

19th Amendment

The 19th amendment is a very important amendment to the constitution as it gave women the right to vote in 1920. You may remember that the 15th amendment made it illegal for the federal or state government to deny any US citizen the right to vote. For some reason, this did not apply to women. The 19th amendment changed this by making it illegal for any citizen, regardless of gender, to be denied the right to vote.

The movement to allow women the right to vote through the 19th amendment was the Suffrage movement.

You may have heard of women such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who were key figures in the Suffrage movement. The Suffrage movement has been going on since the Civil War, but the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments did not cover the rights of women to vote. These women were the original authors of the 19th amendment although it took forty-one years before the government would even consider ratifying the 19th amendment. Many lawmakers feared that women would vote in large groups, which would affect the outcome of elections.

The 19th amendment unified suffrage laws across the United States. Before the 19th amendment, there were many states where women had full suffrage, including New York and most Western states. Other states had limited suffrage, only allowing women to vote in select elections. During this time, there were a number of efforts to get Congress to consider the 19th amendment, mostly successful, until 1919. Wisconsin was the first state to approve the amendment and the 36th and final approval needed to have the amendment passed was in Tennessee in 1920, by a slim margin.

With that ratification complete the 19th amendment became part of the constitution on August 18, 1920. The Supreme Court would later defend the right of women to vote under the 19th amendment in Maryland, where one concerned citizen sued to stop women from voting. This man, Oscar Leser, believed that the 19th amendment interfered with the state's electorate. The Supreme Court disagreed.

All states, even states that rejected the 19th amendment at first have ratified the amendment. The last state was Mississippi. This is a symbolic measure, since the 19th amendment became law with the 36th state ratifying it. Alaska and Hawaii were not yet states and therefore, cannot ratify the amendment.

What is the text of the 19th Amendment?

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged...

(the US government may not stop a citizen from voting)

by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

(neither the federal or state government can prevent the right to vote based on sex)

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

(Congress is empowered to pass laws to protect the right of women to vote in the United States)