

## Today marks 90th anniversary of women's right to vote, but there's still work to do

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**Patriot-News Op-Ed**

The 19th Amendment to the Constitution states: "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."

Today marks the 90th anniversary of the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing a woman's right to vote.



Alex Brandon, The Associated Press

Women in America still do not run for office nearly as often as men do. There have been some advancements such as Nancy Pelosi, the first female speaker of the House.

Today is a day to not only celebrate the enacting of the 19th Amendment, but to call attention to women's continuing efforts toward full equality to make Pennsylvania and the United States a more equal society. Full participatory rights by women are essential to real democracy.

As a modern woman in this country, I cannot imagine not being permitted to vote. But that was the case for millions of American women, including my grandmother 90 years ago.

It took 144 years after the Declaration of Independence was signed and 50 years after black men were given voting rights before women were treated as full American citizens and able to vote.

Achieving this milestone required decades of struggle and protest.

The passage of the 19th Amendment was a hard-fought battle waged mostly by brave women and supportive men of various political beliefs, backgrounds, religions and ethnicities working together.

Amending the Constitution is a difficult process, and it requires a proposed amendment to be ratified by three-fourths of the states.

Carrie Chapman Catt, a leader in the U.S. suffragette movement, once estimated that the struggle required more than 50 referendums, 480 campaigns to get legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters, 47 campaigns to get constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions, 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to include woman suffrage planks, 30 campaigns to get presidential party campaigns to include woman suffrage planks in party platforms and 19 campaigns with 19 successive congresses.

Today, women's political leverage is stronger than ever and continues to grow.

For example, at least 13 women, a record, will win a major party nomination for the U.S. Senate this year. There are three female justices on the Supreme Court, Speaker Nancy Pelosi is the first woman to lead the House of Representatives, and the nation's secretary of state has been a woman for 10 of the last 14 years, with Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

These changes reflect the changes in the electorate. More women than men have voted in each presidential election since 1960. Groups of women are increasingly seen as the key to electoral victory for both parties.

Four times since 1976, more than 60 percent of women have voted in a presidential election; men have topped the 60 percent turnout mark only once in that span, according to data from Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics.

However, although women turn out to vote in greater numbers than men and can therefore often be a decisive bloc in an election, women do not run for office nearly as much as men do.

This is especially true for Pennsylvania. National studies put Pennsylvania in the bottom five of all states ranked by women's political representation and involvement.

The commonwealth has never elected a female governor or U.S. senator, has only two women among its 19 elected delegates to the U.S. House of Representatives, and has a full-time state Legislature where women comprise only 15 percent of the membership.



Rogette Nicole Harris

Besides electing more women to public office, more women need to be appointed to boards and positions of influential decision-making roles.

If political parties are not going to encourage and recruit women to run for office and push them in appointments, it's up to organizations such as the National Women's Political Caucus of Pennsylvania to ensure that political parties respect our votes, rather than just court us during election time.

No one can deny that it has been a long journey for women in the United States in their quest for social and political equality.

Voting rights for women is a remarkable testimony to the unrelenting tenacity and spirit of women who were seen as powerless and yet achieved one of the largest extensions of citizenship rights in our nation's history.

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