



Backgrounder

Patricia Arquette's Oscar-waving cry for equal wages rekindled a national conversation about gender equality, but as one Chinese proverb says, "Talk doesn't cook rice." That's why Barbara Ortiz Howard and her nonprofit Women On 20s went on a mission to get people who care about equality to turn their talk into votes. Those proxies, she hoped – hundreds of thousands of them -- would convince President Obama that it's high time to put a woman's face on American paper currency.

Beginning at the start of Women's History Month March 1st, Howard and her team drove Americans everywhere to the website, www.womenon20s.org to have them vote on their choice for the woman to replace Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill. Treasury code requires that portraits on paper currency be of individuals of great stature, but they have to be deceased. Changing one of those faces can be ordered by the Treasury Secretary or the President without an act of Congress. Last July, President Obama tipped his hat toward the idea of featuring more women on U.S. currency in an off-the-cuff remark during a speech in Missouri.

Howard believes that having a woman's portrait on our paper money "can become a symbol of greater changes to come." Recognizing women's historical accomplishments and contributions to our society by "elevating them to their rightful place alongside men on our money," she says, "is something that's long overdue."

Part of the Women On 20s mission is to have the new "woman's bill" issued in time for the 100th anniversary in 2020 of the passage of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. While no Congressional approval is required, the process of producing a new issue can take several years, from commissioning to design to minting. The organization believes the \$20 bill is ripe for change. It's due for a redesign in keeping with efforts to prevent counterfeiting. But more importantly, Howard argues, President Jackson was responsible for signing the "Indian Removal

Act of 1830” that resulted in the death of thousands of Native Americans in their forced relocation West, creating what is known in history books as “The Trail of Tears.” What’s more, Jackson was a fierce opponent of central banking and paper currency, favoring “hard money” backed by gold and silver.

Howard, owner of an exterior building restoration company outside of New York City, is no stranger to the challenges of working in a male-dominated business. She has long been irked by the absence of a woman’s image on our paper money. A few years ago she decided to try and do something about it by launching the Women On 20s campaign and in March of 2014 she teamed up with her friend Susan Ades Stone, a journalist, to do it. They took their inspiration from their daughters Dylan and Sylvia, and their athletic, “sporty-girl” friends. Howard explained, “As they grew up I wanted to honor their individuality, pride and expectations that they’ll be valued as women who can and will succeed on a level playing field with men.”

Ades Stone, Women On 20s executive director and strategist, says she shaped the campaign not only to achieve the goal of getting a woman’s portrait on the \$20 bill, but to educate and stimulate conversation -- "not just a national conversation, but conversation at every dinner table in America.” By recognizing the accomplishments of the 15 women on the slate of candidates, she said, "we succeeded in honoring all women. The idea was to give as many Americans as possible a chance to take part in something so much larger than just changing a face on a bill."

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