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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

June 19, 2015

The Honorable Jack Lew
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Lew:

I am strongly supportive of your announcement that a notable woman will finally be featured on America's currency. Women have made remarkable contributions to the shaping of our nation, and shamefully, these contributions have consistently failed to garner the attention and praise they so greatly deserve. However, I am concerned with your choice to replace our nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, on the ten dollar bill, as opposed to replacing Andrew Jackson on the twenty dollar bill, which had been initially proposed and is the more utilized note.

The individuals that your predecessors have chosen to feature on our currency are a statement of who we are as a country and the ideals and morals we represent. An orphaned immigrant from the Caribbean, Alexander Hamilton made many significant contributions to make this country what it is today. Hamilton was General George Washington's chief staff aide during the Revolutionary War, one of the most influential interpreters of the U.S. Constitution, a passionate advocate for the abolition of slavery, and the founder of the nation's financial system. As one of the primary authors of the Federalist Papers, Hamilton wrote eloquently about the importance of ratifying our beloved Constitution. Finally, an abolitionist, Hamilton was responsible for America's transformation from a rural agrarian society dependent on slavery into a modern industrial economy based on freedom and new industries in order to secure our economic independence.

In light of Hamilton's extraordinary contributions to establishing this great nation, I question the decision to remove Hamilton from the ten dollar bill while President Andrew Jackson continues to be featured on the twenty dollar bill. I am a lifelong yellow dog Democrat. While President Jackson is celebrated for founding the modern Democratic Party, his populist achievements and his military prowess, he was also a slaveholder responsible for the Trail of Tears, which forced southeastern Native American tribes into mass migrations westward during the 1830s, resulting in thousands of Native American deaths. The United States has a painful history in its treatment of Native Americans, which President Jackson contributed to, and we are still working to rectify the horrific actions taken. Additionally, President Jackson was a fierce opponent of the central banking system and paper currency, making him an ironic choice to be immortalized on our currency.

As you know, the American public's grass roots campaign to redesign the twenty dollar bill, Women On 20s, rightfully garnered the support of many Americans. I agree with supporters of this campaign who, like you, believe America's currency is a way for our nation to make a statement about who we are and what we stand for. I understand this decision was made with the goal of having a new bill in circulation before the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment that granted women the right to vote. While I appreciate the significance of coordinating the release of the new bill with the anniversary of the 19th Amendment, this decision should not be made at the expense of featuring the most worthy Americans on our currency.

Additionally, I would like to learn more about the options currently being discussed for the redesign of the ten dollar bill, such as producing two bills or having both portraits on the same bill. In order to properly recognize women's contributions to this country, I believe a woman should have her own space on our currency, and on a more utilized denomination. As you know, in 2014, there were 8.1 billion twenty dollar bills in circulation, compared with only 1.9 billion ten dollar notes.

The decision to add a woman to our paper currency is an important step forward for our nation and I share the excitement about this prospect from women across our nation. But in celebrating women's invaluable contributions to our democracy, I reiterate my deep concern with the effort to remove Alexander Hamilton from the ten dollar bill rather than replacing President Jackson with a woman on the more heavily utilized twenty dollar bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to work with you to preserve Alexander Hamilton's place on our currency while elevating a woman to a place that is today reserved exclusively for the men who shaped American history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Pascrell, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress