

## Women's Suffrage

ANNR: Women's Suffrage - on today's Congressional Moment...

The first woman elected to Congress was Jeanette Rankin of Montana, in 1916, even though at that time women in most states were not allowed to vote.

The women's suffrage movement was active for many years, but progress was slow. In 1878, Susan B. Anthony had drafted a constitutional amendment to give women in all states the right to vote, but decades later it had still not passed Congress.

The movement got new life with the various Progressive Era reforms in the early 1900s, but it got a particular boost after President Woodrow Wilson stated in a speech that World War I "was a fight for democracy in Europe." That upset women, who felt they were being excluded from democracy in the United States.

That led to extensive marches in Washington and picketing at the White House, with "Kaiser Wilson" and other banners being displayed. Wilson and members of Congress got the message, and a special session was held in 1919 to again take up the amendment. This time it passed both the House and Senate, and was sent on to the states for ratification. The first state to ratify it was Wisconsin, and it became the law of the land—as the 19th amendment to the Constitution—after Tennessee approved it in 1920.

After decades of struggle, women had finally achieved the right to vote, and soon they would be voting in large numbers and having a voice in the direction of the country. Yet in other ways change has been slow: Although a majority of Americans today are women, they currently hold less than 20 percent of the seats in Congress.

CLOSING: This is Lee Hamilton. Congressional decisions impact all our lives. To find out more about how Congress works, or to get involved in your government, visit the Center on Congress website at [congress.indiana.edu](http://congress.indiana.edu).