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# Smithsonian misses deadline to lock in sites for two new museums on the National Mall

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The Smithsonian Institution missed its end-of-year deadline to lock in sites for two new museums, a stumbling block in the yearslong effort to advance the proposed American Women's History and American Latino museums.

The museum operator's board of regents had until Tuesday to designate sites for the new museums based on 2020 legislation authorizing the search. It appeared poised to hit that target when it said in October it had homed in on "two optimal sites" from a larger pool of 14, despite opposition from advisory groups including the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission.

The board was unable to formally select those sites, however, without legislation permitting the Smithsonian to build on its preferred spots, both located on part of the National Mall known as the Reserve, an area extending from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. Proponents had pushed for wording in the federal spending bill



MICHAEL NEIBAUER

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that came out Dec. 20, but with so many competing interests, that wording didn't make the cut, according to Estuardo Rodriguez, president and CEO of the Friends of the National Museum of the American Latino, a nonprofit group not affiliated with the Smithsonian.

"The Hail Mary effort was to try to include language in the omnibus before the end of the year, but this did not happen," Rodriguez said. "They have not selected a location, they've only identified the optimal location, so without the authority, they're going to go past the deadline."

The omnibus wasn't totally unkind to the effort, as it included \$4 million apiece to advance plans for both museums. Still, having missed the deadline, the effort to lock in sites for both museums will need to continue with the new Congress, Rodriguez said. It likely won't be the legislative body's top priority, however, and it could take time before the Smithsonian gets the green light to proceed.

Also among the Latino museum's supporters is Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., who criticized the inability to secure legislative approval prior to the expiration of the 117th Congress. It's unclear what the next steps will be, but a spokesperson for Menendez said he plans to continue to work as Congress convenes in the new year to ensure both museums are placed on the optimal sites identified by the Smithsonian's board.

Prior to the omnibus vote, Menendez said he "simply cannot understand how it is that Congress has jeopardized their museum site selections just days before the deadline," according to the congressional record.

"Make no mistake, we belong on The Mall," Menendez said. "We belong alongside the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of African American History, and we belong in the place where millions of visitors come to learn about their histories and their pasts. The importance of these museums and their locations cannot be overstated."

**Daniel J. Sernovitz**

Senior Staff Reporter

*Washington Business Journal*

