

The Role of Washington State in the 19th Amendment

by Shanna Stevenson, WHC Coordinator

Signaling a change in national tactics away from the less militant NAWSA strategies, Alice Paul had formed the Congressional Union (CU) in April 1913 with the singular goal of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. The National Council of Women Voters (NCWV) soon joined forces with the CU. Paul and her colleague Lucy Burns had worked with militant suffragettes in England and wanted to implement similar tactics in the United States. Instead of asking for the vote, they believed in demanding women's suffrage. Paul was riding a momentous wave of publicity, which had been gathering force in the wake of the massive March 3, 1913, pro-suffrage parade in Washington, D.C., which she had organized as leader of NAWSA's Congressional Committee just prior to President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Although the parade was a public relations coup, it in many ways symbolized the divide that had been growing within NAWSA over strategy.

Emma Smith DeVoe relished the CU alliance because of her split with NAWSA and, at first, concurred with their more militant tactics. Dr. Cora Smith Eaton, a veteran of the Washington campaign, joined DeVoe's activism. An NCWV affiliate, Eaton married Judson King in 1912 and moved to Washington, D.C. As chair of the NCWV Congressional Committee, she often testified before Congress on behalf of the enfranchised women of Washington and the NCWV, sometimes joined by DeVoe. King headed a delegation of nine members of the NCWV, which met with President Wilson on March 31, 1913. They were only the third group to meet with the president after his inauguration.¹ King also organized a suffrage amendment demonstration in Hyattsville, Maryland, on July 31, 1913. Suffragists from all over the country rendezvoused there for a car caravan to Washington, D.C., where they presented petitions to their congressmen.²

Consisting as it did of a large block of voting women, the NCWV appealed to elected officials. The CU, which held elected officials responsible for the enactment of women's suffrage, thus saw the NCWV as a valuable ally. In 1914, as part of its overall strategy, the CU sent representatives to Washington State to work against electing Democrats to Congress—a move that was generally opposed by Washington women voters who had steered away from party politics in the 1910 victory.³ In April 1916 the CU again sent national organizers to enfranchised states on a "Suffrage Special" train to garner support from voting women to pressure Congress for a federal amendment. CU representative Harriet Stanton Blatch, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter, gave a speech in Seattle and was part of a procession of 150 cars that toured the city decked out in purple, white, and gold banners. CU delegate Lucy Burns scattered leaflets over the city from a plane. Envoys went on to Bellingham and later to Spokane, where they planted a tree in honor of May Arkwright Hutton.⁴

After the 1915 NCWV National Convention DeVoe began to migrate away from her CU affiliation back toward NAWSA. DeVoe's longtime colleague, Carrie Chapman Catt, regained the presidency of NAWSA, unseating Anna Howard Shaw in 1915. Catt changed NAWSA's focus from state-by-state victories to the ratification of a national amendment, although she still included a role for individual states in her "Winning Plan," adopted in 1916. By March 1917 Paul had changed the name of the Congressional Union to the National Woman's Party (NWP) and made it independent of NAWSA. The NWP used marches, protests, and pickets at the White House to bring attention to the cause. Several of the picketing women were arrested, beaten, and force-fed.⁵ Preferring non-partisanship in the suffrage campaign, Catt and NAWSA generally opposed the NWP's militant tactics as well as its policy of holding political parties accountable for a women's suffrage victory.

During World War I NAWSA withdrew from suffrage work to support the war effort, but the NWP continued its militant tactics, likening President Wilson to the German Kaiser for supporting a war for "democracy" in Europe while American women lacked a political voice at home.⁶ Catt believed that women's service in home-front activities during World War I, such as food preservation, war bond sales, and Red Cross work, would enhance their case for equal citizenship.⁷

Finally, in June 1919, after intense pressure from both NWP and NAWSA, Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and sent it to the states for ratification. Washington was the penultimate of thirty-six states needed to ratify the amendment and the last enfranchised state to take action. DeVoe and Catt pressured a reluctant Governor Louis Hart to call a special legislative session. Hart feared that other matters would barrage the legislature in a special session but eventually agreed to call the legislators together in March 1920. Pierce County representative [Frances Haskell](#), the fourth woman elected to the Washington legislature, introduced the resolution, stating:

This is a very important hour in the history of our state and nation, for we have met here in special session the 22nd day of March, in the year of our Lord 1920, to ratify the federal suffrage amendment and to prove to the world the greatness of our Evergreen state, which is not determined by the number of acres that it contains nor by the number of its population, but by the character of its men and women who today are extending to all the women of America the privilege of the ballot.⁸

Governor Hart, Speaker Fred Adams, and Emma Smith DeVoe shared the dais in the House of Representatives, and by special resolution, DeVoe expressed her thanks to the legislature. In the Senate, veteran suffragist Carrie Hill shared the podium with President of the Senate Philip H. Carlyon of Olympia. Both houses cast a unanimous vote to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment—the twelfth state in which no one voted against the amendment.⁹ Tennessee was the final state needed to ratify the amendment which codified that "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 amendment became official on August 26, 1920.¹⁰

Notes:

1. Whether King marched in the March 3 parade is unknown — her obituary and a family reminiscence indicate that she might have participated. See Jean Gardiner Smith to George W. Starcher, January 9, 1963, in the files from the President of the University of North Dakota, provided to the author by the University of North Dakota.
2. “Suffrage Autoists Besiege Senators; Motor Parade From Hyattsville, Md., Precedes Presentation of Petitions at Capitol. Special to the *New York Times*,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1913, 7.
3. Emma Smith DeVoe to Dr. Cora Smith Eaton King, September 2, 1914, NWP Papers; and Ross-Nazzari, “Always be Good Natured and Cheerful,” 198.
4. Inez Haynes Irwin, *The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party* (1921; reprint, Fairfax, Va.: Denlingers Publishers, Inc., 1977), 156-57.
5. Linda G. Ford, “Alice Paul and the Triumph of Militancy,” in *One Woman, One Vote*, ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler (Troutdale, Ore.: New Sage Press, 1995).
6. Library of Congress, American Memory, Photographs from the National Women’s Party, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/suffrage/nwp/index.html>.
7. Robert Booth Fowler, “Carrie Chapman Catt, Strategist,” in *One Woman, One Vote*, ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler (Troutdale, Ore.: New Sage Press, 1995); and Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 2:353.
8. “Suffrage Amendment Ratified Unanimously,” *Washington Standard*, March 23, 1920, 1.
9. Dr. Cora Smith Eaton King et al., “Washington,” *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6:685-86.
10. Nineteenth Amendment.
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/amendment_19/print_friendly.html?page=index_content.html&title=The_19th_Amendment