

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the United States Congress was winding down for the August recess, the House Administration Committee held a hearing on H.R. 4863 “The Commission to Establish the National Museum of the American Latino Act of 2004.” The hearing on Capitol Hill today marked a momentous step towards the establishment of a museum that will celebrate the contributions of the Latino community to the United States.

The Committee on House Administration heard testimony from five witnesses today: Rep. Becerra; Rep. Ros-Lehtinen; Diane Camber, Executive Director of the Bass Museum in Miami; the Hon. Lawrence M. Small, Secretary of The Smithsonian Institution; and Dr. Jonathan Yorba, Executive Director of La Plaza de Cultura y Artes Foundation and author of Arte Latino:

Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

“When we originally introduced the bill, we expected this to be a long process. This hearing represents a concrete indication that our legislation will become law and that the Museum is on its way to becoming a reality,” Rep. Becerra said. “I expect that as a result of this hearing the House Administration Committee has a better understanding of the need for a Commission to study how such a Museum of the American Latino might be created and maintained.”

At the full committee hearing, the Ranking Democrat on the Committee on House Administration John Larson (CT-01) declared in his opening remarks that H.R. 4863, “Is long overdue.”

The Senate version of this bill S. 2434, was recently introduced by Senators Hatch (R-UT), Boxer (D-CA), Hutchison and Bingaman (D-NM). "I hope that the success of this hearing will send a signal to the Senate so that we may soon take yet another step towards the adoption of this bill," Rep. Becerra affirmed.

If signed into law, the newly-formed "Commission to Establish the National Museum of the American Latino" would consist of 23 members chosen from a wide array of professional groups, including museum associations, academic institutions, and organizations committed to the research and study of American Latino life, art, history and culture. Seven of the 23 members of the commission would be appointed by the president, while the speaker of the House, the House minority leader, the Senate majority leader and the Senate minority leader would each appoint three voting members and one non-voting member.

Charged with formulating a plan for the creation and maintenance of the museum, from the initial fundraising to the availability of collections that would be housed in the new museum, the Commission's report would be due to Congress 18 months after the enactment of Rep. Becerra's legislation.

"The Museum will serve as a reminder to all Americans of the numerous contributions that Hispanic Americans have made throughout our country's rich history," Rep. Ros-Lehtinen, the principal co-sponsor of Rep. Becerra's legislation, said. "Hispanic Americans have been integral in shaping and influencing America and helping it to become the beacon of hope for all.

Washington D.C. is a fitting place to house the Museum, as folks visiting our nation's Capitol will have the unique opportunity to learn about Hispanic American's important role in our nation's history."

"If you take a walk down the National Mall, you will get as good a snapshot of America as you can find anywhere in this country," Rep. Becerra said. "Yet the lessons of our history, art and culture are still incomplete. When completed, the National Museum of the American Latino will be a welcome addition to the Smithsonian family. Although we are one step closer, this process will not be a fast one – but it will be successful."

For a copy of Rep. Becerra's legislation please call 202-225-6235.

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