



STATE OF UTAH

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Martha Hughes Cannon Statue Ceremony Speech

Lt. Gov. Deidre M. Henderson
December 11, 2024 at 3:00 p.m.
United States Capitol,
Washington, DC 20004

Several years ago, a mother brought her young daughter to visit the Utah State Capitol building and showed her a framed portrait of all the state senators hanging on the wall outside the senate chamber. After studying the pictures for a few moments, the exasperated daughter said, “No fair! Where are the girls?”

To that little girl I say: we’re right here. And so are you.

In 2016, I visited the Library of Congress for the first time. I was impressed with the beauty of the building. The reading room is magnificent and filled with statues and paintings. There were 16 bronze statues of important and accomplished men with names like Beethoven, Plato, Shakespeare, and Moses. And there were also statues of women with names like religion, commerce, law, and history. Each of the eight plaster female statues depicted allegorical women—symbols of civilized society not real, actual women.

This realization gnawed at me and I began looking around the building and then around other areas of our nation’s capital for depictions of real women. There weren’t many.

I knew there were women who had done incredible and important things, and I wondered, is it significant that they were not often reflected in American monuments? Does it matter if we don’t remember real women in tangible and intentional ways?

A Spanish philosopher once said, “Tell me what you pay attention to and I’ll tell you who you are.” Where is our attention focused, and what are we missing if we are only looking out of one eye?

It is time to pay attention to *all* those who worked for the betterment of humanity—including those like Martha who contributed their efforts to the movement of political freedom, equality, and self-government.

The fight to give women equal political rights was the longest reform movement in the history of America. Utah men and women led that fight. This moment is the product of many years of effort to bring attention to our state's leadership in that long struggle.

As Martha takes her place in Emancipation Hall and becomes the fourteenth statue of a woman in the National Statuary Hall Collection, her story will be told to boys and girls, men and women from around the world who visit the seat of our free government. They will learn about the tiny woman from Utah who had a giant impact on the lives of so many people; an impact that is felt to this day.

And they will learn that if an immigrant pioneer woman in the nineteenth century can get an education, overcome persecution and discrimination, claim her own rights, make her community and state a better place, and champion the rights of others, so can they.

The fact that dignitaries from Martha's homeland of Wales, representatives from Congress, leaders of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including the president of the oldest and largest women's organization in the world, the Relief Society, and hundreds of people who traveled 2,000 miles from Utah to Washington D.C. are here today—is a tribute to the woman herself and also a testament of what she symbolizes.

Unlike the statues I saw eight years ago in the Library of Congress, Martha is both a real woman and a representation of who we are and what we value as Utahns and Americans. Martha means something to all of us.

We have all found ourselves standing alone at times. We have all found ourselves feeling the sting of injustice or the slight of being overlooked. We have all fought for change that either never came or that we did not get credit for. We have all championed a cause for which we cared deeply and sacrificed much. And we have all felt that maybe our efforts do not amount to as much as we would like.

So our calling is this: to pick up where Martha and so many others left off. To do our little bit of good in the world. To keep both eyes open and be intentional about remembering the past as we look to the future. And most importantly, to remember that the arc of history bends toward equality and freedom and that today is not a culmination of our efforts, but a continuation of them.