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# Women's Suffrage: Fact Sheet

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## Introduction

The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted women the right to vote. This right—known as women's suffrage—was ratified on August 18, 1920: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

As the United States is preparing to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, statistics show that the number of female voters has exceeded the number of male voters in every presidential election since 1964 and that 73.7 million women voted in the 2016 presidential election.<sup>1</sup>

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to the centennial. It contains a brief history of the women's movement; a legislative timeline; current Nineteenth Amendment legislation; and links to historical documents, selected resources, and commemorative events. This fact sheet will be updated as additional centennial information becomes available.

## Brief History

The first women's rights convention was held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York.<sup>2</sup> The first organization advocating for suffrage “irrespective of race, color or sex” was the American Equal Rights Association, formed in 1866.<sup>3</sup> A few years later, the organization split into two groups over disagreements about the Fourteenth and soon-to-be Fifteenth Amendments. The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), out of New York, focused its efforts on securing women the vote through federal legislation, while the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), based in Boston, approached the issue through state legislation.<sup>4</sup>

In 1869, Wyoming became a territory and passed a bill giving women full voting rights.<sup>5</sup> It was nearly a quarter of a century before any other state afforded its women the right to vote. The first federal legislation proposing equal suffrage for men and women on the basis of citizenship was in 1868. The resolution was not debated; it “laid on the table.”<sup>6</sup> The first federal legislation proposing equal voting rights specifically for women was in 1878, but the resolution was not acted upon until 1887, when it was defeated in the Senate by a 16-to-34 vote.

In 1890, the NWSA and the AWSA reunited to become the National American Woman Suffrage Association, coordinating the national women's movement and finding success in individual states. Between 1893 and 1918, women won full or partial voting rights in 20 states.<sup>7</sup> At the

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<sup>1</sup> Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, “Gender Differences in Voter Turnout,” at <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/genderdiff.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> National Park Service, “Woman's Suffrage History Timeline,” at <https://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/womens-suffrage-history-timeline.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Stanton, Susan Anthony, and Matilda Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 2 (Rochester, NY: Charles Mann, 1887), p. 173, at <https://archive.org/stream/historyofwomansu02stanuoft#page/172/mode/2up>.

<sup>4</sup> National Women's History Museum, “Suffragists Organize: American Woman Suffrage Association,” at <http://www.crusadeforthevote.org/nwsa-organize>.

<sup>5</sup> 1869 Wyo. Session Laws 371, An Act to Grant to Women of Wyoming Territory the Right of Suffrage and to Hold Office, Library of Congress, at <https://www.loc.gov/item/awhbbib000036/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess. (December 10, 1868), p. 38, at <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llcg&fileName=085/llcg085.db&recNum=241>.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Morin, “Political Culture and Suffrage in an Anglo-American Women's West,” *Women's Rights Law Reporter*,

federal level, resolutions were proposed and hearings were held every few years, but there were no further votes on women's suffrage. On March 3, 1913, thousands of women participated in a women's suffrage procession in downtown Washington, DC. They were met with resistance and could proceed only with the assistance of the U.S. Army. The treatment of the women drew worldwide attention and helped to reinvigorate the women's suffrage movement.<sup>8</sup> The House of Representatives passed and adopted a resolution for women's suffrage in early 1918. During that year, the Senate held extensive debates and President Woodrow Wilson delivered a presidential address on the Senate floor in support of voting rights for women. However, the resolution failed by narrow margins twice, before passing both chambers of Congress in summer 1919. The proposed amendment, H.J.Res. 1, was then sent to the states for ratification. On August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36<sup>th</sup> state to approve the amendment.<sup>9</sup> On August 26, 1920, the U.S. Secretary of State verified that the required number of authenticated ratification documents had been received and added the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

## **Women's Suffrage Legislative Timeline**

The following selected highlights track the legislative path toward women's suffrage.

December 7, 1868: Joint Resolution, S.J.Res. 180,<sup>10</sup> proposes an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting suffrage on the basis of citizenship—the first proposed amendment to grant equal suffrage to men and women. The bill was never acted upon.<sup>11</sup>

January 10, 1878: Joint Resolution, S.J.Res. 12, proposes an amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibiting suffrage on the basis of sex. The first proposed amendment to specify women's suffrage.

January 9, 1882: The U.S. Senate forms a Select Committee on Woman Suffrage.

June 5, 1882: The Senate Select Committee on Woman Suffrage reports a constitutional amendment.

December 8, 1886, and January 25, 1887: The Senate debates and votes on women's suffrage. The first Senate vote on women's suffrage fails 16 to 34.

July 31, 1913: Joint Resolution, S.J.Res. 1, proposes an amendment to the U.S. Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women, together with the Report of the Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage recommending its passage.

January 10, 1918: The House adopts H.J. Res. 200 with a vote of 274 to 136.

May 6, 1918–October 3, 1918: The Senate holds extensive debates on H.J. Res. 200 over a five-month period, including May 6, May 10, June 6, June 14, June 20, June 27, July 2, August 5, August 8, August 12, August 22, September 26, September 27, September 28, September 30, October 1, and October 3.

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vol. 19, no.1 (Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey, 1997), pp. 17-38.

<sup>8</sup> National Park Service, "1913 Woman Suffrage Procession," at <https://www.nps.gov/articles/woman-suffrage-procession1913.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> A proposed amendment requires ratification by three-fourths of the States before becoming part of the Constitution.

<sup>10</sup> This joint resolution was designated Senate Resolution (S.R.) 180 based on naming conventions in use at that time. Today, joint resolutions are designated S.J.Res or H.J.Res.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Senate, "Woman Suffrage Centennial: The Senate and Women's Fight for the Vote," at <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/People/Women/WomanSuffrage2019.htm>.

September 30, 1918: President Woodrow Wilson addresses the U.S. Senate in support of women's suffrage.

October 1, 1918: The Senate votes on H.J.Res. 200 but is short the necessary two-thirds majority by two votes. The resolution fails 53 to 31.

October 3, 1918: The Senate motions to reconsider the vote. The motion was debated and agreed to.

February 10, 1919: The Senate votes on H.J.Res. 200 again but is short the required two-thirds majority by one vote. The resolution fails 55 to 29.

May 21, 1919: The House adopts H.J.Res. 1 by a 304-to-89 vote. The resolution is sent to the Senate.

June 4, 1919: The Senate adopts H.J.Res. 1 by a 56-to-25 vote, sending the constitutional amendment to the states for ratification.

June 10, 1919: Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin become first states to approve the amendment.

August 18, 1920: Tennessee becomes the 36<sup>th</sup> state to approve the amendment, satisfying the constitutional threshold of passage in three-quarters of the states.

August 26, 1920: U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby certifies the ratification, officially adding the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

## States That Passed Full Universal Women's Suffrage Before the Nineteenth Amendment

Fifteen states passed full universal women's suffrage prior to the Nineteenth Amendment's passage (see **Table 1**). Six additional states—Illinois, North Dakota, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Arkansas, and Texas—enacted partial suffrage prior to the Nineteenth Amendment.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1. Women's Suffrage Legislation, by State, 1869-1918**

Year of Passage	State	Legislation
1869	Wyoming	1869 Wyo. Session Laws 371
1893	Colorado	1893 Colo. Sess. Laws 256
1896	Utah	Utah Const. art. IV, § I
1896	Idaho	Idaho Const. art. VI, § II
1910	Washington	Wash. Const. art. VI, § I, amend. V
1911	California	Cal. Const. art. II, § I
1912	Arizona	Ariz. Const. art. VII, § II, XV
1912	Kansas	Kan. Const. art. V, § VIII
1912	Oregon	Or. Const. art. IV, § II
1914	Montana	Mont. Const. I, art. IV, § II

<sup>12</sup> Full universal women's suffrage is granted through a constitutional amendment and ensures women's right to vote in all types of elections, including presidential elections. Partial women's suffrage is granted through legislative acts and gives partial or limited voting rights to women on matters of schools, taxes, and bond issues. Karen M. Morin, "Political Culture and Suffrage in an Anglo-American Women's West," in *Women's Rights Law Reporter*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1997), pp. 20-21.

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1914	Nevada	Nev. Const. art. II, § I
1917	New York	N.Y. Const. art. II, § I
1918	Michigan	Mich. Const. art. II, § I
1918	Oklahoma	Okla. Const. art. III, § I
1918	South Dakota	S.D. Const. art. VII, § II

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**Source:** Congressional Research Service.

## Recent Legislation Related to the Nineteenth Amendment

### 116<sup>th</sup> Congress

H.Res. 1046, Supporting the designation of August 2020 as National Women's Suffrage Month.

S.Res. 648, A resolution designating August 2020 as "National Women's Suffrage Month."

H.Res. 354, Celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, providing for women's suffrage, to the Constitution of the United States.

S.Res. 212, Celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, providing for women's suffrage, to the Constitution of the United States.

H.Res. 272, Affirming that all men and women are created equal.

H.R. 473, To authorize the Every Word We Utter Monument to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs, and for other purposes.

H.Res. 2423, Women's Suffrage Centennial Commemorative Coin Act.

S. 1235, Women's Suffrage Centennial Commemorative Coin Act.

### 115<sup>th</sup> Congress

H.Res. 1105, Designating Salt Lake City, Utah, as the western center of the centennial commemoration of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, in coordination with Better Days 2020, and designating Cheyenne, Wyoming, Denver, Colorado, Helena, Montana, and Seneca Falls, New York, as sister cities in those celebrations.

S. 847, Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission Act.

### 114<sup>th</sup> Congress

H.R. 1721, To reauthorize appropriations for the National Women's Rights History Project Act.

## Selected Resources

*American Journalism: A Journal of Media History*, "Women's Suffrage and the Media." A database and resource site with links to multimedia primary and secondary sources.

Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument. Home to the National Woman's Party. Originally a lobbying organization to promote women's suffrage, the group now focuses on educating the public about the women's rights movement. The monument has a museum, library, and archives on-site and a collection of stories online.

Library of Congress, “Women’s Suffrage Teacher’s Guide.” Historical context, teaching suggestions, and links to online resources. The Library of Congress also has several digital collections on women’s suffrage.

Middle Tennessee State University’s Walker Library, “Discovering American Women’s History Online.” Links to a wide variety of digital collections of primary sources regarding women’s suffrage.

National Archives’ Digital Classroom Teaching with Documents, “Lesson Plan: Woman Suffrage and the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.” Historical documents and a script that the National Archives commissioned about the decades-long struggle entitled “Failure is Impossible.”

National Endowment for the Humanities, “The Forgotten Suffragists.” Tells how the national memory of the Nineteenth Amendment has changed over time.

National Museum of African American History and Culture, “Five You Should Know: African American Suffragists.” Highlights five African American suffragettes who fought for women’s and civil rights.

National Park Service, “Women’s Rights: Discover How the Fight for Civil Rights Can Change the World.” The story of the first Women’s Rights Convention held in Seneca Falls, NY, on July 19-20, 1848.

National Women’s History Project, “How Women Won the Vote.” A collection of articles and state commemorations.

National Women’s History Museum, “Crusade for the Vote.” An online resource center with articles, primary and educational resources, and a timeline that tells the history of the Suffrage Movement in the United States.

The U.S. House of Representatives, “Women Must Be Empowered.” The legislative story of women’s suffrage. See also “I’m No Lady; I’m a Member of Congress: Women Pioneers on Capitol Hill, 1917-1934.” A description of the women’s rights movement from 1840 to 1920 and a collection of essays about the continuing challenges for women legislators.

The United States Senate, “The Senate and Women’s Fight for the Vote.” A recitation and timeline of the Senate and women’s fight for the vote.

## **Commemorative Events and Exhibits<sup>13</sup>**

2020 Women’s Vote Centennial Initiative, “2020 Centennial Exhibits.” A collaboration of women-centered institutions, organizations, and scholars from across the United States, working to ensure that this anniversary, and the 72-year fight to achieve it, are commemorated and celebrated throughout the United States.

History, Art & Archives, United States House of Representatives, “Jeannette Rankin’s Historic Election: A Century of Women in Congress.” An exhibit at the U.S. Capitol that tells the 100-year history of women in Congress through oral histories, biographies, documents, and artifacts.

Library of Congress, “Shall Not Be Denied: Women Fight For the Vote.” The exhibition draws from the Library’s extensive collection of personal papers of prominent women and the

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<sup>13</sup> Many in-person commemorative events and exhibits have been rescheduled or moved to an online-only format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check individual organizations’ websites for the latest information.

organizational records of women's suffrage groups, including documents, images, video, and audio recordings.

National Archives Museum, "Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote." Tells the story behind ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment through exhibits, programs, and special events.

Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, "Votes for Women: A Portrait of Persistence." Tells the story of women's fight for equality through an array of early photographic portraits, paintings, engravings, works on paper, lithographs, video, newspapers, postcards, books, ballots, banners, fliers, a china set, embroidery, and pennants. Selected portraits from the exhibit are available online.

## **Related CRS Report**

CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*, coordinated by Jacob R. Straus

CRS Report R45125, *Women's History Month Speech Resources: Fact Sheet*, by Elizabeth C. Larson

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