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# Women's vote marks 90 years

## But local leaders insist 'we are not there yet'

Jaclyn Youhana | The Journal Gazette

The Boy Scouts is established in the United States.

Nabisco introduces the Oreo.

The Titanic sinks.

World War I begins and ends.

None of these events have anything in common, except that each occurred *before* women were allowed to vote.

Today is the 90th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote in the United States.

That means that for a little more than a third of the country's history, women have been able to vote for people who make the laws that govern them.

The story of Nancy McCammon-Hansen's grandmother puts the timeline in perspective for her, when her grandmother voted in that first election in 1920. She was pregnant with McCammon-Hansen's father, who is now 89 1/2 .

"It's not that long ago," says McCammon-Hansen, 58, head of the local chapter of the League of Women Voters, which was formed after the 19th Amendment to educate women on issues and voting.

Rep. Phyllis Pond, R-New Haven, has been in politics for years. Her mother helped instill early in her the importance of voting and getting involved in politics.

"She was proud of the fact that she voted in the first election that women were given the right to vote, and she never missed an election after that," Pond says.

During the first presidential election in which women were allowed to vote, Warren G. Harding defeated James Cox. A New York Times article from Dec. 19, 1920, reports that one-third of women and three of every five men voted in New York in that election.

Today, a higher percentage of women than men vote, which has been true in every presidential election since 1964, according to the Center for American Women and Politics, based at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Because of this, political parties now tend to court women, says Susan Hannah, a political science professor at IPFW.

There are also issues and laws that might never have been passed were the electorate still male-only.

"Oh, my God. We'd be a totally different society," Hannah says.

Domestic violence, property ownership, marriage and education would all look different. Women were responsible for women having the right to own property, Hannah says, and changes in marriage issues were among the first laws women passed.

Schooling quickly became an issue important to women, too, Pond says.

"It was about the time women got the right to vote that women started getting into the educational field more and more," she says. "It used to be the only women we had in education were unmarried women. It used to be that if you got married in the school year, you had to quit.

"So I would hate to see what our school system would be like now if we did not have the women teaching who are raising families."

## Indiana vs. the nation

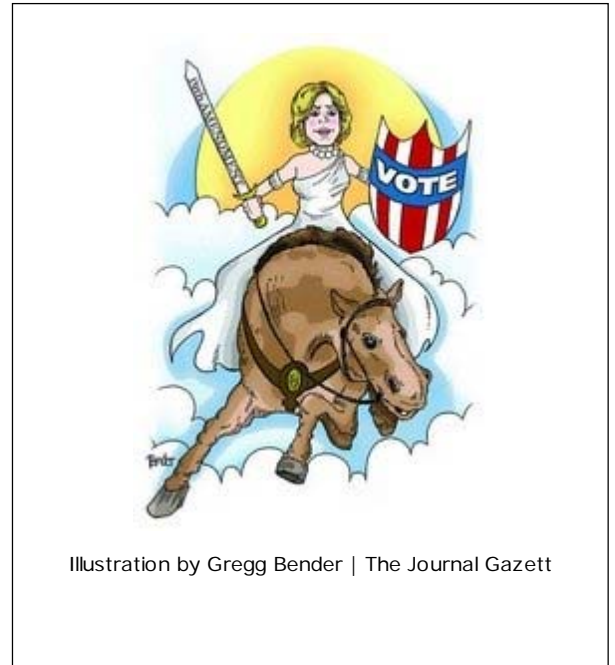


Illustration by Gregg Bender | The Journal Gazette

Certainly, women in politics have come far over the past 90 years, Hannah says, but it's not enough.

"Are we there yet?" she asks. "No, we are not there yet. Don't anybody think it's all even. It's not all even."

Locally, the role of women in politics is more dismal than it is nationally. Hannah, who teaches a class on women in politics, pulls out statistic after statistic to show that Hoosiers have further to go than women in other states.

According to a 2004 report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, based in Washington, D.C., fewer than 18 percent of women 25 and older in Indiana have a college degree, and the state ranks 39th in the nation for the number of black women with college degrees and 48th for the number of white women with degrees.

When compared with men, women make 73 cents for every \$1, ranking Indiana 38th in the nation.

Six states – Arizona, North Carolina, Connecticut, Hawaii, Michigan and Washington – have female governors, and three of the nine U.S. Supreme Court justices are women. When Justice Sandra Day O'Connor retired four years ago, there was just one woman on the court until 2009.

Pond says she'd love to see women more involved in the state legislature.

"There's about the same number of women as there were when I went in 30 years ago," she says.

Pond suspects part of what keeps women away is the very nature of politics: People can't take things personally in office, she says, and they need to be thick-skinned to participate.

"If I don't agree with someone, I don't take it personally when they holler at me," she says.

Although Pond usually votes with her Republican colleagues, she has veered from party on some women's issues. In a 2006 bill stating in part that life begins at conception, Pond was one of two Indiana representatives who voted against the bill.

"I think (abortion is) a very private decision which should be made by those people involved," she told The Journal Gazette previously. "The state shouldn't be involved either way."

McCammon-Hansen wants to see more women going to the polls. She recognizes that President Obama's campaign did wonders to draw younger women to the voting booth, but that was rare.

The problem, she says, is that many young women don't see how politics affects their lives. Laws passed today, she says, will have an effect in 30 or 40 years on issues such as Social Security and Medicare.

The League of Women Voters of the Fort Wayne Area became the state's 19th chapter in June.

McCammon-Hansen moved here in 2006 and was surprised a city of Fort Wayne's size didn't have a league, so she helped start one. The original group was active until the 1970s, McCammon-Hansen says, when women started to work outside the home more often, leaving little time for organizations like the league.

While the league's mailing list includes women from 20-something to 97, most are in the 40-to-60 age group.

## Rights today

Before the 19th Amendment, the decision to allow women to vote was left to the states. In an effort to entice people to move to sparsely populated parts of the nation, Western states often gave women the right to vote in local elections.

The first to grant this right was the Wyoming Territory in 1869, according to "A Look at the 19th Amendment: Women Win the Right to Vote." In the following 45 years, 10 states followed suit.

Hannah points out an interesting test: Take a map of the United States showing which states gave women the right to vote before 1920. Then look at the states that ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, meant to ensure that women and men have the same constitutional rights. The marked states will be identical.

In 1972, Congress passed the amendment, which fell three states shy of the 38 needed for ratification. Indiana was the 35th and, so far, last state to ratify the ERA in 1977.

Hannah says the proposed constitutional amendment is reintroduced to each session of Congress. Some of the reasons people have given for voting against the amendment?

"It means we won't have single sex bathrooms, or women will *have* to serve in the military," says Hannah, who believes the presumptions are absurd. "Women are different from men, but they're not less than men."

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