

Anna Laymon's opening:

Good morning Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, committee members, and my fellow witnesses gathered here today. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss H.R. 473 to place the Every Word We Utter monument in Washington, D.C., as the first outdoor statue dedicated to the suffrage movement in our nation's capital.

My name is Anna Laymon and I am the National Events Director for the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission. Created by Congress in 2017 to coordinate the nationwide celebration of the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, the Commission works to ensure that the story of women's fight for the ballot is shared and commemorated. I serve a critical role in the organization, coordinating legislative efforts to honor the 19th Amendment as well as planning the country's nationwide commemorative events and activities. Prior to joining the Commission, I worked as the Director of Partnerships and Public Programs for the National Woman's Party, the historic nonprofit that was founded in 1913 to ensure the passage of a constitutional suffrage amendment. There, I built coalitions of women's historians and women-centered nonprofits to lift-up women's history and explore issues of women's equality today. I have an MA in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from the University of Cincinnati, and have spent my career in dynamic, women-centered organizations across the US. I bring many years of experience to my role at the Commission and am honored to be coordinating the nationwide efforts to celebrate the centennial of the passage of the 19th Amendment and to be here today as a part of that commemoration.

Designed by renowned sculptor Jane DeDecker, the statue we are discussing today will be cast in bronze and is approximated to stand 21-22 feet tall with a 10 feet circular base. There are two bronze ripples, installed flush with the sidewalk, radiating outward 21 feet. The suggested placement of this statue is in Area II, near the Belmont-Paul National Monument and the Supreme Court. As Congressman Neguse noted, this monument has growing support including from the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission and numerous other women's advocacy groups.

It depicts Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her daughter Harriet Stanton Blatch, Sojourner Truth, Alice Paul, and Ida B. Wells. These women encapsulate both the sustained activism of the suffrage movement over multiple generations as well as the diversity and patriotism of this movement. Each of the depicted women brought something unique and irreplaceable to the fight for suffrage. From Sojourner Truth who threw off the shackles of slavery, fled to freedom in the North and proclaimed to her sisters in suffrage the humanity of women of color; to Alice Paul who brought women out of the home and into the streets to protest for national change, and every woman in between, this statue epitomizes the very tenants of the suffrage movement – tenants on which our nation was founded; freedom, peaceful protest, and millions of voices coming together as one to create change.

The true art of this statue lies not only in who it depicts physically, but in the symbolism of continuation and futurity for equality which it encapsulates. For, just as our nation is an ongoing, evolving experiment in democracy, so too are the movements for equality within it. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton remarked in a letter to Lucretia Mott explaining the continuous nature of this movement, from which the artist Jane DeDecker drew her inspiration for this monument: “Every word we utter, every act we perform wafts into innumerable circles beyond...”

As described by the sculptor: Anthony and Stanton writing the Nineteenth Amendment is the nucleus of the sculpture, the beginning of the women’s movement. To the side of the authors stands the elder Sojourner Truth, a beacon for the movement. The young Harriet Stanton Blatch represents the future. From them rises the next generation of the movement, the “daughters” who ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, represented by Ida B. Wells and Alice Paul. Standing on the shoulders of giants, these women were elevated by what came before. From this height, the ratification flag cascades to the innumerable circles that ripple outwards from the bottom of the statue.

The first bronze ripple will hold the names of the women on the first tier of the monument along with their contemporaries, names such as Frances Willard, Zitkala Sa, Clara Elizabeth, Adelina Otero-Warren, and Chan Le. These are the women who envisioned the women's right to vote. The next ripple includes the names of the second wave of the movement, those women who experienced the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment and voted for the first time, Alva Belmont, Inez Mullholand and Lucy Burns. The outer bronze ripple will represent the names of women who have made significant contributions to the ideals of the sentiments, not just the right to vote, but continued efforts for equality for all women, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Maya Angelou, and others of the younger, modern generations of women's rights advocates.

At no cost to the taxpayer, you have the opportunity today to commemorate the women who led our nation to greater equality. There is no better way to ring in the centennial of women's suffrage than with this kind of public commemoration which will create ripples of inspiration for every generation to come.

In closing, I would like to quote one of the mothers of suffrage Alice Paul who said, "I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality."

On behalf of ordinary equality and in honor of the women who fought for the vote for each of us, I urge you to support HR473 to establish the Every Word We Utter monument. Thank you for your time and consideration.