

Telling the story of all Americans

By: **Rep. Jim Moran**

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During the Fourth of July weekend, hundreds of thousands of people visited the National Mall to watch fireworks, tour museums and monuments and revisit the story of our country's founding and development as a beacon of democracy and freedom.

But the full narrative — who we are as a nation and the many vibrant ethnicities that make up the fabric of the American experience — remains incomplete. This story about the making of the American people — all the people — needs to be told in our nation's capital.

The last remaining places on the National Mall are becoming filled with museums that deliver stories of a specific ethnic group — like the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the proposed National Museum of the American Latino. If this trend continues, we threaten to make our already heavily concentrated Mall overcrowded, leaving future generations no room to honor their heroes and causes, while severely burdening the Smithsonian's budget.

We will most likely also miss the opportunity to show how everyone's story can be brought together in the context of the American story.

To bridge these looming concerns, I am introducing a bipartisan resolution that calls for a presidential commission to study the establishment of the National Museum of the American People — an institution devoted to telling the story of how the world's pioneers interwove their diverse races, religions and ethnicities into the strongest societal fabric.

While the American History Museum is a popular destination full of engaging pieces of Americana, it does not capture, nor does it have the space to communicate, the narratives of immigration and integration.

This effort is supported by 139 organizations, representing virtually every major ethnic and nationality group in the nation. The museum is to highlight the diversity and richness of the cultures our ancestors came from and foster a sense of belonging to the nation by the waves of people who made us the world's leading economic, military, scientific and cultural force.

The museum's central theme is from our national motto: "E Pluribus Unum" — From Many We Are One.

Canada and Mexico have major national museums in their capitals, telling the story of their peoples. These are the most visited museums in those nations.

In our proposed museum, people from every ethnic and minority group will come to see their own story — and learn how they joined together in pursuit of a more noble national purpose. Foreign visitors will very likely come to learn how natives of their countries helped create our nation.

For the different groups who became Americans, the museum will tell who, where, when, why and how they transformed our nation. Today's technology makes all this possible.

The Museum of the American People would be like walking through a dramatic documentary, delving into these grand movements of peoples. It will follow in the tradition of some of today's most successful storytelling museums — such as the Holocaust Memorial Museum. The goal will be to tell our people's compelling story with force and clarity.

Because of the current fiscal realities, none of the money to design and build the museum should come from federal appropriations. Even the commission should be privately funded.

While there should always be room for other national museums in our nation's capital devoted to all manner of art, cultural and scientific accomplishments, this museum, covering accurately and adequately each group's story in the context of the American experience, should help stem the trend of groups having their own individual, specific ethnic museums.

All these people's stories should be told. But the list is nearly infinite — while the space, money and political will are not.

In telling everyone's story, the National Museum of the American People would recognize the important differences that set us apart, while celebrating the common purpose that has brought us together: E Pluribus Unum.

Rep. Jim Moran (D-Va.) represents the Arlington and Alexandria areas in Congress. For more information, see www.nmap2015.com.