

**Written Statement of Dr. Theodore S. Gonzalves, Interim Director,
Smithsonian Institution Asian Pacific American Center
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
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Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am Dr. Theodore S. Gonzalves and I have the honor of serving as the interim director of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center. Prior to joining the Smithsonian Institution, I worked for 26 years as a professor of Asian American and ethnic studies in the states of Hawai'i, Maryland, and California. I consider it a great professional privilege to work at the world's largest museum, research, and education complex. Our Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population, numbering approximately 24 million.

We have stories that are in dire need of telling. And the Smithsonian plays a crucial role in the telling of those stories.

In 1997, the Smithsonian established our unit to document AAPI history, art, and culture. Our activities involve public programming, exhibitions, research, and developing collections. In 2022, the Asian Pacific American Center will celebrate its 25th anniversary of providing critical expertise in the sharing of these stories.

The Asian Pacific American Center administers an Initiatives Pool; these are federally appropriated funds that support projects across the Smithsonian. These projects allow us to engage the public and researchers in dynamic programs. Since its creation five years ago, the Initiatives Pool has supported 50 projects, including the creation of the first Curator of Asian Pacific American History at the National Museum of American History.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on HR 3525, a bill to establish a commission to study the potential creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture. If Congress deems it in the public interest to move forward with the creation of a commission, the Smithsonian and I stand ready to serve as content experts should the bill pass into public law.

In the meanwhile, the Asian Pacific American Center will contribute to the Smithsonian's larger aim of telling inclusive stories about our shared pasts and futures. For our 25th anniversary, the Center looks forward to (1) hosting a major literature festival in Washington, D.C.; (2) commissioning several murals that celebrate AAPI communities throughout the U.S.; (3) continuing to collect objects that inspire and expand the general public's knowledge; (4)

providing paid internships and fellowships to develop the next generation of museum professionals; and (5) creating the first dedicated Asian Pacific American exhibition gallery within the Smithsonian.

In these remarks, I have been referencing persons and stories that seem abstract. But let me take a moment to make clear what often seems clouded. I could recite to you a long list of high achievers and medal-winners. But more often than not, AAPI stories are about hard lives, hard-headed dreamers, and strivers. To paraphrase one of my favorite writers, Carlos Bulosan, “If you want to know what we are... We are factory hands, field hands, mill hands, searching, building.... We are doctors, scientists, chemists, discovering and eliminating disease, hunger, and antagonism. We are soldiers, sailors, citizens, guarding the imperishable dream of our [ancestors] to live in freedom. We are the living dream of the dead. We are the living spirit of the free.”¹

I would like to thank the Committee for giving me this opportunity to testify and for your support and interest in the work of the Smithsonian. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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¹ Carlos Bulosan, “Freedom From Want,” *Saturday Evening Post*, March 6, 1943; <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2017/12/carlos-bulosans-freedom-want/>