

**Statement - Rules Committee Hearing on New Museums  
November 17, 2020**

Good morning Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, Senator Feinstein, and other members of this Committee. Let me begin by thanking you for holding this hearing on legislation to establish new museums, including the bill that Senator Feinstein and I have introduced called *The Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act*.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, this cause to establish a women's history museum has always been a bipartisan one. The very first bill that I introduced to create such a museum was in 2003, and at that time, Senators Barbara Mikulski, my dear colleague Senator Feinstein, were cosponsors of that bill. This year, as we commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's suffrage and the decades-long fight for women's equality at the ballot box, it is fitting that we at long last establish an institution in our nation's capital to honor American women.

Women have made invaluable contributions to our country in every field: government, business, medicine, law, literature, sports, entertainment, the arts, and the military. As Senator Klobuchar mentioned, here in the Senate, we have a record number of women – 26 in all – serving. When I first became a Senator, there were only nine of us.

Telling the history of American women matters, it inspires girls to know that there are no boundaries to their potential. A museum recognizing the achievements and experiences of American women is long overdue.

In 1999, a Presidential commission on commemorating women in our history concluded that an “appropriate celebration of women's history in the next millennium should include the designation of a focal point for women's history in our Nation's capital.”

In 2014, Congress took the important step toward realizing this goal when it passed legislation creating an independent, bipartisan Commission to study establishing such a museum

right here in Washington, D.C. After 18 months, the bipartisan Commission unanimously concluded that, “America needs and deserves a physical national museum dedicated to showcasing the historical experiences and impact of women in this country.” I agree wholeheartedly with the Commission’s conclusion and I want to thank Jane Abraham in her leadership in heading the Commission.

Following the Commission’s recommendations, Senator Feinstein and I introduced legislation to create an American Women’s History Museum that would collect, study, and create programs incorporating and exhibiting a wide spectrum of women’s experiences, contributions, and history. It would be a part of the Smithsonian Institution, ensuring that it is free and open to all who visit Washington, and would be representative of the diverse viewpoints held by American women. It is important to emphasize that this museum would portray all aspects of women’s contributions to our history, without partisanship or bias. It would share the stories of pioneering women such as abolitionist Harriet Tubman; the founder of the Girl Scouts, Juliette Gordon Low; Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O’Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg; leading suffragists like Maine’s own Florence Brooks Whitehouse, and so many others.

The Commission also recommended a Smithsonian-wide American Women’s History Initiative and since 2018, Congress has provided nearly \$10 million in federal funding toward this important step toward creating the museum. Building on these successes, our bill calls for a funding commitment from both the private sector and the federal government, following the successful model used by the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, our bill enjoys broad bipartisan support, and I want to thank the women members who serve on this committee, as well as others, for

cosponsoring it. It is also supported by several organizations, and I would ask that their letters of support be entered into the record.

I also want to acknowledge the steadfast leadership of Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick, who have led the effort on the House side. In February, the House passed its bill by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 374 - 37.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, as our Women's Suffrage Centennial year draws to a close, I can think of no better way to honor those women and that momentous achievement than by passing *The Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act*. I would note in closing, Mr. Chairman, that in Washington, we all enjoy the many museums along the National Mall that commemorate various aspects of our history and our culture. We even have a museum that celebrates buildings, surely if we can have a museum that celebrates buildings, we ought to have one and are long overdue in establishing one that celebrates the many contributions of American women to our nation. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Senator Klobuchar.