

WIRED

At the White House's United State of Women Summit, a Call for More

“THAT’S A LOT of women,” my Uber driver mutters as we round the corner outside the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington DC. I look out the window to see he’s right. The sidewalks are absolutely swarming with women—hundreds of women—all of them awaiting entry to the White House’s United State of Women Summit, the first in history.

Inside, thousands more fill a cavernous convention hall, where they browse exhibits set up by groups like End Rape on Campus and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Groups clad in matching pink Planned Parenthood T-shirts weave through the crowd and cling like magnets to Cecile Richards, their organization’s embattled president, who was the brunt of Congress’s many attacks last year. Together, they snap selfies. Overhead, the speakers blast back-to-back women’s empowerment anthems: “No Scrubs.” “Natural Woman.” “Run the World (Girls).”

In many ways, today’s United State of Women conference feels like a celebration of how far women have come. And we have come far. Last week, nearly a century after women got the right to vote, Hillary Clinton clinched a major party’s presumptive presidential nomination—a major milestone in United States history.

The goal of the summit, however, is not to just talk about how far the country—and the world—has come, but how far we still need to go. The day’s high-profile list of speakers, including President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, First Lady Michelle Obama, and the one and only Oprah Winfrey, plan to discuss a wide-ranging list of issues that still impact women today, from violence and rape culture, to the wage gap and the absence of educational opportunities for women around the world.

But the Summit, importantly, is not just about talk. It’s about action. This morning, the White House announced \$50 million worth of commitments to improve the lives of women and girls around the world, as well as a litany of initiatives that target key gender gaps in society.

One of the major initiatives is the new White House Equal Pay Pledge, through which companies promise to conduct an annual gender pay analysis and reassess their hiring and promoting processes to ensure equity. Already, tech giants including Airbnb, Amazon, Pinterest, Salesforce, Slack, and Spotify have signed the pledge, which is key, given the drastic gender gaps that exist within the tech industry.

The Department of Labor, meanwhile, is updating its sex discrimination guidelines for the first time since the 1970s. And companies including AOL and Oracle are joining in a \$20 million investment in women’s education through the First Lady’s Let Girls Learn Initiative.