

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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October 14, 2014
Start: 1:14 p.m.
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HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: JAMES G. VAN BRAMER
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Elizabeth S. Crowley
Julissa Ferreras
Peter A. Koo
Stephen T. Levin
Andy L. King
Costa G. Constantinides
Laurie A. Cumbo
Helen K. Rosenthal

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Jose E. Serrano
United States Congressman
New York's 15th Congressional District

Estuardo Rodriguez, Executive Director Friends
of the American Latino Museum

Sid Wilson, Board Chairman
Friends of the American Latino Museum
Commissioner Appointee to the National Museum
of the American Latino Study Commission

Juan Cartagena, President and General Counsel
of Latino Justice PRLDEF - Puerto Rican Legal
Defense and Education Fund

Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Executive Director
El Museo del Barrio in East Harlem

Dr. Marilu Galvan, Executive Director
Centro Civico Cultural Dominicano

Dr. Marta Moreno Vega
New York University

Milagros Baez O'Toole, President
Elmhurst Spanish Women
Board Chair of Acacia Network

Deborah Schwartz, President
Brooklyn Historical Society

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[sound check]

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Good afternoon.

4

Are we ready? Okay.

5

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please.

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Good afternoon,

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everybody [gavel] and welcome to this very important

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convening of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,

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Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. I

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am very proud to be the Chair of this committee. My

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name is Jimmy Van Bramer. Joining me today is our

12

amazing Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, the prime

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sponsor of the very important resolution, which we'll

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be discussing today. So I want to acknowledge

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Council Member Peter Koo of our Committee, who is

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here, and I know others will be joining us shortly.

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Resolution 405 sponsored by Speaker Mark-

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Viverito calls upon Congress to pass and the

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President to sign H.R. 1217 and S. 568 to establish

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the Smithsonian American Latino Museum, and designate

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the Arts and Industries Building as its future

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location in Washington, D.C. This resolution

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supports the creation of a national museum to foster

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a deeper awareness of Latino history and heritage in

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the United States. Needless to say, the Latino

2 population contributed to the diversity and richness
3 of most every city across our nation, including New
4 York City. Of course, our home, which is also home
5 to a thriving and growing Latino population of at
6 least 2.3 million people. According to the most
7 recent census data, the Latino population is the
8 largest ethnic minority in the country, and it is
9 ever growing.

10 The contributions of Latinos in the
11 United States whether it's in government, civic life,
12 the armed forces, business, entertainment, fine arts,
13 fashion, culinary arts, music, sports, and so many
14 other areas are undeniable. A museum dedicated to
15 the Latino experience in the United States would,
16 therefore, paint a more complete picture of our
17 nation's history. The creation of the American
18 Latino Museum would also exemplify a commitment to
19 the arts, diversity, to culture, and inclusivity.

20 Indeed, the history of this country cannot accurately
21 be told without the inclusion of Latinos and Latinos.

22 I look forward to hearing more today about the
23 importance of the Smithsonian American Latino Museum,
24 and all of the factors to be considered before its
25 creation. And I truly hope our resolution helps

2 encourage our representatives in Washington, D.C. to
3 act quickly.

4 I want to thank Tonya Cyrus, our
5 Committee's Policy Analyst, Anita Kilauan, our
6 Committee's Counsel, and all the staff helping to
7 prepare for this hearing. And now it is our distinct
8 honor and privilege to hand this over to our Speaker
9 and the sponsor of this very important resolution,
10 Melissa Mark-Viverito.

11 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Well, good
12 afternoon, [Speaking Spanish]. Thank you Majority
13 Leader, and Chair of this great committee. I'm
14 Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. I want to thank
15 everyone that is here to testify on this important
16 matter. And it's great to see our friends and
17 colleagues in the audience, but in particular
18 Congressman Jose Serrano who is here. Thank you so
19 much for joining us.

20 I really want to talk about this
21 important topic. As we said, it's a resolution that
22 would-- We're looking at new Resolution No. 405,
23 which calls upon Congress to pass and the President
24 to sign H.R. 1217 and S. 568, which would establish
25 the Smithsonian American Latino Museum, and designate

3 the Arts and Industries Building as its future
4 location in Washington, D.C. And I'm proud to be the
5 sponsor of this important resolution. As has been
6 indicated according to the most recent census data,
7 the Latino population in the largest minority in the
8 United States. There are approximately 53 million
9 people of Latino descent that are living in this
10 country, and over 2.3 million is right here in New
11 York City.

12 The Latino population of the U.S. is
13 projected to be 132 million in 2050. That's up from
14 where we are today at 53 million, but it will
15 constitute 32% of the nation's total population. The
16 Latino experience is deeply woven into the American
17 story. Latinos have played a pivotal role in shaping
18 the history and trajectory of the U.S. from
19 immigration to service in war, to building cities, to
20 advancing the American dream. Latinos have made
21 significant contributions to our nation including
22 arts, sciences, and the economy. Latino leaders,
23 pioneers and communities enrich the cultural fabrics
24 of our nation and our city. Latinos have broken
25 glass ceilings, and are leaders in non-profit
organizations, advocacy groups, and corporations.

2 Many such individuals are among us here today.

3 Latinos also serve in government at every level. It
4 is clear to see this in the New York City Council, in
5 Congress, and even among the nine Justices in the New
6 York Supreme Court. I stand before you proud to be
7 the first Puerto Rican young person Latino to hold a
8 citywide elected position.

9 Often the histories of people of color
10 are forgotten or rewritten. This museum will
11 physically institutionalize the memory and history of
12 Latinos in America creating opportunities for
13 generations of all Americans to develop a greater
14 understanding of Latino culture, history, and
15 heritage. This museum would also foster a more
16 comprehensive understanding of America itself. It is
17 therefore of utmost importance that Congress pass the
18 bills to establish the Smithsonian American Latino
19 Museum. And I look forward to hearing more about
20 this from those that are going to testify.

21 And I was just commenting to the Majority
22 Leader before that we're only about 2,000 Tweets the
23 Latino Museum Twitter handle has about 171,000
24 commenters. So obviously, there is a lot of support
25 in different sectors. And so, I appreciate everyone

3 that has helped us put together this hearing today.

4 I look forward to hearing the testimony and support
5 for this resolution. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
7 much, Madam Speaker, and you are, of course, a part
8 of the history in such a very big way with your
9 amazing leadership here in the City Council.
10 Speaking of amazing leadership, we are thrilled and
11 honored to be joined today by Congressman Jose
12 Serrano, who is a great leader in that history in so
13 many ways, and I'd like to ask him to come forward
14 and testify before the committee. And, of course, I
15 could not have Congressman Serrano here without
16 recognizing his son, State Senator. Jose Serrano was
17 chair of this committee when he was in the New York
18 City Council. So welcome, Congressman Serrano.

19 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: Thank you, Mr.
20 Chairman, and yes it's true I hold a special place in
21 my heart for this committee not only because prior to
22 politics I was involved with something called the
23 South Bronx Community Action Theater. But because my
24 son followed it up by working for the Public Theater,
25 and then becoming Chairman of this Committee. And

3 now Chairman of a similar committee in the State
4 Senate.

5 I'm very pleased to be with you here
6 today, and with our Speaker, Mr. Koo, and all of the
7 folks who are staff members who played such a role in
8 this. I'll be really honest with you. I actually
9 started out in politics 40 years ago. I wanted why
10 the City Council would have resolutions asking
11 Congress to do something. Then when I got to
12 Congress, I was actually bothered by having the City
13 Council asking Congress to do something. And then I
14 grew up, and realized that it helps in forcing other
15 people to understand the full significance of the
16 issue. In other words, what you're doing today is
17 totally, totally proper and totally healthy by making
18 my job then easier to go and face other folks. And
19 so I'm very pleased to be here today, and thank you
20 for the opportunity to testify before you in passing
21 legislation to designate the Arts and Industries
22 Building as the future site for the Smithsonian
23 National Museum for the American Latino.

24 I do deeply appreciate that this
25 committee is taking the time to explore this issue in
greater depth as it is a subject that I truly care

2 about. I have been a long-time supporter of
3 establishing this museum, and I am well aware of the
4 legislative challenges it currently faces in
5 Congress. I applaud the Friends of the National
6 Museum of the American Latino for championing this
7 issue. I am glad to be part of such a historic
8 effort to finally grant a place in our nation's
9 Capitol to honor the tremendous contributions of
10 Latino men and women to our country.

11 Latinos and Latinos have been an integral
12 part of the United States for over a couple hundred
13 years. Although the community was quite small in the
14 earliest days of our nation, that is if you don't
15 count territories we took when there were all
16 Latinos. We're not going to go into that subject
17 today. It was officially quite small, but
18 unofficially quite large. It had been an integral
19 part of 200 and it was small in the beginning due to
20 this undeniable fact. Now it stands as one of the
21 largest minority groups in the United States. And we
22 as a nation to need to recognize the importance of
23 this community by constructing a Museum on a national
24 mall. That this museum will be addressing the
25 underrepresentation of American Latino art and

1 culture in the Smithsonian Institution. And that's
2 important to note that it's not just building a
3 museum. It's also the fact that the Smithsonian has
4 not done what is right, and by building this museum
5 we move forward to us getting the Smithsonian to do
6 what it should have done many years ago.

8 This museum can teach the American people
9 about the great contributions that Latinos have given
10 our country from the great Roberto Clemente in
11 baseball to the talented Jamie Rivera in music to
12 Justice Sonia Sotomayor in the Supreme Court. The
13 United States has been deeply enriched by the Latino
14 community. I must say it's our first Latino-Puerto
15 Rican Speaker in the New York City Council, who most
16 certainly already had a place in that museum, and I
17 can assure you of that.

18 The United States is better, stronger,
19 and more diverse because we're a nation of
20 immigrants, and I must say migrants also. A nation
21 of people from around the world who contribute each
22 day to our culture and history. Each year millions
23 of people visit Washington, D.C. to learn about our
24 government, our history, and our culture.

25 Establishing the American Latino Museum will not only

2 teach our fellow citizens about the importance of the
3 Latino culture, but it will also show the world who
4 we are as a nation, a nation enriched by cultures
5 from around the world. I commend this committee for
6 bringing attention to this issue by starting a public
7 discussion in New York City. As a New Yorker, I am
8 particularly pleased that so many members of the City
9 Council have taken a keen interest in the American
10 Latino Museum. You can continue counting on my
11 upmost support for the museum, and I am confident
12 that together we can and will establish the museum
13 for all Americans. Again, I thank you for this
14 opportunity and qualify my earlier statement again by
15 saying that I find that it is important for local
16 bodies to speak on this issue.

17 Let me before I end, Mr. Chairman, say
18 something that is a mantra with me in Congress. When
19 we speak of the United States, we always speak about
20 50 states, but there are 50 states and there are
21 territories. And for this Latino museum, and perhaps
22 you can put this in your resolution or add to it.
23 For this museum to be truly a Latino museum, it can't
24 just speak about Latinos who succeeded within the 50

1 states. It has to speak about contributions of
2 Latinos in those territories.
3

4 I'll give an example, and I dare tread on
5 holy ground here because he is probably one of the
6 greatest Puerto Ricans of all time. Roberto Clemente
7 is an icon, a symbol of who we are as a people.
8 Roberto's accomplishments as a professional were
9 within the 50 states. But there are people in Puerto
10 Rico right now in the Virgin Islands in Samoa and
11 other places who are Latinos who are accomplishing
12 many things in arts and science and other things.
13 They have to be included in this museum. And I'm
14 concerned that in the same way someone this morning
15 on a low-ball TV station said, Well, if we're lucky,
16 the hurricane won't touch the United States. Sure,
17 as it goes over Puerto Rico and the Virgin Island it
18 will touch American citizens, whether people realize
19 it or not. So I would hope that in joining us in
20 this fight you and the Speaker and everyone else also
21 join us in saying it must include Latinos period
22 regardless of where they reside, as long as there are
23 Latinos within the United States and its territories.
24 And thank you so much.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
3 much Congressman for your eloquence and passion, and
4 for your lifelong love of the arts. I want to
5 recognize that we've been joined by Council Member
6 Helen Rosenthal from Manhattan. And as you
7 mentioned, Speaker Mark-Viverito's history making as
8 it's in progress actually. I leaned over and said, I
9 look forward the Melissa Mark-Viverito exhibit at
10 this museum one day in Washington. But I'd like to
11 give the Speaker the floor to start with questions--

12 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: [interposing]
13 Sure.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --of the
15 Congressman.

16 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you so
17 much, Chair Van Bramer. Congressman, as always thank
18 you so much for your work. You are Congressman to
19 50% of my district. So you are very dear to me, and
20 obviously to our community. And I think the last
21 things that you spoke about were very important to
22 note. And not only for the reasons you cited. But
23 when you think about the fact that we are U.S.
24 citizens those that live on the Island, the
25 contributions that are made that adding to this

2 country as well in terms of serving the distinction
3 and disproportionate ways in the armed services,
4 whatever your opinion is about war in general. But,
5 you know, we have an incredible trajectory of
6 support. So we definitely don't want any of the
7 contributions that have been made to be overlooked.
8 So I think it's really important. You know you say--
9 You talked a little bit about maybe the opposition,
10 and I know that there is also the track of
11 Congresswoman Maloney fighting for the women's
12 museum. And we've heard about the fact that there's
13 some opposition to it for whatever reason. I can't
14 understand why, but what has been the opposition to
15 being supportive of these bills?

16 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: That's a great
17 point. Three points I'm going to come up with.
18 First of all, you and I share the same views on our
19 country getting involved in wars. But we also share
20 the view that once you wear the uniform and come back
21 home, you should be treated equally and with respect
22 especially the wounded warriors. And so, if for no
23 other reason, the territory should be included in
24 this because how can you tell the military history of
25 this country without including the people who live in

3 the territories. Some of them who never spoke
4 English. Some of them who never left their homeland
5 other than to go to war to defend this country, and
6 to defend our democracy here. So you have to be
7 involved. The opposition is the foolish one. It's
8 the one that in a perfect world would make sense, but
9 we don't live in a perfect world.

10 I've heard from very liberal members of
11 Congress including-- Not including, they have to be
12 Democrats if they're very liberal, saying, Why not
13 just a museum for Americans? And the idea I keep
14 telling them is to single out the contributions of
15 certain groups of Americans. And, therefore, it's
16 important the fact that we're building an African-
17 American museum on the mall now. And that we will
18 hopefully and eventually build a Latino museum. So
19 the opposition comes from two places, and it's not--
20 One of them is opposition, which is what I just
21 mentioned to you. The other one is people trying to
22 find space for their own cores. A woman's museum,
23 which is something that we respect and we support,
24 and other kinds of museums.

25 But as the population grows, as
politically the community grows to the point where

2 one of the two major parties knows it can't survive
3 the next election with 74% of its people of this
4 community voting against them. It changes to the
5 point with them a Latino museum becomes very much a
6 part number one. Number 2 and lastly, the Latino has
7 been part of the history since the beginning, since
8 the beginning of this country's creation. And so to
9 just single out their contributions, our
10 contributions within the American city-- If you were
11 just-- If you were building a museum about Puerto
12 Rican culture on a national mall, one could argue how
13 does that fit into the larger picture.

14 But this is different. This is about
15 what we have contributed as a community to the larger
16 picture to make this country what it is today. To
17 make this country the strong country that it is. And
18 so, the opposition in those cases is just people who
19 want their own museum, and they at times sound
20 valuable. In general, we have a lot of support.
21 Here's one point that I don't know if I should be
22 saying in public, but I didn't consult with my
23 political consultants, which number zero. Which is
24 do we mention this in public? The reason you don't
25 see a lot of co-sponsors at this moment is that our

2 plan is for each Republican we pick up we have
3 hundreds of Democrats willing to align. But we don't
4 want a bill that has 150 Democrats and 25 Republicans
5 because that won't go anywhere especially if they're
6 still in the majority. So, you know, even I myself
7 do not appear as a sponsor of the bill while I'm a
8 creator of the bill. And the minute that we open up
9 more Republicans, we fill in with Democrats to try to
10 make it a bi-partisan bill.

11 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Well, I
12 appreciate it. I want to thank you again for your
13 support of this. We are happy to lend our voice in a
14 small way, and hopefully it will continue to build
15 our momentum so that we do see the support. And
16 obviously, the Smithsonian having a responsibility,
17 right, to also work with--

18 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: [interposing] Yes.

19 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: --us on this is
20 important to note as well. So, I'll leave it there
21 because I know we have other panels, which we can
22 also engage with them on other aspects of the
23 institution itself. But thank you very much,
24 Congressman.

25

2 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: My pleasure. Thank
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
5 much, Madam Speaker. I want to recognize we've been
6 joined by Council Member Costa Constantinides, also
7 from Queens and a member of our Committee. And
8 Congressman, I just wanted to-- I was thrilled to
9 hear you say that you thought that this could be
10 helpful in pushing this along. And I was wondering
11 in furtherance of that, do you have a timeline in
12 mind or how is this going to be helpful in pushing
13 this forward as quickly as possible? And maybe the
14 folks from the actual Friends of the Museum will
15 speak more to this, but--

16 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: [interposing]
17 Right.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --in terms of
19 how quickly would you like to see it?

20 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: Well, I'd like to
21 see it right away. If I may, I will touch on the
22 subject that shouldn't be at hearings, but it's
23 everywhere we go these days, and that's the political
24 question. I suspect once the elections are over,
25 assuming for a second that the House of

2 Representatives continues under Republic leadership,
3 I suspect that after November you're going to see a
4 lot of action heading to the real Latino community as
5 we move to the 2016 Presidential election. Because
6 that particular party can continue to win local
7 elections, but will have a hard time winning national
8 elections with 74% of Latinos voting against it.
9 It's just a hard fact. So you're going to see
10 immigration issues. What? I don't know. You're
11 going to see movement on the Latino Museum, and
12 you're going to see a lot of things happening. And
13 as demographics change, and districts become more
14 Latino in many areas where they were not before, now
15 you're going to see people themselves saying let's do
16 something about it.

17 And then the last point, which is very
18 important is you have areas like Florida, for
19 instance, which are now swing states for both
20 parties. And both parties want to out-Latino
21 themselves in Florida. You know, Who is more Latino?
22 I am, you know. So these issues then come into play.
23 And lastly, and I know you don't do this, but never
24 underestimate the power of New York City in telling
25 people what to do. In fact, we Puerto Ricans have

2 been lying to ourselves for years. We continue to
3 say that San Juan is the capitol of Puerto Rico. The
4 truth is that New York is the capital of Puerto Rico,
5 and it's been like that for a long time. San Juan
6 may be on the map, but we know where the capitol is,
7 and that's in the Bronx. It's been like that for a
8 long, long time, and I came here when I was six years
9 old. So I know for a fact.

10 So the New York City Council with a
11 Latina Speaker with a Puerto Rican Speaker, with you
12 as Chairman of this Committee, with the
13 progressiveness that has been shown in the few months
14 that you've taken over this government, I think goes
15 a long way in convincing a lot of people. And, it
16 may even make some New York members of Congress, who
17 are a little uneasy or don't know how to move, move
18 faster than they are moving right now on this issue.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I believe that
20 and hope that that is the course of action. I want
21 to thank you, Congressman Serrano, for everything
22 that you've done. I don't believe there are any more
23 questions. I think the speaker said it all, and we
24 do have some other panelists, but we're honored to
25 have you here today. The Serrano family has a long

2 and very proud legacy here in the City of New York
3 that is ongoing needless to say. And your son
4 Senator Serrano is simply terrific, and a great--

5 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: [interposing] Yes,
6 he is.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --patron of the
8 arts. And I love working with State Senator Serrano
9 and I'm proud to chair the committee that he once
10 chaired.

11 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: Thank you so much.
12 I'm very proud of him. He's doing a great job, and
13 my only sadness at times, if I may sound a little
14 dramatic Latino, is that my parents are not around to
15 see their son and their grandson and what we've done.
16 And that's part of what they did. They made American
17 history. They made Latino history by working the
18 factories. They made Latino and American history by
19 picketing to get one hour of Spanish TV. Now we have
20 networks that I don't even-- In Spanish. Now, we
21 have networks I can't even keep up with. Today De
22 Ario [sp?] and La Prensa, there were two different
23 newspapers that sold in the Bronx when it wasn't sold
24 in the Bronx. I mean people had to get a permit to
25 play baseball at St. Mary's Park. To get a beer

2 license for Braveda [sp?], to get a license to cut
3 hair on 149th Street. To open the first Gucci
4 Theater [sic] above 161st Street in the Bronx. These
5 are the smaller things that maybe won't show up at
6 the museum. But these are part of the history. And
7 my parents are part of it, and my family has been
8 part of it, and I'm pretty proud of that.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you for
10 sharing that.

11 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And thank you so
13 much for being with us, Congressman. And I will now
14 call the second panel.

15 CONGRESSMAN SERRANO: Thank you so much.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And now we will
17 hear from Estuardo Rodriguez, Friends of the American
18 Latino Museum.

19 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: [off mic]

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And Sid Wilson
21 also from the Friends Of the American Latino Museum,
22 and Juan Cartagena, Latino Justice PRLDEL. PRLDEF,
23 of course. And why don't we start with you Mr.
24 Rodriguez, and go down the line, and we have one more
25 panel after this.

2 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon,
3 esteemed members of the New York City Council. It is
4 my honor to sit before representatives of our
5 nation's largest and most storied city. And I
6 sincerely thank all of you for the invitation. I am
7 especially grateful to Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito
8 whose leadership and foresight on this issue is
9 critical to creating this opportunity for our
10 campaign.

11 My name is Estuardo Rodriguez, and I
12 serve as the Executive Director of the Friends of the
13 American Latino Museum. I am also an alumnus of
14 Saint John's University School of Law, Jamaica-Queens
15 on the F Line. So I am especially honored to be back
16 in New York to be part of this panel and provide
17 testimony in support of the campaign that I and my
18 team have put our heart and soul into for over the
19 last eight years.

20 The Friends of the American Latino Museum
21 is the only organization exclusively dedicated to the
22 creation of the National Smithsonian American Latino
23 Museum in our nation's capitol. For the last eight
24 years we have been working to push forth a campaign
25 to build this museum through our national network,

2 our National Coalition building communications and
3 marketing techniques, advocacy work, and fundraising
4 plans. We are the only current museum initiative
5 that has presented a commission report on the
6 feasibility of a museum to the President of the
7 United States and Congress. We have a larger social
8 media following than any existing Smithsonian Museum
9 number over 145,000 on Facebook and 172,000 on
10 Twitter, and a larger list of email addresses and
11 supporters from across the country.

12 We have created a board of national
13 leaders representing quintessential American
14 companies like Facebook, Coca-Cola, J.P. Morgan
15 Chase, and Exxon Mobil, as well as landmark civil
16 rights, and advocacy organizations that include
17 LULAC, AARP, and Global Latino. Working with our
18 board of directors we have traveled across the United
19 States to expand our network of supporting major
20 Hispanic markets, as well as markets with a new and
21 growing Latino populations. To do this, we have
22 activated local leaders in cities from Houston to
23 Miami, to Minneapolis, and hosted town halls with
24 premier institutions like Rice University, and the
25 University of Southern California. We have hosted

2 panels and exhibit at major conferences such as the
3 National Council of La Raz's National Conference, and
4 South by Southwest and many more.

5 Because we do not think we should have to
6 wait any longer to highlight the many American Latino
7 stories that built this nation, this year we launched
8 the Inaugural American-Latino Influencer Awards. The
9 first one was held in Houston followed by one in Las
10 Vegas with an upcoming event in Miami, Florida. This
11 award ceremony serves to commemorate and share the
12 history, and leadership of the American Latinos in
13 the arts, public service, and corporate sectors. Our
14 honorees for these awards included public servants
15 from both sides of the aisle including Senate
16 Majority Leader Harry Reid, and his Republican
17 counterpart in Nevada, Senator Dean Heller, museum
18 curators, local leaders, and more.

19 Through all of our events we are not only
20 conveying the campaign's urgency to give American
21 Latinos a national platform where one does not
22 currently exist. But we are also responding to the
23 same urgency each community has expressed. Every
24 city where we have shared our campaign has brought
25 with it a sampling of the unique sacrifice and

3 contributions of Latino families to our nation.

4 Stories of service to the nation that date back

5 before the first World War to the wars currently

6 waged in the Middle East. American Latino servicemen

7 and women are there. Americans of every ethnicity,

8 every corner of the country, and every economic

9 background feel that this museum is long overdue. In

10 fact, it is clear that it is long overdue not only to

11 us, but the Smithsonian itself has known for at least

12 20 years that this museum is long overdue.

13 This year we have a disappointing

14 obligation to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the

15 Smithsonian's own report on Latino representation

16 with the institution. The report is entitled,

17 *Willful Neglect* because it found that Latinos are the

18 most severely underrepresented group throughout the

19 Smithsonian's programs and exhibits. So neglected

20 were Latinos throughout the Smithsonian, that it is

21 almost-- that it almost appears international. It is

22 a disappointing obligation because after 20 years,

23 much work still remains. The report specifically

24 recommended the Smithsonian immediately begin the

25 establishment of an American Latino museum. But 20

years later we are still fighting for it.

3 Which brings us to the next step in our
4 campaign, the reason for today's proposed resolution.
5 The need to pass the Smithsonian American Latino
6 Museum Act. The next piece of legislation does one
7 very important thing. This piece of legislation does
8 one very important thing, and that is it gives the
9 museum a home, and commissions a study to determine
10 the costs associated with creating the museum. What
11 this bill does is critical to our progress. The home
12 it proposes for the museum is the Arts and the
13 Industries Building on the National Mall. The Arts
14 and Industries Building is registered as a national
15 historic site, and has been vacant for some time
16 after it fell into disrepair. This is the second
17 oldest building on the National Mall, and more
18 importantly it is the last possible space for a
19 museum on the mall, our nation's front yard. The
20 National Mall is home to many of the Smithsonian's
21 hallmark museums, American History, Natural History,
22 American Indian, and soon the African-American
23 History Museum of Culture and Art, just to name a
24 few. The Smithsonian American Latino Museum belongs
25 among them.

3 When buses of school children from all
4 over the nation, tour groups from all over the world,
5 and college kids on their D.C. summer internships
6 want to learn about our nation and its history, they
7 go to the National Mall. The Mall has over 30
8 million visitors per year. The story of our nation's
9 largest community of color, one that has been
10 represented on this soil since even before the
11 founding of Jamestown must have equal representation
12 on the National Mall. We will accept nothing less.
13 That is why this resolution is so important. That is
14 why the support of New York City, a city without
15 rivals and its diversity, grandeur and prominence in
16 American history will get us closer to the passage of
17 this Smithsonian American Latino Museum Act. I thank
18 you very much for your invitation again, and your
19 time.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
21 much for your testimony, and I want to thank you for
22 including your Saint John's University heritage. I,
23 too, am a graduate of Saint John's University. So I
24 thank you for including that. I do want to recognize
25 we've been joined by three very distinguished members
of our committee, our Finance Chair Julissa Ferreras;

2 Lori Cumbo, Council Member Laurie Cumbo from
3 Brooklyn; and Council Member Steve Levin also from
4 Brooklyn. So we are all here, and if you would start
5 your testimony.

6 SID WILSON: Thank you, Chairman. Good
7 afternoon Chairman Van Bramer, Madam Speaker Mark-
8 Viverito, and all of the members of the New York City
9 Council Cultural Affairs Committee. I thank you for
10 this invitation to testify on Resolution 405. My
11 name is Sid Wilson. I serve as the Board Chairman of
12 the Friends of the American Latino Museum. I am also
13 a former Commissioner Appointee of the President of
14 the United States, Barack Obama who appointed me to
15 the National Museum of the American Latino Study
16 Commission. I want to thank all the council members
17 who support this resolution. I have been a part of
18 the National Museum and American Latino Movement for
19 the last eight years, of which two have been as an
20 appointee to the Study Commission.

21 In September 2009, President Barack Obama
22 appointed me to join the 23-member Study Commission
23 to prepare a feasibility study on the prospects of
24 building a new Smithsonian American Latino Museum.
25 As part of this bi-partisan study, which I want to

2 underline as very bi-partisan, in which 13 Democrats
3 and 10 Republicans came together as part of the
4 commission. We toured the country. Hosted forums
5 and town hall meetings in 11 major cities including
6 New York City where we hosted an open forum at Hunter
7 College on June 19, 2010. After nearly two years of
8 conducting the study, we presented our feasibility
9 report directly to President Obama, and to Congress
10 on May 5th of 2011. As part of the report, we
11 indicated that the Smithsonian Arts and Industries
12 Building would be the best site for future
13 Smithsonian American Latino Museum.

14 We also conducted a fundraising strategy
15 where we serve as key funder to assess the capacity
16 to raise the needed funds for the construction and
17 operation of a new Smithsonian American Latino
18 Museum, including foundations, high net worth
19 individuals, and corporations. Our Fundraising is
20 Study on the website for the Friends of the American
21 Latino Museum, which is www.americanlatinomuseum.org.
22 It will have the report, which also shows the
23 fundraising strategy, which we document there. And
24 shows that we do have the capacity to raise the

1 private sector portion of the full budget needed to
2 building a new Smithsonian American Latino Museum.
3

4 This project has overwhelming national
5 support in the Latino community. We have the largest
6 social media following, the Friends of the American
7 Latino Museum of any major Latino organization in the
8 country, and we have more followers than any other
9 Smithsonian institution despite the fact that our
10 building hasn't been built yet. Despite the public
11 acknowledgment by President Obama that he would sign
12 the bill if passed. Despite the fact that for the
13 last 20 years there's been a clear omission of our
14 Latino history and culture in a permanent capacity in
15 the Smithsonian Institution as documented by the
16 report *Willful Neglect*, which Estuardo mentioned
17 earlier. Which documented the lack of Latino
18 presence in the Smithsonian.

19 Despite the fact that the Smithsonian has
20 successfully created new museums, including the
21 National Museum of the American Indian, and the soon-
22 to-be built National Museum of African-American
23 History and Culture, which will be open in 2015.
24 Both of which being on the National Mall, and despite
25 the strong bi-partisan support to build a new

3 American Latino Museum on the National Mall in the
4 Smithsonian Arts and Industries building as
5 demonstrated by the sponsors of the bills in the
6 House and Senate. Despite all of that, Congress has
7 continued to stall on this bill.

8 By passing Resolution 405, the New York
9 City Council will send a strong message to congress
10 that this bill is a priority legislation that should
11 be passed in this congressional session. After all,
12 this bill is calling on Congress to pass a bill that
13 will eliminate an American story, the 500-year
14 history of Latino influence in the United States.

15 Let me conclude by sharing a personal
16 example of the importance of this museum. I was born
17 in Washington Heights, New York City. My parents
18 immigrated together to New York City from the
19 Dominican Republic. They came from a city called
20 Marona. While I grew up knowing all about the recent
21 migration of Dominicans in the U.S. over the last 50
22 years, it wasn't until 2012 through the Cuban
23 Dominican Studies Institute at City College that I
24 learned that the first Dominican to settle in New
25 York City was Juan Rodriguez who migrated from Santo
Domingo to New York in 1613.

2 This is just one of thousands of examples
3 of many histories that will be told in a future
4 Smithsonian American Latino Museum along with the
5 rich histories of St. Augustine, Florida, Santa Fe,
6 New Mexico, which often is not recognized, I am told
7 as the oldest state capital in the country, Santa Fe,
8 New Mexico. The early Mexican-American settlers in
9 the American west. The history of the early Puerto
10 Ricans who came to New York. Latinos who
11 participated in the American wars include the
12 Lincolneers [sic]. Latino's discoveries, Latino
13 innovations, historical accomplishments by American
14 Latinos including our civil rights leaders and
15 organizations.

16 By passing Resolution 405, the New York
17 City Council will be sending a message to Congress
18 that our American story must be told in a permanent
19 site. So that all Americans of all backgrounds today
20 and in future generations can benefit from learning
21 the full American story, the history of the American
22 Latino. And so with that, I just want to express my
23 sincere thanks to the New York City Council, to this
24 Committee, to you Chairman Van Bramer, to you Madam
25 Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. And we appreciate

2 that because together we believe that we will pass
3 this bill, which will illuminate the American story,
4 the story of the American Latino.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, and--

6 JUAN CARTAGENA: Jimmy Van Bramer, thank
7 you so much for inviting me. My name is Juan
8 Cartagena. I'm the President and General Counsel of
9 Latino Justice PRLDEF formally known as the Puerto
10 Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. And Council
11 Member Mark-Viverito, good to see you again. Thank
12 you so much for being here. Chairman, if you will
13 allow me, I can in less than 24 hours just give you a
14 two-pager that will summarize exactly what I'm going
15 to say today for the record.

16 I will talk to you about two unique New
17 York stories that will support your consideration of
18 this resolution, Resolution 405 to support both the
19 establishment and the designation location of the
20 Smithsonian Museum on the American Latino. And they
21 are two unique New York stories. I come from a legal
22 perspective. The development of the law in this
23 country and its ability to actually affect the
24 quality of necessities, the need for need for equal
25 right across all Americans in this country has been

3 largely developed both through the case law in
4 Superior Court. But also through examples that often
5 times emanate in the Latino community. And the
6 museum itself will have a wonderful exposition I'm
7 sure of how that law developed. And we could talk
8 about how *Mendez v. Westminster* in 1940 was a
9 precursor to *Brown v. Board of Education* where the
10 lawyers both David Marshall and Robert Carter right
11 here in New York City supported the efforts to
12 desegregate California's public schools eight years
13 before *Brown*. Sylvia Mendez is still alive today.
14 It was a child who was not allowed to go to school
15 with Whites in California. Her mother was Puerto
16 Rican and her father was Mexican. That lawsuit was
17 extremely successful, and laid this groundwork for
18 eventual national limine of desegregation in our
19 public schools.

20 Years later, in another very important
21 called *Hernandez v. Texas* in a Supreme Court action
22 said effectively the following: That the equal
23 protection clause, the basis of all of our anti-
24 discrimination laws cannot just operate on a two-
25 racial class theory. It has to go beyond Black and
White relationships. It also is for Latino Americans

2 in this country. And most recently *Plyler v. Doe*,
3 another very famous case of the Supreme Court said
4 that undocumented children, minor children, cannot be
5 denied a free public education. The most basic
6 rights are free education because education is so
7 important.

8 But here's the amazing New York story for
9 this Museum. New York City is the home of how an
10 electoral system in the largest city in the country
11 at the time in the 1970s and still the largest city
12 today, that an electoral system is able to operate in
13 two languages, Spanish and English, to create both
14 the foundation of bilingual ballots and bilingual
15 assistance verbally at the polls. The Congressional
16 record of the 1970 Amendments-- And this occurred,
17 by the way, as early as 1965 because the voting since
18 1965, because the voting since 1965 is not just
19 merely black and white. There's an amazing provision
20 called Section 4(e), which helped Puerto Rican
21 citizens register to vote in a language they can
22 understand and exercise their right to vote.

23 Five years later, and this is the
24 paraphrase of the quote that I'm going to give you in
25 the Congressional record, a senator from Florida

2 said, Well, I would support the establishment of
3 bilingual elections for other language minorities,
4 Native Americans, Asians, and, of course, Spanish
5 languages such as the Mexican-Americans throughout
6 the country. Because he said, If they can do it in
7 New York, they can do it anywhere. The unique New
8 York City story of a voting that was established that
9 celebrates 50 years next year in 2015 is a story
10 about how the franchises opened up to all Americans
11 regardless of their ability to master the English
12 language.

13 And I will end this with a New York City
14 point. The Museum for the American Latino will, I'm
15 sure, also talk about the institutions within this
16 community throughout its history. And I have the
17 incredible honor to head up one of those
18 institutions. The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and
19 Education Fund was founded right here in New York
20 City in 1972 by a current Judge Victor Marrero,
21 Attorney Jorge Batista, who still practices in the
22 Bronx; and the current Secretary of State for New
23 York Cesar Perales. They had a vision to help Puerto
24 Ricans assimilate with the protection of their rights
25 and dignity into this society. It happened in New

2 York, and in a very short time it will be bringing
3 lawsuits throughout the country.

4 We are now called the Latino Justice
5 PRLDEF, but those acronyms are still the same. And
6 our reach, our scope and our influence was born here.
7 That institution, I'm sure, would also be reflected
8 in the exhibits of this important museum. So thank
9 you very much.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
11 much for all of your testimonies. I know there are
12 some questions from the council members, but Speaker
13 Melissa Mark-Viverito has some questions before she
14 has to go.

15 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Chair,
16 and thank you, Juan, for putting it in that context
17 because I think it really gives an understanding.
18 And I think also the understanding of bilingual
19 education also that originated here in terms of the
20 Bilingual Consent to Create. I think there is
21 history, the story about how that impacts nationwide
22 and that it was families and individuals and women
23 probably at the forefront of those struggles. So I
24 appreciate that.

2 I had a question for the committee, for
3 Sid and I'm sorry. Estuardo. We have a letter, a
4 copy of a letter that was sent to you, Sid, I think
5 from October 7th from the Smithsonian, which I don't
6 know. There are concerns I have about some of the
7 language in there, and you didn't-- You guys never,
8 you guys never-- Neither of you mentioned it in your
9 testimony, but I think it things to be concerned
10 about. First of all, they talk about, as we have
11 said on many occasions the Smithsonian is authorized
12 and funded by Congress. The Smithsonian would be
13 honored to have this new museum added to the
14 Smithsonian family. I don't see that in our
15 background information. The bills that are in
16 Congress, do they also talk about designation of
17 funds for the museum, or is this primarily just on
18 the feasibility side or what is being called forms of
19 legislation?

20 SID WILSON: I'm happy to start. You
21 know, this definitely dives into the weaves of the
22 political process, which is much like we all know
23 making sausage, right. It's not always pretty. The
24 letter that you are referencing address the actual
25 legislation that was crafted by Congressman Xavier

2 Bacerra with Congresswoman Illeana Ros-Lehtinen.

3 They are very much attuned to what the political
4 climate is on Capitol Hill, and that is that anything
5 with the words "appropriations" tied to it will go
6 nowhere. The bills for the African-American Museum
7 and the Native American Museum passed at a different
8 time.

9 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: I'm sorry. Can
10 you repeat that.

11 SID WILSON: They passed at a different
12 time--

13 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: [interposing]
14 Right.

15 SID WILSON: --a different era where
16 appropriations were not frowned up. The legislation
17 as it is crafted now, does not designate-- Or let me
18 rephrase that. It does not require the Smithsonian
19 to start fundraising. The legislation, and this is
20 the conversation, and debate that we've been having
21 with the Smithsonian just very recently. And that is
22 that this bill needs to be clean in the sense of any
23 appropriations request. It is asking for the
24 designation of the American Smithsonian Arts and
25 Industries Building as the future home of the museum.

2 And asking for a commission to undergo an 18-month
3 study to uncover the costs in converting the A&I
4 Building into an American Latino Museum. It does not
5 require them actually build this museum, or start
6 fundraising for it. The conversation that we had
7 with the Under-Secretary as referenced in that letter
8 is the sense that he gets from the legislation, that
9 it does require him to fundraise. And the fact that
10 it doesn't mention any appropriations like the other
11 museums that I mentioned. As Congressman--

12 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: [interposing] So
13 then if I may then just interject--

14 SID WILSON: Go ahead.

15 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: --because
16 understanding the dynamics and obviously the reality
17 and the politics of Congress I understood what you
18 said. But then the language even of this institution
19 worries me more because it doesn't really sound like
20 a full-throated support of this, right? In the
21 letter it says that as with any new venture of this
22 magnitude, the availability of financial resources
23 from the very onset of the project will be essential
24 to the viability of the museum. And federal funds

2 are an important tool for leveraging private
3 philanthropy.

4 So they are kind of making that a deal
5 breaker, right. And then they say, Finally, creating
6 the Smithsonian American Latino Museum prior to the
7 completion of fundraising for the actual museum of
8 African-American History and Culture would place a
9 significant burden on the Smithsonian. And so they
10 don't think that they could do both projects--

11 SID WILSON: [interposing] Right.

12 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: --at the same
13 time.

14 SID WILSON: Right, right.

15 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: I mean there's--
16 And I'm not saying-- I mean this-- Obviously, we
17 support and I support the Reso, and I believe my
18 colleagues will. But you've raised concerns in your
19 testimony about the Smithsonian in general about the
20 lack of real serious attention being paid to having
21 our history reflected in the existing museums. And
22 this kind of language, you know, further lends
23 concern--

24 SID WILSON: [interposing] Sure.
25

2 SARAH MEYERS: --about what extent their
3 support is there.

4 SID WILSON: And in working with
5 Congressman Xavier Bacerra he has reached out to the
6 Smithsonian, and we have also reached out to them.
7 The political process, as we have outlined it, is
8 that this piece of legislation is critical for us to
9 put a placeholder on the Arts and Industries
10 Building. There are many competing campaigns out
11 there. We need to put a placeholder on it. That's
12 what this legislation does. And then as the
13 Commission Report outlined, 50% of the money that is
14 estimated to be required to build this museum, \$650
15 million. \$325 million of that, which needs to come
16 from the community and from the private sector, et
17 cetera. That next piece of legislation would follow.
18 So assuming this bill gets passed this year, or in
19 the next Congress, we would immediately then use that
20 as a way to start a capital campaign by showing
21 potential funders that we had a place. We can
22 actually raise money through this for this building.
23 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: And that's great,
24 and I'm saying that to express disappointment in the
25 Smithsonian, right. And to say that there's

2 additional pressure of accountability that they have
3 to be held to. But they can't be pitting communities
4 against each other, which is what that letter pretty
5 much indicates. And that there needs to be, you
6 know, greater accountability on their end to be
7 responsive to what it is that we're demanding. I
8 think that hopefully Resos like this will do that,
9 and there may be subsequent steps that need to be
10 taken for that message to get across to them as well.

11 SID WILSON: If I could add one more
12 thing, please know that we have requested a letter
13 with Secretary Clough of the Smithsonian. He has
14 agreed to that meeting, and we will be joined by
15 other national Latino leaders and their organizations
16 that have supported the museum for over eight years
17 or more that we've been working on this. So it will
18 be a meeting probably by the end of this month.

19 JUAN CARTAGENA: And if I could just
20 really quickly just add that this bill, and actually
21 as the letter states is that they will support this
22 if Congress actually passes this bill. Now, where
23 they mentioned the funding side of this, that's what
24 many of you know. And that is what many of you know,
25 I think someone said or I may be even mentioned this

3 earlier is that in order to get this bill passed so
4 that we can get the placeholder there. There could
5 be an appropriation because that was the only way to
6 get certain members of Congress and the Senate to
7 sign on to make sure that it was a bi-partisan bill.
8 And so, in doing that, we now successfully have a bi-
9 partisan bill, which has Congressman Xavier Bacerra
10 and Congresswoman-- Congressman Xavier Bacerra on the
11 Democratic side, and Congresswoman Illeana Ros-
12 Lehtinen on the Republican side.

12 And on the Senate side where the bill was
13 introduced by Senator Harry Reid, and some of the
14 members on the Democratic, and Senator Marco Rubio on
15 the Republican side. And then since that point, we
16 have been able to accumulated more co-sponsors. But
17 in order for that to happen, it was carefully crafted
18 that it would be able to get more and broader
19 support. So if we were to put a bill as the
20 Smithsonian with a referral you would lose a
21 significant number of co-sponsors. Which would
22 effectively cause the bill to not be able to pass.

23 And one last thing also just really
24 quickly. In the letter, they mentioned the fact that
25 hadn't-- They didn't want to start until they

2 finished the African-American Museum. To my memory,
3 there was overlap when the Smithsonian was finishing
4 the American Indian Museum while they started the
5 African-American because I think that commission
6 started in about 2001, if my memory is right. And
7 the American Indian I believe was completed around
8 2005 or 2006, if my memory is right. So there was,
9 you know, overlap. So that my not necessarily be a
10 consistent comment.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much both for explaining the sense of urgency around
13 this particular piece of legislation, which is very,
14 very helpful to all of us. And, I know that all of
15 us feel that sense of urgency, and passion around
16 this issue as well. So, I want to ask Council Member
17 Julissa Ferreras to ask a few questions.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you very
19 much, our leader and Chair. Thank you. Good to see
20 friends on the other side of the table. Well, I
21 guess with the new Administration we see more
22 friends, too. I just wanted to kind of have this
23 opportunity. One thing that I find is people
24 actually watch these hearings. They're interested.
25 We have more and more engagement.

2 As a Board Member of NALEO, I understand
3 from a national perspective on how important what
4 you're doing for our people is. But I also recognize
5 that our constituents need to play a role. So, can
6 you I guess express or put on the record how can the
7 local mom, the PTA president, the boyero [Speaking
8 Spanish] on the corner started the conversation about
9 how important it is for us to get this museum up and
10 running? What's the best way for them to engage?

11 SID WILSON: Well, I guess I'll start,
12 and thank you Councilwoman. I think the best way to
13 engage is, you know, we certainly have a major social
14 media campaign to talk about the history of the
15 museum. We have great media partners including
16 Ciudad Mitad del Mundo, who have also helped us to
17 get the message across. And I think that what's
18 interesting is that whether the history is for an
19 educational purpose, whether the history is to make
20 sure that we're maintaining our culture. I think
21 that whether you're a PTA mom or boyero [Speaks
22 Spanish], that you will know that this museum is
23 important to each of them. You know, if you're the
24 boyero, you want to understand the history of the
25 Latinos who are in the agricultural field. And many

1 who migrate here. So that that way there is a sense
2 of appreciate of the foods and products being sold.
3 That's important.
4

5 When you look at the current curriculum
6 that does not include much of the history of Latinos
7 in the U.S. that those are important. And we know
8 that when we understand our history, we're much more
9 inclined to participate, be involved, be active. And
10 also to share the story for the next generations. So
11 I think that what's great about this museum is that
12 this is for all Americans, not just Latinos. This is
13 to make sure that every American, and as Estuardo
14 mention, about 30 million that visit the National
15 Mall every single year. To make sure that when they
16 do make that visit that they are able to make an easy
17 stop into what we would like to be as the Smithsonian
18 American Latino Museum.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Can someone
20 speak about the potential because I'm working with
21 Majority Leader Van Bramer, and we've done a lot of
22 work with the Museum of Natural History. So you
23 don't have to physically go to the museum to
24 understand the contribution that an institution of
25 that caliber has on our society. So can you speak on

3 it from the research perspective of like how this can
4 really change the way we look at a Latino experience.
5 But also how we may be able to educate our future
6 generations through being able to organize our
7 thoughts or our history for a museum?

8 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: Sure. I'm happy to.
9 I think the best example is what happened when
10 Justice Sonia Sotomayor was confirmed as a Supreme
11 Court Justice. I think that you started to hear from
12 all over the country. If you were a Puerto Rican or
13 Peruvian American, Mexican American, or it doesn't
14 matter. You had a Latino on the Supreme Court, and
15 there is a whole generation of Latino and Latina
16 youth that can point and say, I could be a Supreme
17 Court Justice. It is the mere existence of an
18 example, a role model to put all of these stories
19 within a museum to see Ellen Ochoa from NASA and
20 Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. It changes
21 the conversation and environment. Where people
22 before found limitations, now they assume it's just
23 how things should be or are.

24 The campaign that we've been running,
25 part of the presentation has been that there are
pages and pages in U.S. history books that are blank.

2 That are incomplete, that have hiccups where there is
3 just a void. They forget to mention only the 500
4 years of Mexican and Spanish indigenous presence here
5 that helped shape the United States, but even after
6 that happened. Many of the history classes that I
7 took when I was in elementary school started with the
8 Pilgrims landed on the East Coast, and then as they
9 moved west they brought civilization. But they
10 forget to mention the cathedrals and the missions and
11 the churches, and all of these buildings that were
12 there, and civilizations that were already very much
13 used to this land.

14 So I think it changes everything
15 dramatically for us to push back against some of the
16 politicking that happens around mid-term elections
17 and presidential elections. And the fight around
18 immigration reform in the Latino community. You
19 know, the crime, the criminals, the children on the
20 border. It changes that conversation in an immense
21 way. It makes it more human, and it makes it more
22 American for us to be able to have those examples on
23 the National Mall. We're very excited about that,
24 and hope that it will happen soon.

2 I do want to go back to your previous
3 question. There are moms and college kids and
4 [Speaking Spanish] with us who want to do something.
5 They should go to Americanlatinomuseum.org.
6 Americanlatinomuseum.org is the base of all
7 information. Where we go, what we do, what we say
8 about this campaign and what the status is. And
9 we're on Facebook and Twitter, it's the American
10 Latino Museum. You can find it there easily. On
11 Twitter it's Latino Museum. But what we do when we
12 present this information, and say we have 172,000
13 followers on Twitter, New York has the fourth largest
14 Latino population in the country. If I can just get
15 you all to sign on and follow my Twitter or my
16 Facebook account, I'm almost done because the massive
17 numbers would just blow members of Congress away, and
18 make them feel like it's an urgent matter.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: That's why I
20 think it's so great that our Chair decided to bring
21 this. And it's actually very I think timely. I have
22 my own issues with Columbus Day not because of it
23 being tied to the Italian community, which is kind of
24 even the Greek group or whatever. But I think that's
25 when you have to talk about our history. And it

2 would be very interesting when we talk about those
3 experiences, and what that has meant in many of our
4 countries and Dominican, too. So what it meant for
5 the Dominican Republic. What it meant for Puerto
6 Rico. What it meant for Argentina, right? I think
7 that it's very important that we have a place to have
8 those stories. And, you know, I'm really excited,
9 and I'm hoping. I can't commit to all eight million
10 New Yorkers, but I--

11 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: I think you have.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: [laughs] But,
13 you know, I represent a very diverse district,
14 Corona, Jackson Heights, Elmhurst East, Elmhurst and
15 132 languages are spoken in my district. Jimmy is
16 part of Queens. We are kind of neighbors. So he has
17 many of the diversities. So I understand the
18 importance and the challenge. Just my one last
19 question. I know that you said that you're really
20 looking for this to be a placeholder. I am
21 concerned, but I can only imagine that everyone wants
22 the last building in the mall. And I hate to put
23 this question to you because you are the leaders, and
24 you always go for what you want. In the event that

2 this can't happen there, you know, what happens to
3 these efforts.

4 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: Well, I'm going to
5 go down the road of hypothetical with you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Yes.

7 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: Because I know--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: [interposing]
9 Worst case scenario. We don't want to--

10 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] I know
11 that you may not

12 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: --ever have any
13 fatal, you know.

14 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: Right. So, the
15 Commission Report and seeking kind of justice a
16 little more, [sic] but the Commission Report actually
17 did look at an alternate site. It is on the Senate
18 site. It is currently a parking lot.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: [interposing]
20 The parking lot issue, right. Because--

21 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: [interposing] The
22 parking lot issue.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: --since
24 senators are going to lose, and their staff are going
25 to lose parking.

2 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: Yes. [laughs]

3 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So that's going
4 to be worse.

5 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: They might lose
6 parking. Well, more I think the larger concern was
7 that African-American Museum when it started its
8 effort they requested that space. And that space was
9 denied to them. There is a history around that
10 space. And they did not feel that it was appropriate
11 even though the African-American History and Art
12 Museum will open its door in 2015. They simply did
13 not feel it would be appropriate to now release it to
14 the American Latino Museum. So, there is that, but
15 you know, all eyes are fixated--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: [interposing]
17 Absolutely, understood.

18 ESTUARDO RODRIGUEZ: --on that space.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And I just
20 wanted it for clarification so that I don't-- so that
21 in the event that something else happens this doesn't
22 fall through the cracks, and then we have to start
23 all this stuff again. So I thank you for your
24 testimony and for your leadership. [Speaks Spanish]

2 SID WILSON: No, no, gracias, and let me
3 just add that of all-- And you are correct, it is
4 the last site on the National Mall, and certainly
5 there are other interests. We're the only group that
6 has a completed commission where the commissioner has
7 reported, and we are ready with our recommendation,
8 which the Congress has introduced based on that
9 recommendation. So we are way ahead of any other
10 interested groups that haven't even created the
11 commission yet much less completed the report and
12 submitted it to the President, submitted it to
13 Congress. And then following that having a bill
14 introduced. So, um, we are the only group that has
15 already reached that point where now the only thing
16 that's left is to actually get the bill passed
17 through Congress.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
19 much, Council Member Ferreras. Thank you to the
20 three panelists, and I look forward to working with
21 you all to make sure that this happens. It's the
22 right thing for our country. With that, I'm going to
23 call the next panel, which is our last panel.

24 SID WILSON: Thank you.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you so
3 much. Jorge Daniel Veneciano from El Musceo del
4 Barrio who will be the first one to speak. And Dr.
5 Marta Moreno Vega who will be next. Is Dr. Marilu
6 Galvan? Yep. She's talking to Jason. Dr. Galvan?
7 Dr. Galvan. Yeah, she's here. Thank you. [laughs]
8 Milagros Baez O'Toole. Ms. Milagros. Right. And
9 Marilu Galvan. Yeah. There is one more seat over
10 there. Yeah. Thank you. Jorge, why don't you
11 begin? Deborah do we have-- Well, we have five
12 panelists and four chairs. So if we can get one more
13 chair then we can have all five together. This is
14 the last panel. Jorge, why don't you begin us off
15 here?

16 JORGE DANIEL VENECIANO: Okay.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you so
18 much.

19 JORGE DANIEL VENECIANO: Good afternoon
20 Chair Jimmy Van Bramer and distinguished members of
21 the Committee. I am Jorge Daniel Veneciano. I'm
22 Executive Director at El Musceo del Barrio in East
23 Harlem. And as someone who directs the nation's
24 first American Latino Museum founded 45 years go.
25 And as someone who also was Director of an American

3 art museum in the heartland of the nation in
4 Nebraska, I can speak with certain knowledge about
5 museums and the service they provide this nation.
6 Therefore, I speak to the resolution before you
7 regarding the Smithsonian American Latino Museum Act.

8 I am sometimes asked the question, Does
9 the nation need an American Latino Museum, which is
10 the implicit question before Congress. Why American
11 citizens should want an American Latino museum
12 follows naturally from an understanding of museums
13 generally. We know already that museums provide
14 cultural education to children and adults, preserve
15 our cultural treasures, and produce new scholarship
16 and understanding for art and culture. These are
17 social values in themselves. Museums, however, don't
18 simply matter in society, they matter to society.
19 They matter in society because they give citizens a
20 public space, a touch point for cultural connections
21 to other citizens. They connect diverse peoples to a
22 social fabric. It is in this way that museums also
23 matter to society. They help its citizenry cohere.
24 They help system ladies [sic] reproduce themselves,
25 that is perpetuate a healthy society, a healthy body
politic.

3 There is much talk of demographic shifts
4 in justifying the need for an American Latino museum.
5 I am in agreement with this position because I think
6 demographics changes is really the way to argue the
7 need. Yet, even if demographics remain the same, or
8 even if they were reversed to levels decades ago, the
9 need would still persist. The historic presence of
10 Latinos across the United States warrants an
11 institution that preserves and presents the
12 contributions to our culture, our nation.

13 The historical fact that the western and
14 southwestern United States was once a part of Mexico,
15 as we heard earlier, also makes clear the presence
16 and history of Latinos in the United States. The
17 Smithsonian, one of the great institutions of
18 American democracy, has 19 museums to its credit
19 celebrating American art, culture, science and
20 industry including museums dedicated to the American
21 Indian and African-American art and culture. A
22 museum of American-Latino art would, therefore, fall
23 squarely within the mission and values of this great
24 institution and it's mission.

25 And here, I think if we think about an
internal tension that's within the institution that

2 we have, we should look at its mission, which is to
3 disseminate knowledge. Its vision, which includes to
4 preserve our heritage, and its values, which include
5 "diversity", quote, unquote capitalizing on the
6 richness inherent in the difference. Its priorities,
7 which include quote "The understanding of the
8 American experience." A national museum of the
9 American Latino would help fulfill the cultural and
10 democratic promise this institution holds for the
11 nation. But, furthermore, it is hard to imagine the
12 fulfillment of the institution's mission without such
13 a museum.

14 All in good time is a phrase we use, we
15 who manage budgets and allocate resources when we see
16 a worthy project that we get to-- that we will get to
17 when resources permit. "Now, is a good time" is a
18 phrase we can use to designate this worthy project
19 and request a study of the resources that will
20 require it to be realized. Now is a good time to
21 pass Resolution 405, and call upon Congress to pass
22 and the President to sign H.R. 1217 and S. 568 to
23 establish the National Museum of the American Latino,
24 and designate the Smithsonian Arts and Industry
25 Building as its future home in Washington, D.C. And

2 I thank you and the committee members and your
3 colleagues at the City Council for bringing this
4 resolution to a vote. And I am also happy to answer
5 questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
7 much, Jorge, for your time and I know that you have
8 another engagement that you must attend to. So I
9 want to invite you to leave when you must, and I
10 thank you again for your testimony and your amazing
11 leadership in El Museo del Barrio. So thank you,
12 and rest assured with the Speaker being the prime
13 sponsor and myself the Majority Leader being the co-
14 prime sponsor of this, I believe it has a good chance
15 of passing. So we're going to move forward with
16 this. So why don't we go back to your left with Dr.
17 Galvan who will testify. Next to them Marta and down
18 the row. So thank you very much.

19 DR. MARILU GALVAN: ... committee and
20 also the Chair, and my name is Dr. Galvan from Centro
21 Civico Cultural Dominicano, the oldest Dominicano
22 organization. We recently celebrated our 52nd
23 anniversary, and we also have a very limited museum
24 in comparison with what we have at this point in time
25 at the table.

2 I speak for the museum. I speak for
3 Presidential Congress to pass this proposal. And I
4 speak for that as an educator at all levels from
5 children [sic] to adjunct at John Jay College, and
6 also as an administrator in the area of culture.
7 Without culture we are not a whole complete
8 individual. The reason why we have so many
9 organizations advocating for culture is because once
10 you know about yourself, you know how to be a good
11 citizen.

12 Presently, we're talking about the Latino
13 Museum. Latino, and I'm not going to recount the
14 whole history, but you all well know the Latino has
15 been not only instrumental at this point in time in
16 the development of the everyday life of the United
17 States. But it is from the beginning that they spoke
18 already about the western [sic] part. That you all
19 know about. It was Spanish. It was Spanish. Then
20 it was Mexican. We know about Florida that it was
21 directly from the Spanish, it was obtained. So it is
22 throughout the whole nation of the United States.
23 This is something that is overdue. Long overdue to
24 have a Latino Museum.

2 I speak for it because as a community are
3 instrumental in moving this nation. We also have
4 demonstrated the number. Our numbers are
5 significant. Our contributions are significant.
6 They have been lifted. But I am also concerned about
7 the everyday individual that are working in those
8 factories, and that are becoming to be knowledgeable
9 about their culture, and they are demanding. They
10 are demanding a place because if you go to the
11 Metropolitan Museum, you can count the number of
12 Latinos going there because they are really eager to
13 learn and to increase their knowledge about what they
14 know at this point time.

15 A Latino Museum would be instrumental in
16 providing them not only assurance about their own
17 heritage, their own culture, but also knowing about
18 the global aspect. And how we interact with this
19 society, and within our brothers and sisters from the
20 Latino community. I know that we don't have too much
21 time. I know that I have a lot more things to say.
22 But I really want to emphasize that I do feel that
23 this is overdue, and that we really beg the committee
24 to speak for this, and to pass this. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
3 much, Dr. Galvan, and thank you also for your
4 testimony at the Cultural Plan Hearing from a couple
5 of weeks ago. I recognize you, and appreciated very
6 much your testimony that day as well.

7 DR. MARILU GALVAN: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I want to
9 assure you that the committee is very much intending
10 to pass this resolution and be helpful in this
11 regard. Dr. Moreno Vega also was amazing at our
12 Cultural Plan Hearing a couple of weeks ago. Thank
13 you very much, Marta.

14 DR. MARTA MORENO VEGA: [off mic] All
15 right. That's wasn't on. I'm sorry. I would like
16 to just focus on the areas that are different from
17 what other people have said for the want of time. I
18 think that it's important that this committee support
19 the resolution to pass the museum, and that the
20 President sign the establishment of the Smithsonian
21 American Latino Museum on the Mall. Because it
22 becomes part of the complex of institutions that
23 reflect its stories that have been excluded. More
24 than exhibitions, more than historical information
25 because we have institutions on the ground that do

3 this and have done this. And have created the
4 atmosphere for the discussion of a national museum.
5 But what it does say is that marginal groups, and
6 those that have been excluded from the story of this
7 nation, are being addressed. And how they are to be
8 addressed is critical because the Latino/Latina
9 experience represents Asian, Native American,
10 African, and all of the configurations and
11 ethnicities and racial configurations and cultures
12 that make up that Latino experience.

13 We have to make sure that the Smithsonian
14 in its bureau [sic] centric vision does not tell a
15 story that excludes the complexity of who we are.
16 Because even within our own cultures, that complexity
17 often times doesn't get told. But important to the
18 story I think is the importance of the community that
19 is promoting the Latino Museum concept. Understand
20 that there are institutions on the ground that have
21 come out of the Civil Rights Movement that are
22 critical to opening the door for this discussion
23 nationally. We have to recognize and make sure that
24 included are the leadership of institutions like the
25 Mexican Museum in Chicago, and the El Museo del
Barrio, whose director was here. I was the second

3 director, and took it from a public school program
4 into an independent institution.

5 Obviously, the Caribbean Cultural Center,
6 which I developed and am the President of, the
7 Guadalupe Cultural Center in San Antonio. Galleria
8 De La Raza in San Francisco. There are a
9 multiplicity of institutions that have created a
10 national dialogue about the Latino experience. And
11 Julissa's comment, how do mom and pop and
12 neighborhood people get involved. They have been
13 involved because these institutions have addressed
14 the needs of neighborhoods and communities. But
15 there is a museum at the Mall that basically says
16 that this country is coming to grips with this
17 racism, the discrimination, right? And understand
18 that there's a broader story than the one that has
19 been told. So thank you for the opportunity.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
21 much, Marta, as always for your passionate
22 leadership. I want to invite Deborah to join the
23 table where Jorge Daniel was, and ask Milagros Baez
24 O'Toole to speak next and then Deborah will close it
25 out.

MILAGROS BAEZ O'TOOLE: [off mic]

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We are. Marta,
3 if you could pass the mic over to her.

4 MILAGROS BAEZ O'TOOLE: Yes, so thank you
5 very much, and thank you to the members of the
6 committee. My name is Milagros Baez O'Toole, and I'm
7 President of Elmhurst Spanish Women and Board Chair
8 of Acacia Network, and I mention that because I am
9 presenting, and I'm testifying on their behalf. Each
10 of them have provided separate testimony. But, you
11 know, sitting here I really would like to say ditto
12 to everything that has been said at this table.
13 Because everything has so legitimately connected to
14 the reasons that we need to have this museum.

15 So I would like to then just read some
16 excerpts from our testimony, and they seem hollow to
17 me after I listened to all these reasons. And it
18 really moved me from the bottom my heart. So I
19 almost would like to do this testimony over again.
20 So on behalf of the Acacia Network, Acacia Network is
21 the largest grassroots non-profit organization based
22 in New York. It provides quality services community
23 and interstate and beyond. And it's proud to support
24 the establishment of the Smithsonian American Latino
25 Museum. I think what is very significant. Acacia

2 Network is an organization that works profoundly with
3 the community. They provide wonderful services to
4 the community. I'm very proud of it because--

5 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic]

6 MILAGROS BAEZ O'TOOLE: You don't have
7 it? I have it in front of me.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I think it's
9 fine. Just go ahead and finish your testimony.

10 MILAGROS BAEZ O'TOOLE: {laughs} You can
11 read it. [sic] No.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [laughs] Thank
13 you. Thank you.

14 MILAGROS BAEZ O'TOOLE: And they're very
15 powerful and their strength is an asset to the
16 support of this initiative. I will read you excerpts
17 from their testimony.

18 The Smithsonian American Latino Museum
19 and recognizes and reaches Latinos, men and women
20 through economic, social, cultural, and it is all of
21 the things that we have heard here today. So I am
22 very proud to be their representative and be here on
23 their behalf. And then there are 100 Hispanic Women
24 and on behalf I will say that the 100 Hispanic Women
25 is a not-for-profit organization that was established

3 in 1995. I am a proud member of the founding
4 members, and it's comprised of a group of prominent
5 professional and prominent also Latina women
6 committed to educational, professional, economical
7 progress of Latinas. So our Board of Directors and
8 2,500 members support the commission on this
9 initiative. And with that I'll say, ditto, and thank
10 you very much for this opportunity.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much Ms. Baez O'Toole for your testimony, and our
13 last speaker today will be Deborah Schwartz from the
14 Brooklyn Historical Society.

15 DEBORAH SCHWARTZ: Thank you, Chairman
16 Van Bramer. I am very glad to be here. I'm honored
17 to be here. I thought I was being very well
18 organized, and we sent copies of this testimony. So
19 hopefully, they're here somewhere. [laughs] But it
20 really pleases me to be here with this Resolution No.
21 405. As President of the Brooklyn Historical
22 Society, I am fully aware of the profound
23 significance of the Latino community in the shaping
24 of New York historically and in the present. In
25 Brooklyn alone, according to the most recent U.S.
Census, there are approximately 508,000 Latinos,

1 almost 20% of the entire population of the enormous
2 borough of Brooklyn.
3

4 The impact of the Spanish speaking people
5 of New York goes back to the 1600s. It is no
6 exaggeration to say that every aspect of this great
7 city has been impacted by the extraordinary labors
8 and intellectual contributions of our Latino
9 communities. Be it in the realm of politics,
10 culture, economics, commerce, the military and every
11 aspect of our lives. Our ability to teach history
12 and tell the amazing stories that collectively make
13 up the fabric of this country have precious few
14 venues. I have spent my entire professional career
15 as a museum educator first at the Brooklyn Museum,
16 and then as the Deputy Director for Education at the
17 Museum of Modern Art. Now, as the head of New
18 York's, one of New York's premier history museums,
19 the Brooklyn Historical Society, it is with
20 confidence and authority that I note for the record
21 that our children's history textbooks change far too
22 infrequently, the new scholarship rarely finds a
23 broad audience.

24 Our museums are central places where
25 history becomes public, where young children are

3 introduced to new ideas and information about the
4 contributions of diverse people. And where material
5 evidence is protected, celebrated, and handed down
6 from one generation to the next. In museums,
7 exhibitions and programs allow us to revisit well
8 known stories, and to consider, reconsider our
9 understanding of who has made history, how, and why.

10 Soon with the opening of the Museum for
11 African-American History and Cultures, Americans and
12 everyone who visit our Capitol will better understand
13 the amazing contributions of Africans and African-
14 Americans. A Latino museum standing nearby with a
15 mission to explore the myriad stories of America's
16 Latino communities will get us one very important
17 step closer to presenting an inclusive history with
18 its many faceted participants properly celebrated and
19 understood.

20 History requires constant refreshing and
21 revision. For the people of the United States, the
22 Mall in Washington should be a mirror in which we see
23 ourselves, all of us, reflected well and truly and
24 where we can underscore that our strength is in our
25 diversity of knowledge and perspectives. Thank you

3 for this opportunity to testify in support of this
4 matter.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, very
6 much, Deborah. Thank you all of you for raising your
7 voices once again in support of this very important
8 resolution. And I think a lot has been said today.
9 I think it's very clear that this Council under the
10 leadership of Ms. Mark-Viverito, our Speaker, and
11 myself as Chair and the Majority Leader share this
12 view. And I look forward to our next meeting of the
13 Cultural Affairs Committee where I expect that we
14 will pass this resolution. And then move to the full
15 Council for passage from the entire body. So thank
16 you for lending your voices today. But more than
17 that particularly because I've seen most, if not all,
18 of you at previous hearings of this committee for
19 raising your voice all the time when it comes to the
20 arts and culture.

21 So with that, I want to thank everyone,
22 and I think most of the folks from the Friends of the
23 Museum are departed, but Sid is still with us. And I
24 don't know who is in charge of his social media, but
25 the Speaker and I are still trying to figure out how
you had 172,000 follows on Twitter when you had no

3 one going through your doors, which is a real
4 accomplishment, and incredibly significant. So thank
5 you very much for all your work, and I look forward
6 to having this on. So with that, we are adjourned.

7 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date October 20, 2014