



IDAHO AND THE 19TH AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

The era of women's suffrage in the United States extended from 1848, when the first women's rights convention met in Seneca Falls, New York to launch the women's suffrage movement, through 1920, when on August 18th, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the proposed women's suffrage amendment. Today it's known as the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

"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."

Although Idaho granted women the right to vote via an amendment to its state constitution in 1896, only 11 states and territories had completed similar action by 1917. In response to this slow and limited progress, suffragists rallied to support a national suffrage amendment. This is the story of Idaho's role in the race for ratification of the national women's suffrage amendment.

DOCUMENTS ON DISPLAY

- "House Joint Resolution No.1, By Drake – A Joint Resolution Ratifying the Proposed Amendment to The Constitution of the United States Extending the Right of Suffrage to Women," February 18, 1920
- Frank L. Polk, "Document No. 3760," United States of America, Department of State, Certification of Joint Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution Extending the Right of Suffrage to Woman, June 12, 1919
- Letter, Frank L. Polk, Acting Secretary of State, to D.W. Davis, Governor of Idaho, June 12, 1919
- Portrait, Idaho Representative Dr. Emma Drake, New Plymouth, undated

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THE PATH TO A NATIONAL SUFFRAGE AMENDMENT

By 1917, America's suffragists had begun picketing the White House to persuade President Wilson to embrace the suffrage cause. The protests finally ceased in 1918 when the 65th Congress agreed to bring a proposed suffrage amendment to a vote. Despite passing the House, the resolution died in the Senate that same year.

The following year, the 66th Congress reintroduced the suffrage amendment. On May 21, 1919, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the resolution with a wide margin and on June 4, 1919, the Senate concurred. Congress had officially passed the joint resolution proposing an amendment to the U.S. Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women.

For any proposed constitutional amendment to become law, three-fourths of all states must ratify the amendment. Following Congress' passage of the proposed suffrage amendment, the U.S. Secretary of State sent certified copies of the amendment to the Governors of each state, asking that their state's legislature to take action. The documents on display represent that request and Idaho's response.



THE TIMING OF RATIFICATION IN IDAHO

On June 12, 1919, eight days after Congress passed House Joint Resolution No. 1, Acting U.S. Secretary of State, Frank L. Polk, wrote to Idaho Governor D.W. Davis. Polk included a certified copy of House Joint Resolution No. 1 in his correspondence and requested that Davis submit the resolution to the Idaho Legislature to take action. Davis was cognizant of the momentum behind national suffrage and shared sentiments with the suffrage cause. During his January 1919 address to the 15th session of the Idaho State Legislature, he noted that the women's suffrage movement was gaining "world-wide recognition," and hoped that in the near future women's suffrage would become an integral part of the U.S. Constitution.

Following Davis' receipt of Polk's request for ratification, he began to consider the necessity of calling a special session of the Idaho Legislature to act on the ratification. Davis only felt justified in calling the session if Idaho's ratification was necessary to keep the proposed amendment alive long enough to ensure three-fourths of the states would vote to ratify. In response to the Governor's hesitance, Miss Shuler, a representative from the National American Woman Suffrage Association, met with him and explained that Idaho's ratification was necessary both for the adoption of the amendment and for the "maintenance of Idaho's superior position as a woman suffrage state of long standing." Ultimately, Davis deemed the special session necessary, and on December 27, 1919, he announced the special session would take place on February 11, 1920. As part of his official statement, he noted that it was "intensely gratifying" to find that a large portion of Representatives and Senators were willing to travel to Boise at their own expense to attend the special session.

GOVERNOR DAVIS AND THE IDAHO LEGISLATURE MAKE HISTORY

Governor D.W. Davis, Address Delivered to the Special Session of the Idaho Legislature, February 11, 1920

By coming here today we bear our responsibility for others. In this new age of better thought and enlightenment the entire world is recognizing the right of women. In Idaho history this will be recorded as an epoch-making day, when our great state takes this historical action toward the complete enfranchisement of the women of our beloved country.

Very truly yours,

Governor of Idaho.

*Source: Idaho State Archives, AR2/12, 20200003
Correspondence and Subject Files (box 105)*

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At noon on February 11, 1920, the special session convened and Governor Davis delivered an address, whereby he acknowledged Idaho's early adoption of women's suffrage, and noted that it was "particularly fitting" that Idaho, "which has enjoyed such privilege should now ratify the federal amendment by which women are to be virtually freed from the narrow prejudices of the past." Representative Drake, one of two women in the 15th session of the Idaho Legislature introduced the resolution in the House, and several Senators introduced it in the Senate. By that afternoon, the Idaho Legislature had passed its resolution, ratifying the 19th Amendment.

After this momentous vote, Idaho Secretary of State Robert O. Jones, certified a copy of Idaho's resolution on March 18, 1920, and sent it to Washington, D.C. The U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby acknowledged receipt of the certified copy on March 24, 1920. With these actions, Idaho became the 30th state to ratify the national women's suffrage amendment, known today as the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.