace Lee Boggs – a human rights activist for seven decades; Larry Itliong – the quintessential leader for labor rights and justice; Dalip Singh Saund – the first Asian American elected to Congress; and Patsy Mink – the first woman of color elected to Congress, and the original champion of Title IX protections in the Higher Education Act, have fought for human and civil rights and social justice with their every breath. Shamefully, these stories are starkly missing from the narrative of American history.

Chair Porter, Ranking Member Rosendale, this commission to study the creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American history is the first step in elevating AAPI experiences. Our stories provide an opportunity for us to celebrate our rich American history, remember the challenges we have overcome, and step forward in unity.

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