

The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, guaranteeing and protecting women's constitutional right to vote. This historic centennial offers an unparalleled opportunity to commemorate a milestone of democracy and to explore its relevance to the issues of equal rights today.

The 19th Amendment granted American women the right to vote, a right known as *women's suffrage*, and was ratified on August 18, 1920, ending almost a century of protest.

There is a nice tie with the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and the 125 women in the 116th Congress. "Nearly 100 years after women earned the right to vote, more than 100 women are serving in Congress," Rep. Val Demings, D-Fla., tweeted ahead of the 2019 State of the Union address by President Trump. "Tonight the women are wearing suffragette white to remind the president that we -- and the rights our ancestors fought for -- aren't going anywhere."

Let's Celebrate the Anniversary

In the 115th Congress, Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) introduced a bill to establish a commission for planning and executing centennial activities. Much can be learned when reading this bill (S.847). Here are the highlights from section 2 of the bill:

(1) From 1919 to 1920, the Sixty-Sixth United States Congress debated, and State legislatures considered, an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to provide suffrage for women.

(2) A proposed women's suffrage amendment was first introduced in the United States Senate in 1878 and was brought to a vote, unsuccessfully, in 1887, 1914, 1918, and 1919. Finally, on May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives approved a proposed amendment, followed by the Senate a few weeks later on June 4.

(3) On August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th State to ratify the amendment, providing the support of three-fourths of States necessary under Article V of the Constitution of the United States.

(4) The introduction, passage, and ultimate ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States were the culmination of decades of work and struggle by advocates for the rights of women across the United States and worldwide.

(5) Ratification of the 19th Amendment ensured women could more fully participate in their democracy and fundamentally changed the role of women in the civic life of our Nation.

(6) The Centennial offers an opportunity for people in the United States to learn about and commemorate the efforts of the women's suffrage movement and the role of women in our democracy.

(7) Commemorative programs, activities, and sites allow people in the United States to learn about the women's suffrage movement and to commemorate and honor the role of the ratification of the 19th Amendment in further fulfilling the promise of the Constitution of the United States and promoting the core values of our democracy.

Achieving this milestone required a lengthy and complicated struggle. Now let's look at the path and the highlights that led to this significant milestone.

Women's Suffrage Movement

The campaign for women's suffrage began in earnest in the decades before the Civil War. During the 1820s and 1830s, most states had extended the franchise to all white men, regardless of how much money or property they had. At the same time, all sorts of reform groups were increasing across the United States—temperance leagues, religious movements, moral-reform societies, anti-slavery organizations—and in many of these, women played a prominent role.

Timeline of Key Events in the Women's Suffrage Movement

Year	Event
1848	The first women's rights convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York. After 2 days of discussion and debate, 68 women and 32 men sign a <i>Declaration of Sentiments</i> , which outlines grievances and sets the agenda for the women's rights movement. A set of 12 resolutions is adopted calling for equal treatment of women and men under the law and voting rights for women.
1868	Ratification of the 14th amendment declaring "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside" and that right may not be "denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State, being twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States."
1869	Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton form the National Woman Suffrage Association. The primary goal of the organization is to achieve voting rights for women by through a Congressional amendment to the Constitution.
1870	Congress ratifies the 15th amendment: "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 race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

(continued)

Timeline of Key Events in the Women's Suffrage Movement

Year	Event
1872	Susan B. Anthony arrested for voting for Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election.
1878	The Women's Suffrage Amendment is first introduced to Congress.
1893	Colorado is the first state to adopt an amendment granting women the right to vote.
1913	Alice Paul and Lucy Burns formed the Congressional Union for Women Suffrage. Their focus is lobbying for a constitutional amendment to secure the right to vote for women. The group is later renamed the National Women's Party. Members picket the White House and practice other forms of civil disobedience.
1919	The federal woman suffrage amendment, originally written by Susan B. Anthony and introduced in Congress in 1878, is passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is then sent to the states for ratification. Within days, the legislatures of Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan had voted to ratify the amendment.

rightly celebrated as a significant milestone made possible by decades of suffragists' relentless political engagement, yet it is just one critical piece of the larger story of women's battle for the vote.

Carrie Chapman Catt



A woman named Carrie Chapman Catt was instrumental in the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Catt, who in 1900 succeeded Anthony as the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), made the controversial decision to support the war effort in World War I, something her colleagues and supporters weren't thrilled about. Eventually, women's help during the war gave them a more nationalistic reputation and in his 1918 State of the Union address, President Woodrow Wilson spoke in favor of women's right to vote.

When thinking about the woman suffrage movement, familiar names such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, come to mind. But there is a full range of activists involved in the struggle. American women across the spectra of race, ethnicity, and class advanced the cause of suffrage. Few of these early supporters lived to see final victory on August 26, 1920. This day is now nationally recognized as *Women's Equality Day*.

According to the Center for American Women and Politics, in every presidential election since 1980, the proportion of eligible women voters has exceeded the percentage of available males who voted.

Ratification of the 19th Amendment

The actual wording on the 19th Amendment is:

“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.”

On May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives passed the 19th Amendment, and two weeks later, the Senate followed. When Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the amendment on August 18, 1920, the amendment passed its final hurdle of obtaining the agreement of three-fourths of the states. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby certified the ratification on August 26, 1920, changing the face of the American electorate forever.

On November 2 of that same year, more than 8 million women across the U.S. voted in elections for the first time. Although only 36 states initially ratified the 19th Amendment, women in the states that did not ratify also had the right to vote. It took over 60 years for the remaining 12 states to officially ratify the 19th Amendment. Mississippi was the last to do so, on March 22, 1984.

The Activists

Beginning in the mid-19th century, several generations of woman suffrage supporters lectured, wrote, marched, lobbied, and practiced civil disobedience to achieve what many Americans considered a radical change of the Constitution. The 19th amendment is

REVIEW QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE? Write a **T** or **F** in the space provided.

- 1. Woodrow Wilson was president when the 19th Amendment was ratified.
- 2. The Bill of Rights gave women the right to vote.
- 3. Women placed their first vote in the November 2, 1920 election.
- 4. Women's Equality Day is held every year on July 4.
- 5. Tennessee played a pivot role, becoming the 36th state to ratify the amendment.

EVENTS IN ORDER. Write the numbers **1-4**, indicating which historical event happened **first (1)**, **second (2)**, **third (3)**, and **fourth (4)**.

- Mississippi ratifies the 19th Amendment.
- Illinois becomes a state.
- The first women's rights convention is held.
- Bill of Rights adopted.

SHORT ANSWER

1. What event did Carrie Chapman Catt support that gave more press for the women's right to vote?

2. How did the 19th Amendment differ from the 15th Amendment?
