

Executive Summary

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

As the Commission draws to its formal conclusion with the presentation of this report, it is the unanimous opinion of the Commission that:

Overall Conclusion

- **America needs and deserves a physical national museum dedicated to showcasing the historical experiences and impact of women in this country.** The future Museum should be called the American Museum of Women's History (AMWH).

Structure and Governance of the Museum

- **The American Museum of Women's History should be an official part of the Smithsonian Institution.** Being a part of the Smithsonian will provide the future Museum with many strategic advantages. The Smithsonian brand and reputation brings credibility to a museum. The Smithsonian gives private donors confidence that their generous support will be used wisely. The Smithsonian already has vast amounts of artifacts related to women's history in its possession. The museums that are part of the Smithsonian Institution are among the most widely visited in the world. And for over 170 years, the Smithsonian has learned through experience how to present potentially controversial exhibits and topics in a fair and balanced way.
- As part of the Smithsonian, the Museum's governance structure would follow the guidelines of all Smithsonian museums via the oversight of the Board of Regents, along with the advice, assistance and support, particularly in the area of fundraising, of a dedicated museum Board of Trustees. **The Smithsonian's Board of Regents would be the ultimate governing body.**
- Similar to all Smithsonian museums and other leading museums in the D.C. region, the American Museum of Women's History must be free of charge to the general public. Special exhibits may or may not require a fee.

Collections, Content and Impact

- **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.** The permanent collection will be derived from a variety of sources, including donations and acquisitions from private collections and individuals. Additionally, the AMWH will create original material to build on the permanent collection, using oral history databases, reproductions, and audio/visual technology to create distinct and multi-sensory experiences for visitors. Through use of digital multimedia tools, the Museum's collections, exhibits, and research will reach and engage audiences across the country and around the world, encouraging future visitors to its physical site.



Former POW's being released in the Philippines, Ruth Bradley is waving. She was an Army nurse, serving in World War II and Korea, earning 34 medals and citations for bravery.

- **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.** Potentially controversial topics and exhibits should be presented with consideration of diverse viewpoints, thereby allowing viewers a fuller contextual understanding of the topic, and encouraging them to draw their own conclusions. Many leading museums, presidential libraries and history centers from across the country could serve as successful models of this approach vis-à-vis interactive exhibits, displays, and interactive/decision theaters that allow for audience participation and opinion formulation.

Outreach Efforts and Data Analysis

- **National outreach will be critical to the Museum's success.** During the development stages of the interpretive planning and design process, the AMWH should consider holding stakeholder "focus groups" across the country. These brainstorming sessions can help the development team to capture the breadth of diverse experiences and rich stories across geographical, cultural and economic strata. In addition to these "focus groups," the Commission recommends that an AMWH Interpretive Planning and Design Team work with the AMWH to select and engage women's history scholars who represent the history and subject matter that will inform a well-rounded story of women's history in America.

From these scholarly groups, **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.** This group will meet quarterly throughout the development stages of the exhibition design. The group may expand to include specific content experts as the final design and exhibit narrative are developed.

Once specific plans begin to develop for the physical property, the organizing entity will make sure that leading women architects, landscape architects, builders, etc. play prominent roles in the creation of the living Museum.

- **According to extensive outreach already conducted by the Commission, 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, rather than hinder or eclipse them.** Particularly with an added research center component, the American Museum of Women's History in Washington, D.C. will serve as a hub or gateway connecting this important constituency within a national framework.

Site Recommendations

- The Commission established a list of 10 key criteria on which to evaluate potential sites. **The top site criteria in priority order are as follows: potential for congressional support; location; private and potentially public funding attractiveness; visitor/tourist traffic attractiveness; and public transportation access.**
- The Commission's study on potential sites is thorough and clearly articulated throughout the report. It is important to emphasize that the site evaluation, however, is based in the current time. **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.** The Commission also recognizes that once Congress agrees to provide public land, the final selection of a site will not be a decision made by the Commission, but instead one that will be deferred to Congress and the Smithsonian's Board of Regents.
- As a part of its extensive research, however, the Commission did review dozens of potential sites and then carefully evaluated and visited ten (10). **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 northeast side of the U.S. Capitol grounds (also an open piece of property that is the mirror site to the 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.All three of the preferred sites have their own list of strengths and weaknesses, as outlined in the Commission's report. *As noted above, in terms of any serious consideration of the Arts and Industries Building, the Commission is sensitive to interest in the building on behalf of the National Museum of the American Latino Commission and would certainly not wish to move forward should Congress deem the building to be a more suitable site for a future National Museum of the American Latino.*

Fundraising Projections

- It is very important to emphasize that 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.** This will avoid donor confusion and cross-purpose fundraising within the Smithsonian's institution-wide development efforts.
- 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.** This conclusion is based upon professional research gathered on other museum and national memorial fundraising efforts, current philanthropic giving trends, and the direct input of over 75 high net worth donors from across the country who have recently indicated a potential interest in supporting the effort.
- **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**



Private Minnie Spotted-Wolf - First Native American woman to enlist in the United States Marine Corps.

costs of a world-class Museum of a reasonable size (75,000 to 90,000 square feet),

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.

Note: The Projected Capital and Operating Budget further outlines the funding of a future reasonably sized Museum based both on a 75,000 square foot Museum plan and a 90,000 square foot Museum plan for a new build, not an existing renovated, structure. See pages 96-97

- The Commission wishes to emphasize that the private sector fundraising goal can only be reached if the federal government donates prominent land or a building, and appropriates funds for the ongoing operations costs, as it does all other Smithsonian museums. **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 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.

- **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.** However, for the purposes of providing Congress with estimated costs, the Commission is using rough order of magnitude estimates (ROMs), per the advice of museum and real estate experts.
- Prior to groundbreaking, 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.** The job of raising the required funds for the Museum is too significant for one organization to tackle alone, so success will be based upon a cooperative effort. The Commission feels that to successfully raise between \$150 and \$180 million dollars from the private sector in today's market will require an extensive campaign built upon significant gifts within the \$20 million to \$1 million range. This type of fundraising requires extensive outreach by a community of leading citizens with affluence and influence across the country who are accustomed to successfully raising these levels of gifts.

“It is important that this future museum be a living museum—that this museum continually changes, and that it encompasses stories from our past, and our present, and will one day tell stories from our future.”

Jane Abraham, Commission Chair

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—especially with significant budgetary outlays for the newly created National Museum of African American History and Culture, substantial capital expenditures for the National Air and Space Museum and the Udvar-Hazy Center, and the partial renovation of the Arts and Industries Building. That being understood, the Commission has received assurances from Smithsonian Secretary David Skorton that the Institution is aware of the need for more women’s history in its programming, and that addressing this need should be a priority both in the short term and when considering any long-term planning. Secretary Skorton, when meeting with the Commissioners on August 10, 2016, said, “I would 100% agree that we need more women’s history within the Smithsonian and I support some sort of Smithsonian program that supports your efforts with a particular emphasis on quality and scholarship.”

Therefore, rather than calling for a final Congressional decision in the near future on establishing a physical AMWH within the Smithsonian, **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.** This strategic plan must be comprehensive, defining all parameters of the project to ensure appropriate funding, Smithsonian support, public endorsement, and Congressional action and buy-in.

The First Phase — Action Plan

The First Critical Phase of the plan would require the creation of a Smithsonian-wide initiative called the American Women’s History Initiative. The Initiative would, through a coordinated plan across the museums of the Institution, support projects in research, collections and programming to advance and underscore the contributions women have played throughout American history. The Initiative will include detailed planning, fundraising, initial traveling exhibits and public events aiming to bring this decision forward in the context of the upcoming national celebration of the Centennial of Women’s Suffrage in 2019-2020. 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 National Women’s History Museum (NWHM), a nonprofit organization led by a dedicated staff and volunteers, has been the primary organization behind the effort to build a women’s history museum in our nation’s capital. Their efforts were instrumental in securing the approval by the U.S. Congress to establish a Congressional Commission. The Commission strongly encourages 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. Following statutory precedents, the Board of Regents will appoint all members of the Advisory Council after consultation with the Congressional Commission. The Commission would hope that the Smithsonian would invite all of the Commissioners to serve on the Advisory Council should they choose to continue. The Commission would encourage the Board of Regents to appoint a diverse Advisory Council to include: women’s history scholars/academics, corporate/foundation/high net worth individuals capable of securing large sums of financial support, celebrities, and representatives of other women’s history nonprofits from across the country. The Commission would also encourage the Smithsonian to include the chair and one independent board member of the National Women’s History Museum (NWHM) selected by the NWHM Board of Directors. Private sector fundraising efforts will supplement the modest federal appropriation to provide the Initiative with adequate funding.

Once the Smithsonian American Women’s History Initiative is established, laying the groundwork for the eventual building of a permanent museum of women’s history within the Smithsonian family of museums, will take the collective efforts of a number of organizations (corporate, foundations, and nonprofits) and individuals to make the Museum a reality.

The Second Phase — Action Plan

The **Second Critical Phase** of the plan would involve Congress awarding the Smithsonian a prominent plot of land along (or in the case of the Arts and Industries an existing but renovated building) a long 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. Upon the enactment of the legislation creating the Museum and offering site options, the Smithsonian will conduct a thorough feasibility study to include site, size, and cost projections. This study will ultimately determine the optimum size of the future Museum. A “soft” capital campaign would begin to raise significant funds to serve as the foundation of the capital campaign once a site is finalized.

The Third Phase — Action Plan

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. The end of the Third Phase will include the completion of the building, the pre-opening festivities, and a national celebration of the opening of the Smithsonian’s American Museum of Women’s History. Open free of charge to the American people and guests from around the world, visitors will celebrate the experiences and contributions of American women to our country’s great history for many, many decades to come.

Preliminary Timeline

