



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

October 31, 2005

Were You Invited to a “Día de Los Muertos” Party?
What do all those skeletons mean?

Celebrate Latin American Heritage and Cosponsor H.R. 2134

Dear Colleague:

Observed with festive rituals in Mexico and in much of Latin America on November 1st and 2nd, el día de los muertos infuses humor and joy into honoring the cycle of life and death. Originating as a Roman Catholic appropriation of an ancient indigenous festival, the Day of the Dead was moved in Spanish colonial days from its mid-summer date to coincide with the Christian commemoration of All Saints Day.



In Puerto Rico and other parts of the Caribbean, families visit the graves of their departed relatives, bringing food or a cafecito (coffee) to symbolically share with their loved ones. In Mexico you may find children and adults dressed up in fancy clothes, with faces painted like skeletons to portray the dead. A symbolic altar or communion table may be set with a serving of favorite food and drink symbolically placed before pictures of deceased family members. In the United States, cities and towns with Latino communities will commemorate the tradition through parades or parties. Because of the costumes and proximity on the calendar, el día de los muertos is often confused with Halloween. But where Halloween has become a day for pranks, haunted houses and candy, el día de los muertos celebrates life in a manner that ensures those who have lived before us are not forgotten.



Following the tradition of honoring the past, I have introduced legislation to create an expert commission to study whether and how to establish a national museum dedicated to Latino history, culture, and art. The museums in Washington, D.C. are visited by millions of tourists annually, who come away with the impression that they have seen the best representation of what America has to offer. Yet scarcely any of the permanent exhibitions in the capital city are representative of the Latino experience and contributions to American life. For the 40 million Latinos in the United States, one-third of who are under 18 years old, a more complete picture is warranted.

To cosponsor the bipartisan H.R. 2134, the National Museum of the American Latino Community Commission Act, and join more than 85 of your colleagues, please contact Joel Najar (Rep. Becerra) at 6-3748 or Eddy Acevedo (Rep. Ros-Lehtinen) at 5-3931.

Sincerely,

XAVIER BECERRA
Member of Congress