

“WOMEN MUST BE EMPOWERED”



*The U.S. House of Representatives
and the Nineteenth Amendment*

On the cover: Manufactured by the Whitehead & Hoag Company in Newark, New Jersey, this dime-sized button announced support for women's voting rights. The gold background was emblematic of the suffrage movement's primary color, and the phrase "Votes for Women" was one of its main rallying cries.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

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HISTORY, ART & ARCHIVES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 2019

House Calendar No. 1.

66TH CONGRESS,
1ST SESSION.

H. J. RES. 1.

[Report No. 1.]

4

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

MAY 19, 1919.

Mr. MANN introduced the following joint resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Woman Suffrage and ordered to be printed.

MAY 20, 1919.

Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

JOINT RESOLUTION

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women.

1 *Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives*
2 *of the United States of America in Congress assembled*
3 *(two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the*
4 following article is proposed as an amendment to the Con-
5 stitution, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as
6 part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of
7 three-fourths of the several States.

8 “ARTICLE ———.

9 “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall
10 not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any
11 State on account of sex.

12 “Congress shall have power to enforce this article by
13 appropriate legislation.”

Early in the afternoon on May 21, 1919, Representative James Mann of Illinois called up the first bill of the new Congress, House Joint Resolution 1.

Widely known as the Susan B. Anthony amendment, H.J. Res. 1 had been one of more than 1,200 pieces of legislation introduced two days earlier on Opening Day of the 66th Congress (1919–1921), a special session called by President Woodrow Wilson to address the fallout from the Great War. Many of the bills addressed veterans' issues, education, prohibition, and even daylight savings time. Most were mundane. H.J. Res. 1, however, was anything but.

Named for one of America's foremost women's rights champions, the Susan B. Anthony amendment was only 39 words long, but it was revolutionary in its intent and sweeping despite its brevity: "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. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

Seventeen months earlier, in January 1918, the House had passed a nearly identical bill only to watch it die in the Senate. Women from all over the country packed the visitors' gallery to witness the House set in motion a constitutional process that promised to change the course of American history. There was a sense of uncertainty that day, as many wondered if it had the votes to pass.

There was no such concern in 1919. In what was described as a "suffrage landslide," the House passed the amendment 304 to 89 as cheers erupted in the gallery. The Senate followed suit two weeks later, and the states finally ratified it in August 1920.

In a sense, the success of H.J. Res. 1 was not the end of the women's suffrage story but more like the middle chapter of a much longer narrative of voting rights in America. For more than a century, women's rights advocates had worked to secure equal opportunity and equal access to the vote. But in many areas of the country, what contemporaries called "woman suffrage" remained a contested and unfulfilled right long after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.

In May 1919, however, the obstacles to equality had started to fall. "Never was there a more splendid response to the movement for justice to women now sweeping the world," said Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, "than the quick and gallant action of the House of Representatives."

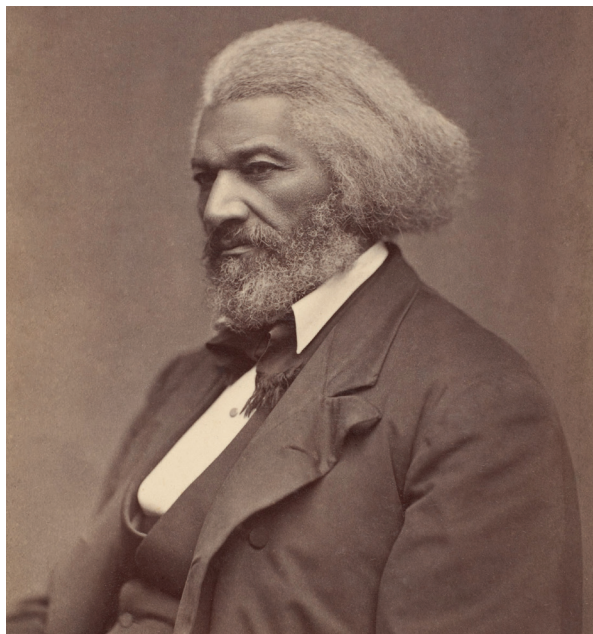
The Origins of the Women's Rights Movement

The struggle for women's rights in America predates the founding of the Republic. On March 31, 1776, months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Abigail Adams composed a letter to her husband, future President John Adams, with advice for the American revolutionaries as they drafted a "new Code of Laws" for an independent nation. "Remember the Ladies," she wrote, urging her husband and his compatriots to guarantee the rights of women. If not, she warned, "we are determined to foment a Rebellion [*sic*], and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation."

Despite her appeal, Abigail Adams's rebellion simmered below the surface in nineteenth-century America, especially before the Civil War, as women were deliberately marginalized

House Joint Resolution 1, proposing an amendment to the Constitution extending voting rights to women, was introduced in the House on May 19, 1919.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration



In 1848 abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke at the Seneca Falls Convention in support of women's voting rights. The masthead atop Douglass's newspaper, *The North Star*, famously declared "Right is of no sex—Truth is of no color."

Image courtesy of the Gilman Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

in politics. New Jersey had conducted a brief experiment with women's suffrage only to revoke it in 1807. Shut out of the polls, women nevertheless found ways to make their mark on politics. Women's rights advocates found allies and opportunities for political activism in the movement to abolish slavery, and many anti-slavery organizations welcomed women as vocal political agents and supported the nascent women's movement as a common struggle against injustice. Initially, the antebellum women's movement was small and mostly unorganized, with a focus on attaining equality before the law rather than the vote.

Introduced by Representative George Julian of Indiana in December 1868, this handwritten copy of House Joint Resolution 371 proposed an amendment to the Constitution granting all American citizens the right to vote regardless of "race, color, or sex."

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

The first attempt to organize a national movement for women's rights occurred in Seneca Falls, New York, on July 19 and 20, 1848. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a young mother from upstate New York, and the Quaker abolitionist Lucretia Mott, about 300 people—most of whom were women—attended the Seneca Falls Convention to outline a collective agenda for the women's rights movement. Stanton drafted a "Declaration of Sentiments" that echoed the preamble of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal." In a list of resolutions, Stanton cataloged economic and educational inequities, restrictive laws on marriage and property rights, and social and cultural norms that prevented women from enjoying "all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States." Stanton also demanded the "sacred right to the elective franchise" for women—despite objections from Mott and others who considered this provision too radical. The convention approved the voting rights resolution after abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke in support of it.

By the 1850s, a community of women activists was protesting the social and institutional barriers that limited women's rights. They questioned restrictions on women's clothing, property rights, and marriage. The movement grew as women's rights advocates held conventions, circulated ideas in an emerging network of newspapers, and collected thousands of signatures in petition drives to change state laws.

A decade later, the America that emerged from the Civil War and took shape during Reconstruction offered a political opening for women to demand suffrage. After the emancipation of four million

Joint Resolution proposing
an amendment to the Constitution
of the United States.

Be it resolved by the senate
and House of Representatives of the
United States of America in con-
gress assembled (two thirds concurring)
that the following article be sub-
mitted to the legislatures of the sev-
eral states; and when adopted
by three fourths of the states, shall
become a part of the Constitution
of the United States, and ^{be} known
as article fifteenth of amendments
to said Constitution.

Article 15. The right of suffrage
in the United States shall be based
upon citizenship, ^{and shall be regulated by congress;} and all citizens of
the United States, whether native
or naturalized, shall enjoy this right
equally, without any distinction or
discrimination whatever founded
on race, color, or sex.



Carved by Adelaide Johnson and on display in the Capitol Rotunda, this monument commemorating three founders of America's women's suffrage movement was given to Congress in 1921 and features Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott.

Image courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol

enslaved African Americans, Radical Republicans in Congress proposed a constitutional amendment extending citizenship rights and equal protection under the law to all “persons born or naturalized in the United States.” Whether those rights would include women was unclear, and debates in both houses of Congress focused on defining access to citizenship. Many Members praised the virtues of “manhood suffrage” and expressed concern about the inclusive language in early drafts of the proposed amendment. Ultimately, the Fourteenth Amendment went as far as to define voting rights as the exclusive privilege of “male citizens”—explicitly adding gender to the Constitution for the first time.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton objected to the use of “that word ‘male,’” and during the debate over the proposed amendment she sent to Congress the first of many petitions supporting women's suffrage. On January 23, 1866, Representative James Brooks of New York read the petition along with an accompanying letter by Susan B. Anthony, a Massachusetts teacher, into

the record. Some Members, including George Julian of Indiana, welcomed the opportunity to enfranchise women. In December 1868, Julian proposed a constitutional amendment to guarantee citizens the right to vote “without any distinction or discrimination whatever founded on race, color, or sex.” His resolution was never voted on, and even Congressmen who otherwise supported expanding the electorate were not willing to support women's suffrage.

Organizing for the Vote

In 1869 Congress ignored calls to enshrine women's suffrage in the Constitution and passed a concise guarantor of the voting rights of African-American men. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified by the states in 1870, declared that the right to vote “shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” That year, Joseph Rainey of South Carolina became the first of 20 African-American men elected to the House during the nineteenth century.

During the congressional battle over the Fifteenth Amendment, Stanton and Anthony led a lobbying effort to ensure that voting rights for women were included in the legislation. With increasing frequency, Stanton denounced the extension of voting rights to African Americans while restrictions on women remained. She praised the virtues of “educated white women,” and warned that new immigrants and African Americans were not prepared to exercise the rights of citizens. Stanton's rhetoric alienated African-American women involved in the fight for women's rights, and similar ideas about race and gender persisted in the women's suffrage movement well into the twentieth century.

Over the next 30 years, women's suffrage organizations struggled against forces in American society that remained opposed to women's voting rights. On Capitol Hill, for

instance, California Senator Aaron Sargent proposed a woman's suffrage amendment in 1878, but it was never brought to a vote. Throughout the Gilded Age, legislators continued to offer women's suffrage amendments in the House and Senate without success.

Across the country, the movement had been divided over whether to pursue suffrage at the federal or state level, but without powerful allies in Congress it coalesced under the banner of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890. Led initially by Stanton and then by Anthony, NAWSA worked as a nonpartisan organization with the goal of securing the vote using a state-by-state march toward a federal amendment.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, civil rights and voting rights came under constant attack in large sections of the country as state policies and court decisions effectively nullified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. As the system of segregation known as Jim Crow crystallized in the South, African Americans saw protections for their civil and political rights disappear, and few Members of Congress were willing to advocate for any additional federal safeguards.

In an 1898 address to NAWSA, African-American activist Mary Church Terrell decried these injustices, while remaining hopeful "not only in the prospective enfranchisement of my sex but in the emancipation of my race." African-American suffragists like Terrell continued to struggle to expand access to the ballot. Their voices, however, could be heard only outside the halls of Congress. In the House and Senate, those voices had fallen silent: from 1901 to 1929 no African-American legislator served in Congress. The promise of the Reconstruction Era—that American democracy could be more just and more representative—was undermined by an organized political movement working to restrict voting rights and exclude millions of Americans from the political process.

Western Progress

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a surge of volunteerism among middle-class women galvanized the women's suffrage movement. Women became prominent activists in progressive campaigns, joined women's clubs and professional societies, took up the temperance cause, and participated in civic and charity organizations. Working-class women organized labor unions and collaborated with middle-class women in organizations such as the Women's Trade Union League and the National Consumers League. NAWSA hoped this outpouring of activism would eventually lead to voting rights at the state and federal levels.

Activist, writer, educator, and suffragist, Mary Church Terrell was one of the country's most influential African-American voices for women's rights. Before and after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, she worked to ensure that black women had equal access to the vote.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress





Published in 1915, “The Awakening” depicts a woman, the personification of Liberty, carrying a torch for suffrage as she walks across the United States. Emblazoned on her billowing cloak, the phrase “Votes for Women” was one of the suffrage movement’s principal slogans. Before passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, women in most western states had won the right to vote, but many eastern states had not yet enfranchised women.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Although the push for national voting legislation remained a major focus of the movement, western states emerged as promising venues for significant victories in the struggle for women’s suffrage. In 1869 the territorial legislature of Wyoming granted voting rights to women. Two decades later, when Congress considered Wyoming for statehood, opponents of women’s suffrage in the House vehemently objected to this provision, calling it unconstitutional.

Nevertheless, Wyoming was admitted as a state in 1890, and six years later Utah also entered the Union with women’s suffrage in its state constitution. Territorial governments had extended the vote to women, in part, as an

incentive to attract more women residents. With men moving in large numbers to the West to take jobs in labor-intensive industries such as mining, women’s suffrage was also meant to help established families in the territories maintain political influence.

Efforts to achieve suffrage at the state level were national in scope, though much of the earliest success was confined to the West. Between 1870 and 1910, women organized 480 campaigns across 33 states to put women’s suffrage on the ballot. A total of 17 referenda were held, but this strategy succeeded only in two western states: Colorado in 1893 and Idaho in 1896. At the time, women’s suffrage meant different things in

different states. Some allowed women to vote in state and national elections, while others limited women to voting on local issues.

Not until 1910 did women secure full voting rights in an additional state, this time in Washington. Between 1911 and 1914, more states extended the franchise to women: California, Arizona, Kansas, Oregon, Nevada, and Montana. Women in Montana won the right to vote in 1914 thanks in part to the efforts of future Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin. And in 1917, the lobbying efforts of suffrage groups produced a key referendum victory in the Northeast when New York voted for women's suffrage.

While NAWSA achieved measured victories at the state level, the National Woman's Party (NWP) embraced a more confrontational style. Led by Alice Paul, the NWP adopted the tactics of the women's suffrage movement in England, picketing and conducting rallies and marches to raise public support. Paul drew a younger generation of women to the movement. She helped resuscitate the push for a federal equal rights amendment and relentlessly attacked the administration of President Woodrow Wilson for obstructing the extension of the vote to women.

Democracy at Home and Abroad

President Wilson considered voting rights a matter to be addressed at the state level and had long opposed a federal amendment on women's suffrage. But by early 1917, he found it increasingly difficult to maintain this position. As the United States prepared to enter the Great War, Wilson addressed a Joint Session of Congress to make the case for American intervention abroad. In his speech in the House Chamber on April 2, 1917, Wilson appealed to Americans to join the war effort wholeheartedly. "The world," he said, "must be made safe for democracy." He praised the virtues of "self-governed nations" and predicted a new era in

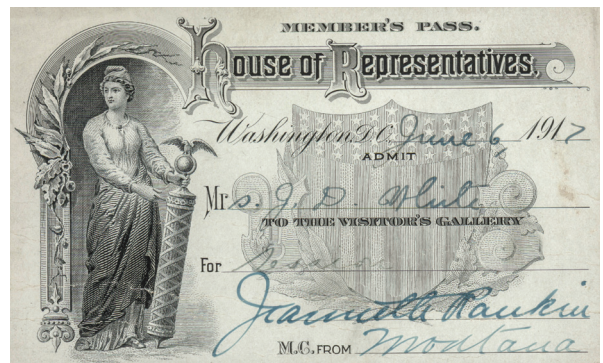
which democracy would become the antidote to war and misery.

As Wilson described the need to bring self-determination to "nations great and small" around the world, Representative Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the first woman elected to Congress, listened intently from the House Floor. Rankin's election to the House in November 1916 catapulted her to celebrity status, and one of her first acts as a Member was to vote against the declaration of war. Rankin was a pacifist, but she nevertheless recognized that the war could be a catalyst for federal action on women's suffrage.

Working alongside suffrage groups, Rankin sought to capitalize on Wilson's wartime rhetoric of democracy to bring women's voting rights to the fore during the 65th Congress (1917–1919). She shrewdly exploited the media spotlight on her office, giving frequent interviews to reporters and authoring with her staff a semiweekly column for the Hearst newspaper syndicate. She rarely passed up an opportunity to address civic groups. By the end of April 1917 she had testified before a Senate committee on women's suffrage and worked with her colleagues to put voting rights on the House agenda. Rankin was set to play an integral role when a women's suffrage amendment finally made it to the House Floor later that Congress.

Representative Jeannette Rankin's promotion of women's rights extended to filling the House Visitors' Galleries with supporters. On June 6, 1917, she provided this gallery pass to Kentucky suffrage leader Alice White.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives



The House Committee on Woman Suffrage

The Judiciary Committee, which had jurisdiction over voting rights, had long been hostile to women's suffrage. As a workaround, California Democrat John E. Raker proposed a new standing committee in the House—the Committee on Woman Suffrage—to consider bills related to women's voting rights, bypassing the Judiciary Committee entirely. Rankin testified on behalf of Raker's proposal in May 1917, and on June 6 the Rules Committee cleared it for debate on the condition that the House pass all pending war measures before the new committee could be brought up for consideration.

Raker's resolution reached the House Floor on September 24. "In this hour, when the life of this Republic is at stake and when American women are responding to the call to duty equally with the men," Rules Committee Chairman Edward Pou of North Carolina stated, it was more vital than ever that the House create a suffrage committee. "We have as a Member of this body the first woman Representative in the American Congress," Pou said to applause. "She will not be the last, Mr. Speaker."

Rankin spoke in favor of the resolution, arguing that Congress needed to lead on the issue in light of the formidable obstacles blocking women's suffrage in the states. "Perhaps it is news to you to know that some of the women of the United States can never be enfranchised except by a Federal amendment," she said, "for the constitutions of some of the States are such that it is practically impossible to amend them."

The measure creating the suffrage committee easily passed, 181 to 107. Afterward, Raker assumed the chairmanship of the new panel, and House leaders accorded Rankin the honor of serving as the Ranking Republican—a rare nod to a first-term Member in an institution where seniority usually dictates legislative power.

A Constitutional Amendment

Opponents of women's suffrage in the House exploited every opportunity to impede the work of the new committee. In December 1917, for instance, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Edwin Yates Webb of North Carolina, submitted an alternative voting-rights amendment to undercut what he called "the suffrage forces." Webb's proposal included a restrictive seven-year ratification window; generally no time limit is imposed on the ratification of constitutional amendments. In something of a compromise, Speaker Champ Clark of Missouri requested that all suffrage measures be reintroduced and referred to Raker's committee, which would then have to report a new bill by January 10, 1918.

Raker's Woman Suffrage Committee lost no time. It began hearings on January 3, 1918, with witnesses testifying for and against the voting-rights amendment. At the hearing, Rankin reinforced the arguments of suffrage advocates and highlighted flaws in the opposition's logic. When former Senator Joseph W. Bailey of Texas testified that the vote should be limited to those able to exercise "all the duties of citizenship," Rankin observed, "We have men in the United States Senate who cannot serve in the Army, and yet they make splendid Senators."

A crush of people, including scores who had arrived early to secure a seat in the House Gallery for the suffrage debate, packed the Capitol on the morning of January 10, 1918. Many were women who had brought lunches in preparation for a long day. NAWSA's leadership—Carrie Chapman Catt and others—were guests of Speaker Clark.

The House Rules Committee delivered an initial victory when it brought the Woman Suffrage Committee's report to the floor and ignored the report of the Judiciary Committee. With Chairman Raker managing debate for Democrats in favor of

the resolution, House Joint Resolution 200, Rankin controlled time for Republican supporters. Two other Members, one Republican and one Democrat, led the opposition for their sides. Only one other woman joined Rankin on the House Floor that day: May Offterdinger, Chairman Raker's chief aide on the Woman Suffrage Committee.

“The Nation Needs Its Women”

As Raker approached a lectern, Massachusetts Republican Joseph Walsh, a suffrage opponent, suddenly asked if the chairman would yield to Rankin to let her open debate. Raker agreed and stepped aside for the Congresswoman from Montana. Rankin began by invoking the

generations of American women who had fought for the right to vote. “For 70 years the women leaders of this country have been asking the Government to recognize this possibility,” she said. Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Clara Barton, and many others “all have asked the Government to permit women to serve more effectively the national welfare.” Noting that this issue now came up in time of war, Rankin asked that women have the chance to serve their country. “To-day, as never before the Nation needs its women—needs the work of their hands and their hearts and their minds,” she said.

To those who believed the issue should be left to the states, she had a simple message: “We

Jeannette Rankin of Montana (right) speaks from the balcony of the National American Woman Suffrage Association headquarters in Washington, DC, on April 2, 1917. Carrie Chapman Catt, the group's president, stands beside her. Rankin was sworn into the 65th Congress later that day.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress





On March 31, 1920, the Mississippi state house of representatives voted down the Nineteenth Amendment, despite the state senate having approved it the day before. This Clifford K. Berryman cartoon, published the next day on April 1, 1920, depicts Mississippi's failure to ratify the women's suffrage amendment as a cruel April Fool's joke.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

mobilized and equipped our Army not State by State but through Congress," she reminded them. "Shall our women, our home defense, be our only fighters in the struggle for democracy who shall be denied Federal action?" This war, she reminded the House, required a commitment from everyone, not just those men at the front but the farmer growing crops, the seamstress making uniforms, and the miner working deep underground.

She concluded her remarks to sustained applause. "Can we afford to allow these men and women to doubt for a single instant the sincerity of our protestations of democracy? How shall we answer

their challenge, gentlemen; how shall we explain to them the meaning of democracy if the same Congress that voted for war to make the world safe for democracy refuses to give this small measure of democracy to the women of our country?"

In a surprise announcement the evening before the debate, President Wilson had declared his support for the amendment, calling it "an act of right and justice." But Rankin's presence that day overshadowed the eleventh-hour White House endorsement, serving as a vivid and powerful reminder that women had assumed a new role in American politics. The eloquence of her example far exceeded any other speech or endorsement made that day.

As a constitutional amendment, the resolution required a two-thirds majority to pass the House, and it won with the thinnest possible margin, 274 to 136. Speaker Clark did not vote but had been prepared to cast the deciding vote in favor if needed. In the galleries, support for the resolution was overwhelming; applause and cheers greeted the announcement.

The celebrations were short-lived. When the Senate finally considered the suffrage amendment 10 months later in early October 1918 it failed in a narrow vote. President Wilson had again come out in support of the legislation, but Senate Democrats, mainly from the South where voting rights had long been restricted to white men, opposed it.

"Simply a Privilege"

From the start, racial and gender discrimination had been woven, in different ways, into the fabric of the debate on women's voting rights in Congress. At its most fundamental level, the women's suffrage amendment threatened to upend both the male-dominated political world and the system of racial segregation that a number of states had erected over the previous 50 years.

Some Members justified their opposition to women's voting rights using commonly held gender stereotypes. "This is no issue to be decided by woman's fears and tears and emotions," warned Edward Winthrop Gray of New Jersey, describing a wave of crises that he believed would follow if the amendment passed. "Your social structure will have gone to smash," he predicted, "and your family, as the unit of society, will have gone to smash." Women, he said, should be free to rely on "man as her God-given protector and champion." Otherwise, American "civilization is a failure and . . . God and nature both have erred in their scheme of things."

Opponents of the amendment also tried to fold their criticisms into larger denunciations of the power of the federal government: a constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote violated what they felt was a state's right to determine the qualifications of its voters. "Our suffragette friends demand the ballot as a 'right,' and in all their literature and public addresses they refer to women as being 'disfranchised,'" Representative Frank Clark of Florida noted in January 1918. "They are absolutely wrong in both of these propositions. Suffrage for either man or woman is not a 'right' but is simply a privilege, to be conferred or withheld at the pleasure of the State."

For years, states across the country had used that very idea to prohibit people of color from voting. Although the Fifteenth Amendment had enfranchised African-American men after the Civil War, a disorienting assortment of discriminatory policies and a complicit federal government continued to make it all but impossible for them to vote. The fact that the Nineteenth Amendment promised to enfranchise African-American women was one of the major reasons a number of southern legislators opposed the legislation.

Even proponents of women's voting rights framed their support using discriminatory justifications.

In her remarks on the amendment in January 1918, for instance, Rankin had appealed to southern Members on matters of race. "The women of the South have stood by you through every trial," she said. "Now they are asking to help you in a big, broad, national way. Are you going to deny them the equipment with which to help you effectively simply because the enfranchisement of a child-race 50 years ago brought you a problem you were powerless to handle? There are more white women of voting age in the South to-day than there are negro men and women together."

Although a number of legislators from the North and East also voted against the amendment, one national newspaper was unequivocal about why the Senate voted it down: "There is no doubt whatever that the attitude of the South on the Negro question barred the passage of the amendment on Tuesday."

Suffragist and peace activist Jeannette Rankin of Montana was elected to Congress in 1916. "I may be the first woman member of Congress," she said when the final votes were counted. "But I won't be the last."

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress



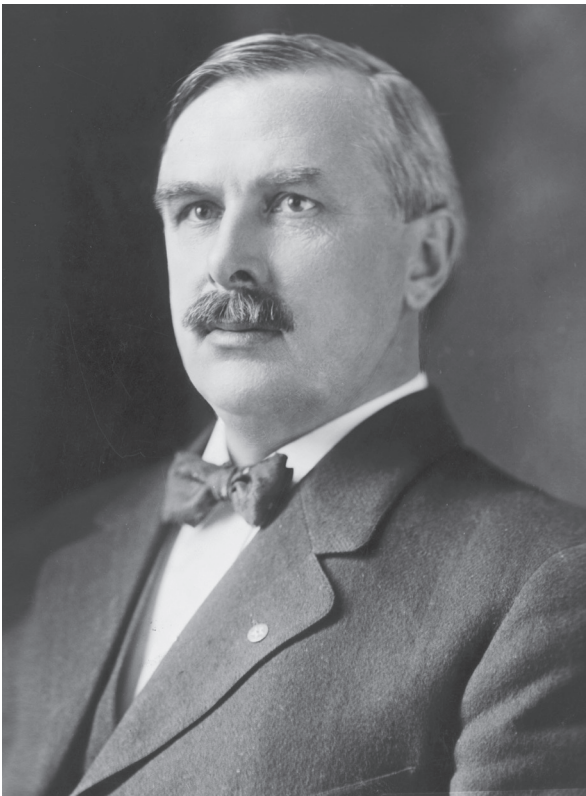
“By the Consent of the Governed”

The failed Senate vote happened only a month before the 1918 midterm elections, and Republicans quickly turned the defeat into a campaign issue. Suffrage became one of a number of themes in the election, but the bill’s failure seemed like a crucial turning point. “The suffrage defeat spells Democrat defeat,” one newspaper wrote in October after the Senate vote. On Election Day in November 1918, Republicans captured a decisive majority in the House and flipped the Senate.

But Rankin, one of the most well-known Republican Representatives, did not return for the 66th Congress; she had been defeated in her

As chairman of the House Committee on Woman Suffrage during the 65th Congress, Representative John Raker of California worked alongside Representative Jeannette Rankin of Montana to pass the first women’s suffrage amendment in the House on January 10, 1918.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

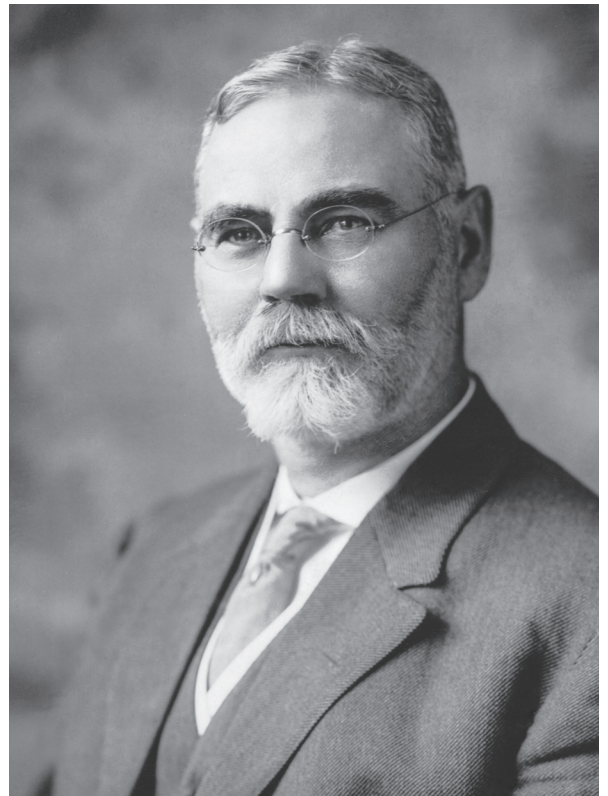


bid for a seat in the Senate. On March 4, 1919, the closing day of the 65th Congress, Rankin said farewell to the House and implored her colleagues to keep up her fight. “I am sorry to leave you before the women of this Nation are enfranchised, but I leave to you, the Members of the Sixty-fifth Congress who will be Members of the Sixty-sixth Congress, the great trust of enfranchising the women of this country.”

In the spring of 1919, Rankin continued her work for women’s rights, sailing across the Atlantic Ocean to attend the International Congress of Women in Zurich, Switzerland. President Wilson, also abroad negotiating the peace treaty to formally end the Great War, called an extraordinary session of Congress to open on

As chairman of the Committee on Woman Suffrage, Representative James Mann of Illinois moved H.J. Res. 1 onto the House Floor for a vote only two days after the House convened in a special session to open the 66th Congress.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress



The Cordova Daily Times

(MEMBER OF ASSOCIATED PRESS)

VOL. 5. NO. 220

CORDOVA, ALASKA, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 1920

PRICE TEN CENTS

WOMEN OF AMERICA WIN RIGHT TO VOTE

Following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment by the states, newspapers across the country—some as far away as the Territory of Alaska—ran bold headlines announcing that women's suffrage had become law.

"Women of America Win Right to Vote," 18 August 1920, Cordova Daily Times, Library of Congress, Chronicling America

May 19, nearly seven months before the customary start of a new Congress. Wilson wanted the 66th Congress to address a number of pressing issues, including wartime appropriations, child labor laws, veterans' issues, and women's suffrage.

Representative James Mann, the former Republican Leader and one of the most powerful legislators on Capitol Hill, wasted no time putting suffrage on the House calendar. Within the first two days of the new session, Mann, frail from a lingering illness but looking to capitalize on the GOP majority, quickly maneuvered the suffrage bill onto the floor as H.J. Res. 1.

The House set aside two hours for debate. Nearly everyone assumed the bill would pass, and many speakers simply reiterated arguments from 1918. Members used the opportunity to register final appeals for and against the amendment, and both parties jockeyed to claim credit. Mann led the arguments in support of suffrage. So many Democrats supported the amendment this time around that Mann sought to maximize political effect by giving Frank Clark, the only member of the Committee on Woman Suffrage who did not support the amendment in 1919, the right to lead the opposition.

Echoing arguments deployed against the suffrage amendment in January 1918, opponents ran

through a list of grievances. According to Clark, the enfranchisement of black women in the South would produce racial turmoil. Calling African-American women "the real leaders in these matters," he feared that black women, having won the right to vote, would "become fanatical on the subject of voting and will reawaken in the negro men an intense and not easily quenched desire to again become a political factor." Like Edwin Yates Webb before him, Clark tried to put a clock on ratification altogether by imposing a seven-year deadline. Supporters of the Nineteenth Amendment were in no mood for this poison pill, however, and voted it down.

Much as they had the year before, proponents of women's suffrage drew on the country's recent experience in the Great War as a principal reason why the amendment should pass. Supporters reminded their colleagues that women had shouldered crushing responsibility and made unimaginable sacrifices during the war. Representative Raker, who had led the Woman Suffrage Committee in the previous Congress, argued that "because of the work women had done, because of the advantage they have been to America in winning the war, because of their loyalty and unselfishness and their ability to cope with all the vicissitudes of war, [they should] be given the same right to participate in their Government as the men have."

By 1919 women had won the right to vote in 15 of the 48 states. During the House debate, Representatives from those states testified about their experiences back home. Edward C. Little of Kansas celebrated the traditional role of women in American society as mothers and homemakers while noting that his state had opened the vote to women seven years earlier to great benefit. “We know of no fireside that has burned more dimly because of any difference of opinion about the use of the ballot,” he said. “To permit the mothers of this country to express their views on important issues will not injure the homes. As I reflect now I realize that every time I followed my mother’s advice I did well.”

For Members like Little, women’s suffrage was simply the right thing to do. “The long and the

Representative Alice Mary Robertson of Oklahoma, the second woman elected to the House and the first woman elected after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, served for one term during the 67th Congress (1921–1923).

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives



short of the whole matter,” he told his colleagues, “is that for centuries you have treated woman as a slave, dragged her over the pages of history by the hair, and then you pretend to think she is an angel, too good to interfere in the affairs of men. Give her now a fixed, reasonable status, as becomes a rational human being like yourself.”

“Equal suffrage for the women of the United States is certain to come,” Adolphus Nelson of Wisconsin told the chamber. “It is futile to stem the ever-growing tide in its favor any longer.” If the momentum of the suffrage movement wasn’t enough, Nelson also believed that denying women the right to vote violated one of America’s founding principles. “Taxation without representation should no longer apply to womankind,” he said. “Real democracy is built on equality and justice and a government by the consent of the governed.”

“To Do Their Part Effectively”

Unlike the close vote the year before, the House vote on May 21, 1919, in favor of the Susan B. Anthony amendment was a landslide, 304 to 89. Two weeks later, the Senate cleared the amendment 56 to 25, with four votes to spare. It took nearly 15 months for the required number of states to ratify the amendment, but on August 26, 1920, U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby officially added the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

The effect of ratification was almost immediate. Only two and a half months later, in November 1920, millions of women voted for the first time in the congressional and presidential elections.

In a less obvious way, the Nineteenth Amendment also expanded the very notion of voting rights. Along with opening access to the ballot box, the amendment redefined who could hold public office and who could vote on the floor of the House and Senate. If women could vote in their home states, they could serve in Washington.

And if they could serve in Washington, they could shape and vote on national policy. Before the Nineteenth Amendment, Jeannette Rankin was the only woman who had ever won a seat in Congress. But starting with the 1920 elections, women have won seats in every Congress (see graph, p. 20).

It is a testament to the larger sense of opportunity inherent in the Nineteenth Amendment that in 1920 the first woman elected to the House after ratification was not someone who had been on the front lines of the suffrage movement, but was instead Alice Mary Robertson of Oklahoma, who had been critical of national suffrage groups and hostile to the idea of women's voting rights in general. Women had won the right to vote in Oklahoma in 1918, and the state had ratified the Nineteenth Amendment on February 28, 1920. But Robertson, who would also become the first woman to preside over a House proceeding, approached her job in Congress far differently from her predecessor. Rankin had gone to Capitol Hill, in part, to represent the interests of women nationally, but Robertson seemed to have no such intention. "I came to Congress to represent my district," she once said, "not women."

Careful observers of Capitol Hill underscored the differences between Rankin and Robertson, questioning how it was that one could follow the other as the first two women in Congress. Only days after the 1920 elections, for instance, an editorial suggested, "This election taught us that women in enormous numbers will attend the polls, but it has given scarcely a hint of what they will do with politics."

Despite the misconception that women would participate in politics as a bloc, the successful campaigns of Rankin and Robertson

demonstrated that women would vote and serve on their own terms, that women had long been active in politics and, regardless of their strategies and beliefs, were going to continue to redefine what was possible in America, this time with the ballot in hand.

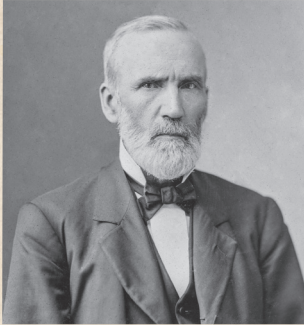
In the near term, the Nineteenth Amendment ushered in gains in representation and political power, but the struggle to ensure that all women had the right to vote and an equal opportunity to do so was just beginning. The draconian policies among the states, which had long prevented people of color from voting, remained in effect after ratification in 1920. For the next 45 years, everyday people pushed back against a system that sought to deny them equal standing and equal access to the ballot box. Those barriers finally started to fall amid the civil rights movement with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Only then did the country move closer to fulfilling the promise of universal suffrage. The struggle for voting rights has been waged in many communities across many generations, making it central to the American experience. The history of that struggle offers lessons that future leaders may draw upon to chart the path forward.

Jeannette Rankin returned to the House in 1941 and served for one final term. For the rest of her life, she championed reforms that she hoped would expand the electorate and make the government more representative of the people. It was a commitment she had long articulated. "The women must be empowered to keep up their own standards, to enforce their own demands," she said during committee testimony in 1917 about the larger relationship between the vote and women in the workforce. "To do their part effectively, the women must be enfranchised."

Amending the Constitution

Congressional Milestones in Women's Suffrage

40th Congress

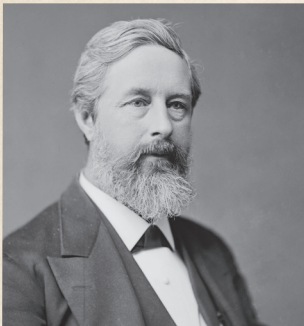


Representative George Julian of Indiana

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

December 8, 1868: Indiana Representative George Julian proposed House Joint Resolution 371, a constitutional amendment that explicitly tied suffrage to citizenship and guaranteed voting rights to all Americans regardless of “race, color, or sex.” Introduced shortly before Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which enfranchised African-American men, Julian’s proposed amendment was never taken up by the House.

45th Congress



Senator Aaron Sargent of California

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

January 10, 1878: Nearly a decade after the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, California Senator Aaron Sargent introduced Senate Resolution 12, a women’s suffrage amendment. A Senate committee considered the bill but did not recommend its passage.

65th Congress



Representative Jeannette Rankin of Montana

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

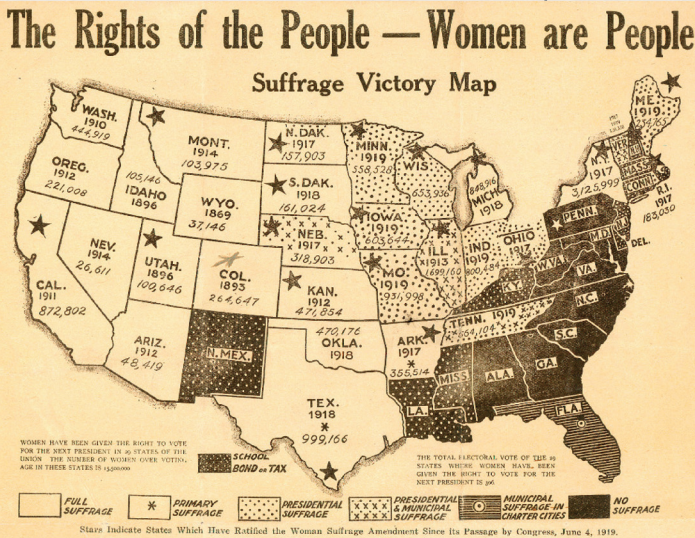
January 10, 1918: The House passed House Joint Resolution 200 by a vote of 274 to 136, becoming the first chamber to pass a women’s suffrage amendment. Montana Representative Jeannette Rankin, the first woman in Congress, led the floor debate. The Senate, however, failed to pass the measure before the 65th Congress expired.

66th Congress

May 21, 1919: The House passed House Joint Resolution 1, which would become the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, 304 to 89.

June 4, 1919: The Senate passed H.J. Res. 1, 56 to 25, sending the constitutional amendment to the states for ratification.

June 10, 1919: Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin became the first states to approve the amendment, beginning a ratification process that lasted more than 14 months.



The stars on this map indicate which states had ratified the Nineteenth Amendment in the months after Congress approved it in the spring of 1919.

Image courtesy of the Library of Virginia

August 18, 1920: Tennessee became the 36th state to approve the amendment, meeting the constitutional threshold of passage in three-quarters of the states.

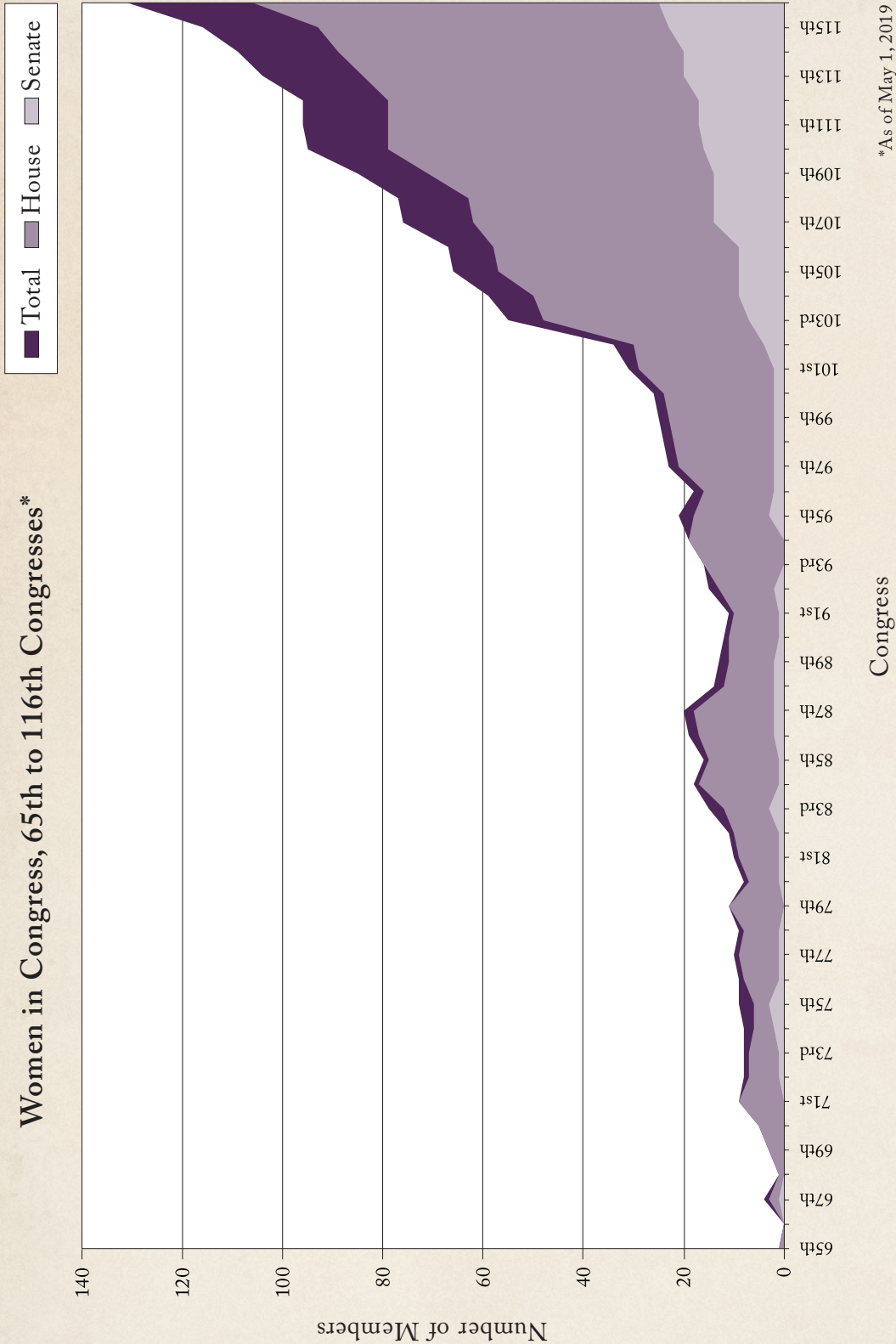
August 26, 1920: U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby certified and officially added the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution. It reads, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."



U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Women in Congress, 65th to 116th Congresses*



Beginning in 1917 with Jeannette Rankin, 365 women have served in Congress as of May 1, 2019. When Rankin served she was the only woman in either the House or Senate. During the 116th Congress (2019–2021), a record 131 women serve in both chambers, including 106 in the House, the highest number in history. <https://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress/>

“How shall we answer their challenge, gentlemen;
how shall we explain to them the meaning of democracy
if the same Congress that voted for war to make
the world safe for democracy refuses to give
this small measure of democracy to
the women of our country?”

Representative Jeannette Rankin, January 10, 1918

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
REPRESENTATIVE ZOE LOFGREN, CHAIRPERSON

OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN and OFFICE OF THE CLERK
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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