

**Sen. Susan M. Collins**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Amendment Statement**  
**June 4, 2019**

\*\*\*

Madam President, as the senior Republican woman in the Senate today, I am pleased to begin a series of speeches along with my good friend from California, the senior Democratic woman Senator, Senator Dianne Feinstein, to commemorate a significant milestone in our nation's history. One hundred years ago today, the Senate finally passed the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which affirmed the right of women to vote in elections.

All of us recall that in 1775, as the Second Continental Congress was forging a new nation conceived in liberty, Abigail Adams admonished her husband, John, to "remember the ladies."

Despite Abigail Adams' advice, it took nearly a century and a half for women to achieve their rightful place as full U.S. citizens. On June 4, 1919, the United States Senate passed the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to our Constitution. The courage and determination exhibited by generations of women and men was rewarded in just two sentences: "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."

That's it, Madam President. Those are the words of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, guaranteeing women the right to vote.

It is an honor today to join my 24 women Senate colleagues in cosponsoring a resolution commemorating this centennial. The yellow roses in such abundance are a historic and enduring symbol of the victory we celebrate today.

It has often been said, as Emerson put it, that "there is properly no history; only biography." The story of women's suffrage is an anthology of remarkable biographies.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott led the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. This marked the first time that American women formally demanded the vote. The convention produced the landmark Declaration of Sentiments. Using the Declaration of Independence as a template, it states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal..."

The early women's rights movement was closely linked to the abolition of slavery. Lucretia Mott made her position clear: "I have no idea of submitting tamely to injustice inflicted either on me or on the slave. I will oppose it with all the moral powers with which I am endowed." Among the most vigorous advocates of women's suffrage were those who knew too well the lash of oppression, the escaped slaves Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman.

Another very important incident in the march of history occurred in 1872. Susan B. Anthony and 14 other women in Rochester, New York, illegally voted in that year's presidential election and were promptly arrested. Susan B. Anthony was put on trial, convicted, and ordered to pay a fine of \$100 or face imprisonment—imagine—for voting. She bravely refused, saying that she would never submit to “this high-handed outrage upon my citizen's rights.” The authorities wisely chose not to pursue collecting the fine.

Suffrage leaders realized that nothing short of a constitutional amendment would do, one modelled after the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which granted the vote to all men, regardless of race. With new leaders such as Carrie Chapman Catt and, later, Alice Paul, stepping forward, a strategy was developed to use every peaceful instrument to change the hearts and minds of political leaders and the public. In addition to marches, rallies, and petitions, they enlisted the power of the pulpit and the press in their just cause.

It took more than four decades for this strategy to succeed, and strong Maine women played key roles. Katherine Reed Ballentine, the daughter of the legendary Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Thomas Brackett Reed, led the Maine Woman Suffrage Association. Author and activist Florence Brooks Whitehouse became a nationally known suffrage organizer and offered these words to opponents of the cause: she said, “This you must know; the world is mine, as yours.”

I am proud to report that when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment came to the Senate floor on that historic day exactly 100 hundred years ago, both of Maine's Senators, Republicans Bert Fernald and Frederick Hale, were among the 56 voting in favor. Following Senate passage, all that remained was for 36 of the 48 states to vote for ratification. Maine became the 19<sup>th</sup> State to ratify the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

But it wasn't easy. An earlier popular referendum on women's suffrage in Maine got clobbered at the polls by a margin of nearly two-to-one. Of course, women were not allowed to vote on their own future, which obviously skewed the result. Recognizing the inherent unfairness of the situation, Maine's Republican Governor, Carl Milliken, called an emergency session of the State Legislature and ushered the measure through by a vote of 72-68.

By the summer of 1920, only one more state was needed to reach the magic number of 36. The nation's eyes were on the state of Tennessee, where the amendment was before the Legislature. The outlook was discouraging – after two roll-call votes, suffrage opponents, who wore red roses in their lapels, were in a dead heat with the yellow rose supporters. If the measure failed to pass in Tennessee, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment would not be ratified.

At the last possible moment, the youngest Tennessee lawmaker, Harry Burn, despite the red rose — which indicated that you were in opposition — that he wore, cast his vote in favor of ratification. After evading an angry mob by climbing out of a third-floor window in the Capitol building and hiding in the attic, Representative Burn explained that he changed his mind after he received a letter from his mother telling him, “Don't forget to be a good boy” and to do the right thing.

Madam President, one of my inspirations in public service, Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith, once addressed the question of what is a woman's proper place. Her famous short answer was, "Everywhere."

The rest of her answer describes the importance of the struggle and the success that we celebrate today: she said, "If there is any proper place for women today, it is that of alert and responsible citizens in the fullest sense of the word." It is a great pleasure to join my colleagues, and particularly the senior Democratic woman Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, in saluting those great, courageous, and persistent women who over many long decades, and through much difficulty, guided our nation to that proper place by giving women the long overdue right to be full citizens in the country, the right to vote.

###