
The American Museum of Women's History

Snapshot Summary of the Congressional Commission's
Purpose, Conclusions and Recommendations
November 16, 2016



The Purpose of the Congressional Commission

On December 19, 2014, H.R. 3979 was passed by Congress. The bill created a congressional commission to study the potential for an American museum of women's history. Specifically, the Commission was tasked to independently examine the threshold question of whether the country needs a museum of this nature in our nation's capital, and if the answer is affirmative, present its conclusions and reasoning on the following:

- Deciding whether or not the future Museum should be part of the Smithsonian Institution;
- Investigating a potential governance and organizational structure for Museum operations;
- Determining the availability and cost of collections;
- Identifying best practices for engaging women in the development and design of the Museum;
- Calculating the impact on other regional women's history museums;
- Finding a location in Washington, D.C.;
- Developing a fundraising feasibility study to support the establishment, operation and maintenance of the Museum through contributions from the private sector;
- Identifying the cost of constructing, operating and maintaining the Museum; and
- Determining a legislative plan of action.

Commission Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Conclusion

1. America needs and deserves a physical national museum dedicated to showcasing the historical experiences and impact of women in this country.

Structure and Governance of the Museum

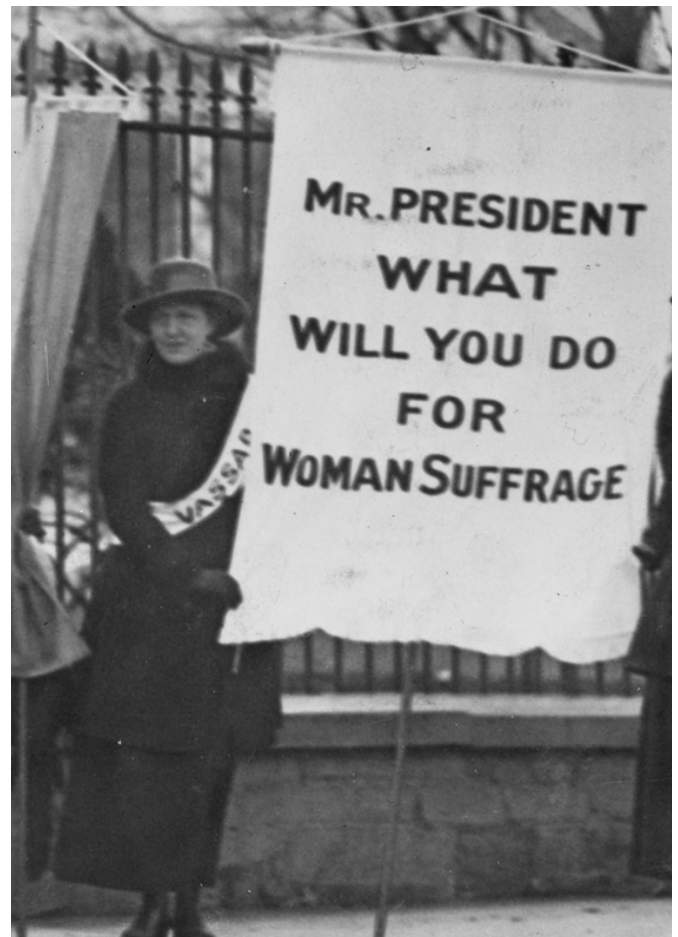
2. The American Museum of Women's History needs and deserves to be an official part of the Smithsonian Institution.
3. The Smithsonian's Board of Regents would be the ultimate governing body.
4. The American Museum of Women's History must be free of charge to the general public.

Collections, Content, and Impact

5. The Museum will be composed of a strong permanent collection, with supplemental exhibits or objects on loan from other museums/archives, including other components of the Smithsonian.
6. The goal of this Museum is to present a wide spectrum of American women's experiences in a way that appeals to a diverse audience.

Outreach Efforts and Data Analysis

7. National outreach will be critical to the Museum's success.
8. The Commission recommends that AMWH create an Academic Advisory Board to help vet the content of the exhibitions and to provide support for additional research and collections identification and acquisition.
9. Leaders of other regional museums and archives related to women's history from across the country unanimously agree that a national Museum would promote their efforts to reach a larger audience.



Suffragist in front of White House, 1917

Site Recommendations

10. The Commission's top site criteria in priority order is as follows: potential for congressional support; location; private and potentially public funding attractiveness; visitor/tourist traffic attractiveness; and public transportation access.
11. Given that the Commission recommends a ten-year timeline for the completion of the project, it may well be that the ultimate solution will be a site yet to be envisioned. However, the Commission's continuing preference is a highly prominent location close to other museums, on or very close to the National Mall, and part of the Smithsonian system.
12. At the present time, there are three examples of preferred sites for the permanent Museum that meet the Commission's criteria and desire for a prominent location in Washington, D.C. The Commission would ask Congress and the Board of Regents to consider the following (in no particular priority order):
 - a. **South Monument Site**, currently an open piece of property that would essentially be the mirror site to the new National Museum of African American History and Culture,
 - b. **Northwest U.S. Capitol Site**, located on the north-east side of the U.S. Capitol grounds and also an open piece of property that would essentially be the mirror site to the United States Botanical Gardens, and
 - c. **Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building**, should Congress and the Smithsonian not move forward in officially designating this site within the next Congress as the future home of a Smithsonian Latino-American museum.
15. Without public support, both the Commission and the major donor community do not think a national Museum is feasible. Therefore, the Commission recommends that:
 - a. The government provide a piece of land free of charge (or provide an existing building, renovated so it is brought up to modern structural code),
 - b. Private sector money finances the construction costs of a world-class Museum of a reasonable size (75,000 to 90,000 square foot),
 - c. Once the construction is complete and the Museum is open to the public, the government would take over the annual costs of operating and maintaining the Museum. Of course, like all other publicly owned museums, private sector money could/would be raised to offset/augment these operational costs.
16. The cost of constructing and opening the future Museum will depend largely upon the site selected and the anticipated square footage. However, with the projected size of approximately 75,000 - 90,000 square feet, private sector money should be able to build the physical Museum. The eventual size of the Museum, in terms of square footage, must be based on the content needs and the amount of funds privately raised. The Commission's goal is that the federal government will not be asked for or be required to fund the capital campaign should the Museum remain within these size limitations. A larger museum footprint, however, may require more funding from both public and private sources.
17. Once the two important funding source components — public and private funding — are finalized, specific budget items such as ongoing operations, collection acquisitions, programming, staffing, facility maintenance, security, and other administrative support services can be better projected.
18. A sound financial plan must be developed by the Smithsonian to ensure the required funding for the Museum's capital campaign. To avoid any financial shortcomings, at least 75% of those capital campaign funds must be pledged prior to any construction.

Fundraising Projections

13. As a Smithsonian entity, the Commission understands and respects that all private-sector fundraising efforts for the future Museum should be organized and initiated officially through the Smithsonian's Office of Advancement.
14. The Commission has determined that a fundraising goal between \$150-\$180 million from the private sector is realistic and attainable for capital expenditures in 2016 dollars as long as the Museum is part of the Smithsonian and has a prominent location.

See back for Commission's Action Plan

Action Plan

The Commission recognizes and appreciates that at present, the Smithsonian is at fundraising and managerial capacity and is not in the short term prepared to initiate the planning of a new permanent Museum. Therefore, the Commission recommends focusing on building support for this goal through a 10-year strategic plan composed of three well-defined phases, based upon a detailed timeline.

First Phase

The **First Critical Phase** of the plan would require the creation of a Smithsonian-wide initiative called the *American Women’s History Initiative*. The Commission asks Congress, on behalf of the Smithsonian, to approve an annual \$2-million-line item in new federal funding to go toward the creation and ongoing work of the Initiative. Once the future Museum is open, the Initiative will dissolve and the work of the Smithsonian in the area of women’s history will be accomplished not only through the new permanent Museum, but throughout the other Smithsonian museums as well.

The Commission strongly encourages the National Women’s History Museum (NWHM) to support the Smithsonian’s effort to raise private sector dollars to fund (1) the Initiative and then (2) the bricks and mortar museum. Because the Initiative and the eventual Museum will be a part of the Smithsonian, the

Commission defers to the Smithsonian on the mechanics for groups such as NWHM to contribute to fundraising. However, the Commission recommends that the roles of any outside groups with respect to fundraising be clearly delineated, such as through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Smithsonian.

Once the Initiative is formally established, the Smithsonian should then appoint 12 – 18 leading Americans to serve on an Advisory Council for the Initiative.

Second Phase

The **Second Critical Phase** of the plan would involve Congress awarding the Smithsonian a prominent plot of land (or in the case of the Arts and Industries Building, an existing but renovated building) along with the designation that the land/building will be the future home of the Smithsonian’s 21st museum, the American Museum of Women’s History.

Third Phase

The **Third (and final) Critical Phase** of the plan would require the Smithsonian, in partnership with the private sector, to complete the capital campaign and develop and execute the actual building of the permanent Museum.

Preliminary Timeline

