



Designating August 26, 2005 as the 85th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment

Proclamation

Whereas, August 26, 2005, marks the 85th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, guaranteeing women's right to vote, the result of a successful and dynamic 72-year political campaign that began at the world's first Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY in 1848 and ended with the addition of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920; and

Whereas, as noted by suffragist leader Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, "Millions of dollars were raised ... hundreds of women gave the accumulated possibilities of an entire lifetime, thousands gave years of their lives, and hundreds of thousands gave constant interest and such aid as they could. It was a continuous, seemingly endless chain of activity. Young suffragists who helped forge the last links of that chain were not born when it began. Old suffragists who forged the first links were dead when it ended."; and

Whereas, between 1868 and 1920, the Woman Suffrage movement confronted the great obstacles of well-financed political, corporate, and religious opposition, as well as voting fraud so widespread that politicians dismissed it with a wink and a nod and women guarded the ballot boxes to help ensure a true vote count. During this time, suffragists were forced to conduct 56 referenda campaigns to male voters, 480 campaigns to urge legislatures to submit Woman Suffrage amendments to voters, 47 campaigns to induce state constitutional conventions to write Woman Suffrage into state constitutions, 277 campaigns to persuade state party conventions to include Woman Suffrage planks in their platforms, 30 campaigns to urge presidential party conventions to adopt Woman Suffrage planks and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses; and

Whereas, women in the West led the way with victories for state-level Woman Suffrage in Wyoming (1890); Utah, Colorado and Idaho (1900); Washington (1910); California (1911); Arizona, Kansas and Oregon (1912); and Montana and Nevada (1914). Many suffrage campaigners endured terrible food, contaminated water, uncomfortable beds, and often hostile audiences. Some were chased by wolves, faced fever and food poisoning, and survived train collisions, explosions, and other near-tragedies. Others flew in hot air balloons and early airplanes to scatter rainbow-colored "Votes for Women" leaflets over neighborhoods and county fairs; and

Whereas, in the great eastern cities, women planned and carried out well-crafted advocacy campaigns and, defying social convention and facing disapproval from their families and communities, marched in huge suffrage parades in colorful costumes, with symbolic floats, brilliant banners, and stirring bands. They were sometimes attacked by violent mobs of angry, drunken, and disorderly men; and

Whereas, suffragist leaders Alice Paul and Lucy Burns along with members of the National Woman's Party challenged President Woodrow Wilson's failure to support woman suffrage by picketing the White House and enduring arrest, incarceration, beatings and brutal forced feeding. Some women came out of prison barely alive, and the news of this treatment by the police and the jailers resulted in national outrage, and the cause of women's voting rights gained much-needed momentum; and

Whereas, the 19th Amendment, called the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, finally narrowly passed Congress in 1919 and was ratified by 36 states in 14 months. It received its last state approval in Tennessee by one vote, that of 25-year-old legislator Harry Burn, who switched from opposition to support after getting a telegram from his mother saying, "Hurrah, and vote for suffrage!" It was certified as part of the U.S. Constitution on August 26, 1920, a day celebrated thereafter as Women's Equality Day; and

Whereas, this year's 85th anniversary of the greatest single expansion of citizenship rights in the United States presents a remarkable opportunity both to honor the unrelenting tenacity and spirit of the multitude of women and men who worked to secure women's right to vote and also to illustrate how much can be achieved in a democratic society by the collective efforts of citizens committed to political reform; and

Whereas, it was the hope of our Foremothers who fought and died for Woman Suffrage that future generations of women would use that hard-won vote to make this a better world and to fight for full equality and justice for women; and

Now, therefore, be it resolved by Dr. James B. McNeer, President of Richard Bland College, that August 26, 2005, the 85th anniversary of the constitutional affirmation of women's right to vote in the United States, be celebrated by governing agencies at the local, state, and national level, as well as by educational institutions, workplaces, civic organizations, places of worship, and communities throughout the nation, with programs, events, proclamations, performances, parades, conferences, and other special ceremonies worthy of this uniquely important and historic occasion.

