

# Unanimous Consent by Representative Debra Altschiller

*Given on the NH House floor on Thursday, June 6, 2019*

This week marked the passage of yet another important anniversary. Tuesday, June 4th was the centennial anniversary of the Congress of the United States passing the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This historic legislation ensured equal voting rights to women and men. It reads as follows “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.”

The journey to that historic day traveled over 71 long years. At the first convention for women’s rights in Seneca Falls, NY in 1848 an idea that was wildly radical for its time was proposed, women should have access to the most crucial part of our government, access to the vote. Those early feminist leaders, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony and the author of the Declaration of Sentiments, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, blazed the path that led to that momentous day, June 4th, 1919, a day none of them would live to see.

The majority of delegates to that Seneca Falls Convention agreed on this: American women were autonomous individuals who deserved their own political identities.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident,” proclaimed the Declaration of Sentiments that the delegates produced, “that all men **and women** are created **equal**, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

What this meant, among other things, was that they believed women should have the right to vote. This bold declaration of intention to pursue self determination, to be recognized as equal citizens with access to the vote unleashed fears and anxieties that our democracy might not withstand an expansion to full inclusion. It did, it expanded more and it has flourished because of it.

These brave, bold, visionary women showed the greatest faith, hope and leadership in bringing equal access to the ballot box. They planted seeds for fruit they would never taste. They inspired generations of feminist activists who built on that on that faith, hope and determination to expand upon that early success in equal access.

One of those faithful, bold activists who fought hard to bring the 19th Amendment to fruition was Alice Paul. She said, “I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality.”

The 19th Amendment empowered women. It elevated and amplified our voices in the political sphere. It’s passage marked the end of having to submit to laws passed by men who women had never consented to represent them. It empowered women to participate in and enter American politics as full participants. In the first election after passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment, 8 million women across the nation voted for the first time.

So we celebrate those Suffragettes! We honor them for the vision of a country where gender was not a barrier to the ballot box. Where self-determination was an American ideal for **all** citizens and where women could be equals in American politics. We are not done with our work of achieving fully equal representation but like our foremothers, we are determined.

Huzzah Suffragettes! We are grateful for the seeds you planted, cared for and nurtured and whose fruits you would never taste. They are sweet indeed.