

TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN JOE NEGUSE
NATIONAL CAPITAL MEMORIAL ADVISORY COMMISSION
HEARING ON H.R. 473 - EVERY WORD WE UTTER
TUESDAY SEPT. 24TH, 2019 1:00 PM

Good afternoon and thank you to everyone for being here today! I want to thank Chairman May and the entire Commission for holding today's hearing on H.R. 473 to establish the Every Word We Utter statue, which could become **the first** outdoor statue in tribute to the women's suffrage movement in Washington, D.C.

Just over 100 years ago, the U.S. House of Representatives passed House Joint Resolution 1 proposing an amendment to the Constitution extending the right to vote to women. It took just over a year for the states to ratify this amendment, forever enshrining women's right to vote in our constitution.

At the forefront of this effort was a diverse and multi-generational movement of women. From their first official call for equality at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, to demonstrations in the streets of the very city in which we sit now; across multiple generations, from farms and villages throughout our nation, women organized, educated, picketed, and demanded their enfranchisement. Through this brave and enduring movement, women received the vote.

And they have never looked back: Today women vote in **higher numbers** than men and have done so **in every election** since 1964.

It is in tribute to the fearlessly bold and righteous women who championed equality in our nation that I sit before you today.

H.R. 473 has received strong bipartisan support, including from the entire Congressional delegation of Colorado. It is bicameral, with the bipartisan Senate companion introduced in May, and has been heard in the committees of jurisdiction in both the House and Senate. Leading women's organizations are in support of this legislation including six chapters of the American Association of University Women, among them the chapters for the states of Colorado and Nevada, as well as the League of Women Voters of Colorado.

The Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission is also supportive of this legislation, and I was honored to have the Commission's National Events Director Anna Laymon present to testify on the significance of this legislation during our committee hearing in May.

As the Commission knows well, under the Commemorative Works Act, the sculpture created by this bill can be donated to the National Park Service from the Every Word We Utter Board with Congressional Authorization. This bill allows for that private donation and stipulates that this statue will not cost anything to the Federal government.

In its initial draft, this bill recommended a suggested placement of this statue in Area II of Washington, D.C., near the Belmont-Paul National Monument and the Supreme Court – an historic placement given its direct ties to the history and remaining legacy of the women’s suffrage movement. The language also proposed a suggested design for this statue. In consultation with the National Park Service while drafting this legislation, both the location and design of this statue were initially placed in the findings section, making them nonbinding and leaving the ultimate decision of both to this Committee and the process of the Commemorative Works Act. During the Natural Resources Committee mark-up on this bill just last week, this findings section was removed to bring the bill more fully into line with the process of the CWA. I am very pleased that the Natural Resources Committee then passed this bill on a bipartisan voice vote and it is now on its way to the House Floor.

The Every Word We Utter Board, including nationally renowned sculptor Jane DeDecker and Board President Jody Shadduck-McNally – who I’m pleased are able to attend this hearing – have worked diligently to apply for the required nonprofit status. The group has been registered with the Colorado Secretary of State since December of 2018 and is incorporated with the IRS. The only status they are still waiting to have certified is tax deductibility as a 501(c)(3), and they have already submitted their paper work for this status to the IRS.

While the specific design of the statue remains at the discretion of the process of the Commemorative Works Act, I would like to take a moment to highlight the design currently included in the non-binding findings section of this legislation, as it does a phenomenal job of encompassing the broad diversity and stalwart determination of the women’s suffrage movement in the United States.

Jane DeDecker is a board member of Every Word We Utter, a Colorado resident, nationally renowned sculptor, and the artist behind the suggested statue. She has placed over 175 life and monumental sized public sculptures in over thirty-three states. Jane’s beautifully crafted design in “Every Word We Utter” brings to life the women behind the suffrage movement from its beginning to its final victory.

The women included in this sculpture hail from every corner of our country and from a diverse set of backgrounds and circumstances. It depicts Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton with her daughter Harriot Stanton Blatch, Sojourner Truth, Alice Paul, and Ida B. Wells, all renowned women's rights activists and foundational members of this multigenerational movement.

These women's efforts across the decades were critical to the ultimate enfranchisement of women throughout our nation. While I could highlight the incredible words and actions of each of them, I would like to highlight one of my personal heroes, Sojourner Truth. A former slave, Sojourner became an outspoken advocate for abolition, temperance, and civil and women's rights in the nineteenth century. At the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner delivered what is now recognized as one of the most famous abolitionist and women's rights speeches in American history.

My daughter Natalie turned 1-year-old at the end of August. I want to ensure that my daughter and every girl growing up alongside her feel represented, empowered, and assured of the fundamental role they play in our society. Establishing Washington, D.C.'s first outdoor statue honoring the women's suffrage movement is a critical way to guarantee just that, and to inspire the next generation to continue advocating for justice and equality for one another and for all that will follow them.

In reverence to all of the generations that came before us, and on behalf of all of those still to come, I thank the committee for considering this bill today.