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Statues and Busts in the U.S. Capitol: Collections and Authorities

The United States Capitol is home to hundreds of works of art. Among them are a number of statues and busts, including the National Statuary Hall Collection and the Senate Vice Presidential Bust Collection, which account for most of the statuary on display in the U.S. Capitol building.

These works of art arrive in the Capitol in different ways. For many years, Congress vested authority to acquire and place art in the Joint Committee on the Library (JCL). Current law provides that the JCL may be involved in the process of accepting future donations of art to Congress, pursuant to authority granted in 1872, particularly with regard to changes in the National Statuary Hall Collection, discussed below. In addition to those authorities, in 1988, Congress assigned responsibility to provide for works of fine art and other property for display in the Capitol to the Capitol Preservation Commission. Similar authorities were granted to the House and Senate through the House of Representatives Fine Arts Board, the Senate Commission on Art, and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration for art in their office buildings and respective wings of the Capitol.

National Statuary Hall Collection

Created in 1864, the National Statuary Hall Collection contains two statues from each state. Under the law, the JCL maintains final approval over the design of these statues. It is up to each individual state to choose who is honored and to pay for the design, creation, and delivery of a new statue to Washington, DC, and removal of an outgoing statue, which becomes the property of the state when it leaves the collection.

In 2000, states were authorized to replace statues in the National Statuary Hall Collection. Nine states have replaced a total of 10 statues. For a list of replaced statues, see CRS Report R42812, *National Statuary Hall Collection: Background and Legislative Options*. **Figure 1** depicts the most recent additions to the collection: Amelia Earhart, from Kansas, and Mary McLeod Bethune, from Florida.

Senate Vice Presidential Bust Collection

In 1885, the Senate authorized the acquisition of the first vice presidential bust for Henry Wilson, who served as the 18th Vice President (1873-1875), shown in **Figure 2**. In 1886, the Senate authorized placement of marble busts of each Vice President, in niches of the Senate chamber.

In 1947, oversight of the acquisition of vice presidential busts was transferred from the Senate Committee on the Library to the Committee on Rules and Administration. Each bust is acquired by the Architect of the Capitol, with the committee's approval.

Figure 1. Most Recent Additions to the National Statuary Hall Collection: Amelia Earhart (KS) and Mary McLeod Bethune (FL)



Source: Architect of the Capitol.

Other Methods of Acquiring Statues

In addition to the established processes for the National Statuary Hall Collection and the Vice Presidential Bust Collection, Congress also acquires statues and busts by commission or receives art by donation.

Figure 2. Bust of Vice President Henry Wilson



Source: U.S. Senate, *Senate Vice Presidential Bust Collection*.

Commission Artwork

In some cases, Congress has chosen to commission, or purchase, artwork to commemorate an event or the

importance of an individual to the United States. For example, in the 109th Congress (2005-2006), Congress authorized the JCL to commission a statue of Rosa Parks for placement in the Capitol (P.L. 109-116). The Rosa Parks statue was installed and dedicated in 2013. **Figure 3** shows the Rosa Parks statue located in National Statuary Hall, although it is not part of the National Statuary Hall Collection.

Figure 3. Rosa Parks Statue in the Capitol



Source: Architect of the Capitol,

Donation of Artwork

Historically, Congress has accepted donated artwork for display in the Capitol. To accept a work of art commissioned and paid for by a third-party entity, Congress has historically passed legislation authorizing the acceptance of the work. Congress has accepted the donations of numerous works of art. These works have been donated by various individuals and groups, including private citizens, social organizations, military organizations, and foreign governments. **Figure 4** shows the following donations:

- Statue of Ulysses S. Grant (1899; S.J.Res. 75, 51st Congress);
- Bust of Raoul Wallenberg—a Swedish citizen who worked to save thousands of Hungarian Jews during World War II (1994; H.Con.Res. 222, 103rd Congress); and
- Bust of Sojourner Truth—an abolitionist and women’s suffrage advocate who worked to end slavery and to aid newly freed slaves following the Civil War (2006; P.L. 109-427).

Figure 4. Examples of Statues and Busts Donated to Congress



Source: Architect of the Capitol, *Capitol Campus Art*,

Legislation, 117th Congress (2021-2022)

H.R. 8237, the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 2023, provides for the removal of all Confederate statues and busts from any publicly accessible area of the United States Capitol. The bill also provides for the removal of a bust of Roger Brooke Taney; and the statues of Charles Brantley Aycock, John Caldwell Calhoun, and James Paul Clarke. On June 24, 2022, H.R. 8237 was reported by the House Appropriations Committee and placed on the Union Calendar.

H.R. 3005, a bill “To direct the Joint Committee on the Library to replace the bust of Roger Brooke Taney in the Old Supreme Court Chamber of the United States Capitol with a bust of Thurgood Marshall to be obtained by the Joint Committee on the Library and to remove certain statues from areas of the United States Capitol which are accessible to the public, to remove all statues of individuals who voluntarily served the Confederate States of America from display in the United States Capitol, and for other purposes,” was introduced by Representative Steny Hoyer on May 5, 2021. The measure would require removal of the same items described in H.R. 8237, and the acquisition by the JCL of a bust of Thurgood Marshall to be placed in the Capitol’s Old Supreme Court Chamber. On June 29, 2021, H.R. 3005 passed the House. On July 12, 2021, it was received in the Senate and on May 24, 2022 was referred to the committee on Rules and Administration.

If enacted, H.R. 3005 or H.R. 8237 would require the removal of statues from the current National Statuary Hall Collection that meet the legislation’s criteria.

Recently, Congress authorized JCL to obtain statues of former Supreme Court Associate Justices Sandra Day O’Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The Architect of the Capitol is authorized to permanently install the statues in the Capitol or on Capitol Grounds (P.L. 117-111).

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