

27 Fast Facts About the 19th Amendment

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The Amendment

1. The 19th Amendment does not directly mention women. Instead, it says:
“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.”
2. The 19th Amendment was officially added to the United States constitution on **August 26, 1920**.
3. The 19th Amendment is also called the Anthony Amendment, named for Susan B. Anthony.
4. The first attempt at a universal suffrage amendment in Congress came in 1868, but gained no traction. The next attempt came in 1878 from California Senator Aaron A. Sargent, who introduced a bill drafted by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. While his bill was rejected, it was introduced every year for the following forty-one years. Eventually, in 1919, Congress approved the exact text of Sargent’s original bill and it was ratified by three-fourths of states in 1920.
5. President Woodrow Wilson tried to pass a national suffrage act in 1918 in the midst of World War I. He endorsed what would later become the 19th Amendment, and one day after doing so, the House passed the measure. Wilson addressed the Senate personally, appealing to the fact that women were also actively participating in the war effort, but it failed in the Senate by two votes. A few months later, Congress attempted to pass the act again, but failed by one vote in the Senate.

Early Voting Rights

6. Unmarried women were allowed to vote in New Jersey from 1797 to 1807.
7. In 1869, Wyoming became the first territorial government that allowed women voting rights. Upon becoming a state in 1890, it was the first state to allow women suffrage in federal elections.
8. By 1920, when the 19th Amendment was ratified, women had unrestricted suffrage in fifteen states, Presidential suffrage in twenty-eight, and different levels of suffrage in local elections throughout many of the other states.

The Suffrage Movement

9. After William Howard Taft was re-nominated by the Republican party in 1912, Theodore Roosevelt formed the progressive Bull Moose party to seek a third term. He made women’s suffrage a central issue and a core part of the platform. One day into his presidential campaign, Roosevelt made history when at the Bull Moose party’s convention, Jane Addams became the first ever woman to second the nomination of a major presidential campaign.
10. After leaving the White House, William Howard Taft was asked in 1915 about women’s suffrage by a reporter for *The Saturday Evening Post*. He said he favored a gradual approach to granting women the vote, saying that “the immediate enfranchisement of women would increase...the hysterical element of the electorate.” Taft continued that this reform should be “delayed until a great majority” supported it, so that the transition would “be a correct and useful extension of the democratic principle. The benefit will come slowly and imperceptibly.”
11. While many opponents of suffrage were men, there were several prominent women who were also outspoken critics of the suffrage movement. Among those women was Alice Hay Wadsworth, former president of the National Association Opposed to Women’s Suffrage and the wife of New York Republican Senator James Wolcott Wadsworth, Jr. A pamphlet published by her association claimed that “90 percent of women either do not want it or do not care,” and granting the vote would lead to “competition with men instead of cooperation.”
12. One of the most dedicated activists in the women’s suffrage movement was Alice Paul, who employed nonviolent protest in her activism by establishing a group named the Silent Sentinels, which first protested outside the White House on January 10, 1917. Over the next 2.5 years, they would protest outside the White House for six days a week, brandishing signs with slogans such as “How long must women wait for liberty?” and “Mr. President, what will you do for woman suffrage?”
13. President Woodrow Wilson was forced to act on women’s suffrage after policemen began to arrest Silent Sentinels, including Alice Paul, for “obstructing traffic.” While in prison, she and her fellow protestors participated in a hunger strike, which caused the guards to force-feed the activists. The brutality continued as guards refused the jailed activists water and manacled a protestor the bars, almost placing her in a straitjacket and gagging her for speaking to her fellow prisoners. Three of the activists emerged from jail so weak and beaten down that doctors feared they would die. After these horrific events, President Wilson went from fairly unenthusiastic support to strong, dedicated advocacy for women’s suffrage.
14. Aloysius Larch-Miller is the one woman who died for the cause of women’s suffrage. After the Senate passed the amendment on June 4, 1919, it went to the states to ratify. Larch-Miller was the secretary of the Oklahoma State Suffrage Ratification Committee, and she caught influenza during the winter of 1920 and was directed to stay in bed. She refused and went out to debate a prominent anti-suffragist at a local event. Larch-Miller passed away two days later, and her death served as a unifying event for suffragists and Oklahoma ratified the 19th Amendment.

Ratification

15. Mississippi was the last state to ratify the 19th Amendment, doing so on June 11, 1970. Several other states waited more than four decades to ratify: Maryland (1941), Virginia (1952), Alabama (1953), Florida (1969, certified in 1973), Georgia (1970), Louisiana (1970), and North Carolina (1971).
16. The US House of Representatives passed the amendment on May 21, 1919.
17. The US Senate passed the amendment on June 4, 1919.
18. Wisconsin became the first state to ratify the amendment on June 10, 1919.
19. Pennsylvania was the seventh state to ratify on June 24, 1919.
20. Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the amendment, officially making it the nineteenth amendment to the United States constitution.
21. Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the amendment on August 18, 1920, making it law. The decision came down to one man’s vote: twenty-four-year-old state representative Harry Burn. Previously, Burn opposed suffrage, but on the day of the vote, received a letter from his mother urging him to support the amendment. He listened to his mother, voting yes and leading the bill to victory by a margin of 49 to 47 in the state House. Since it had already passed the Senate, this is the vote that ensured the passage of the 19th Amendment.

After the 19th Amendment

22. In the eight days after the 19th Amendment officially took effect, August 26, 1920, ten million women became a registered voter.
23. While there are multiple citizens who have been cited as the first to vote after the passage of the amendment, most reports say that title goes to Mrs. Marie Ruoff Byrum. It is said that Byrum cast the first female ballot in post-19th Amendment passage history in an alderman race in Hannibal, Missouri four days after the measure took effect.
24. In 1920, there were rumors that the Democratic party were considering selecting 35-year-old DNC committeewoman Anna Dickie Olesen as their vice-presidential nomination, but they instead chose Franklin Delano Roosevelt.
25. Franklin Delano Roosevelt became the first president whose mother was able to cast a ballot for him.
26. In 1922, anti-suffragists argued that the amendment was unconstitutional because Maryland’s constitution explicitly reserved the vote for men. The Supreme Court unanimously rejected this argument in *Leser v. Garnett*. Interestingly enough, former president William Howard Taft was now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, showing a change in his thinking about the issue.
27. In 2016, Tennessee unveiled a statue celebrating the state’s role in the passage of the 19th Amendment. It depicts five suffragists: Abby Crawford Milton of Chattanooga, Sue Shelton White of Jackson, Frankie Pierce and Anne Dudley of Nashville, and League of Women Voters founder Carrie Chapman Catt.