

Jane Abraham November 16th Remarks

This is a great day for American women.

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for coming out this evening to celebrate what is truly a momentous occasion for all of us at the Commission. For those of you I haven't personally met yet, my name is Jane Abraham and it has been my honor to serve as the Chair of the Congressional Commission on the American Museum of Women's History for these past eighteen months.

I can speak for my fellow Commissioners when I say we are excited to be submitting our bipartisan Report to Congress. We wholeheartedly recommend that a permanent American Museum of Women's History be established here in Washington, D.C.

The Commission's recommendations as to how we will do that represent the

accumulated energy and talent of a diverse group of individuals, many of whom are here tonight. We at the Commission could not be prouder of the Report nor could we be more grateful to those who helped us complete it – on time and on budget!

Additionally, it is a real pleasure to get to present the report to our Hill co-sponsors. These women have been working for years, and in some cases decades, to make this Commission happen, and without their efforts, none of us would be here tonight. Before I speak any further on the Commission’s process and ultimate recommendations, I would like to turn the floor over to some of them who are here.

Barbara Mikulski: Senator Barbara Mikulski was a crucial supporter of the

legislation to establish this Commission, and Senator -- it is your poignant remark that "Women's history is American history" that has been a guiding mantra for this Commission. Thank you Senator, for all that you and your colleagues have done.

Susan Collins: Senator Susan Collins has been leading this effort to establish a women's history museum since 2003, and has been an essential advocate for the Commission's work. Thank you Senator, for all that you and your colleagues have done.

Carolyn Maloney: Representative Carolyn Maloney has tirelessly worked for the past sixteen years to not only get this Commission established, but to rally support for the creation of this museum. She has been on the frontlines of this effort for a long time. Thank you Congresswoman, for all that you and your colleagues have done.

Nancy Pelosi: Leader Nancy Pelosi has been an essential advocate in this

effort to establish a women's history museum, and a great source of support throughout the Commission's work. We are honored to have here today to celebrate with us. Thank you Congresswoman, for all that you and your colleagues have done.

Marsha Blackburn: Representative Marsha Blackburn has tirelessly worked over the years to get this Commission established and has been an essential champion for this overall effort. Thank you Congresswoman, for all that you and your colleagues have done.

Thank you to all of our co-sponsors for your encouraging words, and your continued support of this much-needed museum.

As I mentioned earlier, we are so happy to be able to share this night with so many of the people who made this report possible.

18 months ago this Commission began its mission to study the questions posed to us by Congress regarding the creation of a women's history museum. It has been an intense and exciting process for all of us – and I would like to acknowledge my fellow Commissioners at this point and thank each one of them for their dedication to this important work.

(Raise your hand or stand forward as I say your name):

- Mary Boies from New York
- Bridget Bush from Kentucky
- Pat Mitchell from Georgia
- Marilyn Musgrave from Colorado
- Maria Socorro Pesqueira from Illinois
- Emily Rafferty from New York

And I would also like to acknowledge former Commissioner Kathy Wills Wright. Kathy was required to resign from the Commission when she accepted a federal job this past August.

This has been a major team effort, with quite literally hundreds of people from different political backgrounds volunteering their talent and their time to our cause. It is because of their support that our report is a truly thorough, innovative, and bi-partisan one, honoring the diverse perspectives and talents of women from both the past and the present.

I would like to extend a special thanks to the nonprofit group, the National Women's History Museum, who have been the champions of this cause for so

many years, who lobbied to get this Commission established, and who provided this Commission with essential funding and years of research in the arena of women's history. I'd like to acknowledge the Board chair, Susan Whiting, as well as all the other board members who are here this evening. I'd also like to acknowledge Joan Wages, the President and CEO of NWHM.

I would like to thank the many academics, historians, and museum professionals who donated countless hours of their time and expertise. They made sure that our approach to women's history was as nuanced and inclusive as possible. I would like to particularly thank those scholars and museum professionals who are here tonight, among them:

- Professor Emeritus Sonya Michel, from University of Maryland
- Page Harrington and Jennifer Krafchik, from the National Woman's Party

- Professor Bonnie Morris, from George Washington University
- Dr. Regina Akers, from the Naval History and Heritage Command

Finally, we are proud to be here tonight to publically submit not only our printed copy of the report but, as far as we know, the first-ever Congressional Commission digital report to Congress – which can be accessed through our website. The innovative and multi-media approach of this report is intended to represent the nature of the future museum. The American Museum of Women’s History will present stories from the past utilizing contemporary – high tech platforms that will capture the imagination of generations to come.

We are confident that you will find the Report to be a compelling argument that answers the threshold question, should America have a permanent Museum dedicated to women’s history in our nation’s capitol? The answer is a resounding yes!

Highlights of the report include the following conclusions and recommendations:

First, that the museum should be called the American Museum of Women's History and that it should be an official part of the Smithsonian Institution

Second, that it be composed of a strong permanent collection and compelling temporary exhibits

Next, that the museum needs to have a national learning center component

We also feel that an Academic Advisory Board should be established to provide support for research and guidance

Next, that the site should be a highly prominent location that is close to other national museums, on or very near to the National Mall, and should be free of charge to visitors

We also believe that private sector funding can build the museum if the museum is a reasonable size and uses all that modern technology has to offer

Finally, the Commission acknowledges that museums aren't built overnight and a 10-year timeline will be required. But we want to get going and we want to get going now! We have had a series of conversations with Smithsonian

leadership over the past year. As a result, the Commission proposes that the first critical phase be the creation of an entity called the *American Women's History Initiative* within the Smithsonian system. This will immediately make women's history a top priority in the Smithsonian complex, and we hope that this Initiative will be the first essential stepping stone to a permanent museum.

If you look to my left you'll see a collage of notable women from both the past and present. This mural was created by artists Liberty Blake, and Jann Haworth, and the women featured were submitted by men and women from Salt Lake City. More women will continue to be added, but this mural can provide you with an idea of some of the stories the future museum may tell.

Now, before I let you all go I'd like to give you a brief preview of our microsite.

When you visit our homepage, the first thing you'll see is four options on the bottom left hand corner for accessing the Commission's report. If you click 'Read the Report' it will take you directly to the report as embedded in the website. Or, you can choose to download shorter versions of the report by clicking the 'Report Snapshot' or 'Executive Summary'. You can also download a full pdf of the report by clicking on 'Full Report'.

If you continue scrolling down, you'll see our five 'bookmark' tabs. These tabs contain our '19 Reasons Why We Need To Build This Museum' – the number 19 was chosen in tribute to the 19th amendment, which gave women

the right to vote nationwide in 1920.

Now, if you keep scrolling, you'll see a link to our virtual reality experience, which I'll get to in a moment, but then you'll see the three video components we created to make the case for our museum. The first is a video message from me as Chair, the second is a terrific video featuring women and men from all over America discussing why we need this museum. This video features many women who are here tonight, including our co-sponsors, Senator Elizabeth Dole, Leader Pelosi, Olympian Benita Fitzgerald Mosley, Dr. Sonya Michel, and NWHM Board Chair Susan Whiting.

The third video was created by a young animator and entrepreneur named Maya Penn, who is here with us this evening with her parents. Maya created

a brief video to demonstrate the types of stories we may see in this future museum, and I'd like to play it for you know.

(show two minute video)

Thank you Maya. (applause)

We will be playing all three of these videos on a loop for the rest of evening for you to check out and enjoy, and we also have our technician here who can walk you through the website if you wish.

Lastly, we have a surprise for all of you. Downstairs, we have set up a

virtual reality studio. What would it be like to step back in time to see a woman involved in the Revolutionary War? Nonny de la Pena and her team at the Emblematic Group have come all the way from California to show you. I want to thank them for their generosity in creating this unique virtual reality experience for our Commission. So please, wander downstairs to room HC-8, put on your google cardboard glasses or virtual reality headset, and have fun!

Thank you all again, for coming this evening. This is an exciting step in a long overdue effort to acknowledge the historical experiences and accomplishments of our nation's daughters – sending a message to all Americans that the stories of women in this country matter.

We sincerely hope that our Congressional Report leads us all on a path to a permanent museum very, very soon.

Thank you.