



www.bpwpa.org

Business and  
Professional  
Women/PA

FOR RELEASE PRIOR TO 08/26/2009  
July 15, 2009

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:  
Mary Weeks  
215-855-7680  
[durellfish@comcast.net](mailto:durellfish@comcast.net)

## Women's Inequality in Pennsylvania Government and BPW/PA's Advocacy for Better Representation

This August will mark the 89<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, granting women the right to vote. The struggle for women's suffrage has a long history in Pennsylvania. The Society of Friends (Quakers) was unusual in its equal treatment of women during the Colonial period. While women were permitted to speak during their religious services, women were not granted political rights; only white adult males who owned property could vote. Pennsylvania's political leaders during this time did abolish the property qualifications, but still did not allow women to vote.

Lucretia Mott, a Quaker whose home was in Philadelphia, organized the first Women's Rights Convention with Elizabeth Cady Stanton at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Ms. Mott demanded full political rights for women at this convention, and a resolution was passed regarding women's right to vote. Four years later, a women's rights convention was held in West Chester, PA. And at the celebration of our nation's centennial in 1876, Susan B. Anthony read a suffragette's declaration of independence at Independence Square in Philadelphia.

But not until 1915, did the Pennsylvania General Assembly approve a referendum on an amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution allowing women to vote, to be decided by male voters. The referendum failed, but pressure continued by state and national organizations.

---

MARY L. WEEKS  
BPW/PA Public Relations Chair  
700 Columbia Avenue  
Lansdale, PA 19446

home 215.855.7680  
fax 215.855.3908  
(h) [durellfish@comcast.net](mailto:durellfish@comcast.net)



www.bpwpa.org

Business and  
Professional  
Women/PA

Page 2

## Women's Inequality in PA Government

On June 4, 1919, the U.S. Congress approved the constitutional amendment to grant women the right to vote and sent it to state legislatures for ratification. Pennsylvania was the 8<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the amendment on June 27, 1919 and in August 1920, the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment was officially certified as part of the U.S. Constitution.

In 1971, at the request of Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY), the U.S. Congress designated August 26<sup>th</sup> as "Women's Equality Day" to commemorate the hard work and perseverance of those who helped secure women's suffrage in the U.S. So what better day than the anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to look at the progress and lack thereof on women's voting rights and governmental representation in Pennsylvania?

According to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, women outnumber men among registered voters (1984-2004) and in 2006, registered women voters outnumbered men by 9 million. In recent elections, voter turnout rates for women have equaled or exceeded voter turnout rates for men. The number of women voters has exceeded the number of male voters in every presidential election since 1964 (data available through 2004) and the proportion of eligible female adults who voted has exceeded the proportion of eligible male adults who voted since 1980, with the gap between women and men growing slightly larger with each successive election. And in Pennsylvania, voter registration reached a record 8.7 million voters in 2008 with 68.65% voting in the Presidential election.



www.bpwpa.org

## Business and Professional Women/PA

Page 3

### Women's Inequality in PA Government

The statistics support the fact that women, who fought so hard to obtain the right to vote, do exercise that right during elections. Women, who constitute more than one-half the population, have cast between four and seven million more votes than men in recent elections.

Now for the bad news...In 2009, according to the CAWP, only 24.3% of the 7,382 state legislators nationwide are women. Of the 50 states, Pennsylvania ranked 46<sup>th</sup> in percentage of women state legislators! Only 14.6% (37/253) of the State Senate (10/50) and House (27/203) were women. The only states with lower percentages were Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma and South Carolina. And this appalling trend has been occurring since 1979, with Pennsylvania ranking no better than 43<sup>rd</sup> during those years. That equates to 30 years of gender inequality in our Commonwealth's legislative bodies.

Women have not fared any better with regards to Statewide Elective Executives. Nationally in 2009, 23.6% of women held Statewide Elective Executive positions. Of the 5 total elective executive positions in Pennsylvania, only five women throughout the Commonwealth's history have held any of these five positions. In Pennsylvania, there has never been a woman Governor. Nationwide, with the resignation of Alaska Governor, Sarah Palin, there are only six women governors around the country. And of the U.S. Congressional seats (2 U.S. Senators, 18 U.S. Representatives), no Pennsylvania woman has ever been elected as a U.S. Senator and only seven women have ever been elected as a U.S. Representative.

One might think that the statistics would be much better at the Local level. However, in 2009, in cities with populations over 30,000, only **one** Mayor is a woman in Pennsylvania; Carol T. Di Joseph, Mayor of Abington, PA. Isn't it ironic that Lucretia Mott is buried in Abington?

BPW/PA Public Relations Chair  
700 Columbia Avenue  
Lansdale, PA 19446

---

855.7680  
fax 215.855.3908  
(h) [durellfish@comcast.net](mailto:durellfish@comcast.net)



www.bpwpa.org

Business and  
Professional  
Women/PA

Page 4

## Women's Inequality in PA Government

There is obviously still significant work to be done to achieve true equality for women in the U.S. Congress and Pennsylvania Legislature. In communities, citizens still lack equality and real representation by their elected officials and the legislation their legislators introduce and pass into law.

**Denise Clawson, President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (BPW/PA)**, stated "BPW/PA was founded in 1919 and has been in the forefront of addressing issues crucial to women ever since. Our foremothers and many more like them worked hard to ensure that our generation and future generations could realize the opportunities that were not afforded to them. Our hard-earned progress needs to continue in the halls of our legislature, in order for our freedom and democracy to thrive. As Bella Abzug said, "We are coming down from our pedestal and up from the laundry room. We want an equal share in government and we mean to get it"."

BPW/PA is a leading advocate for working women in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. BPW/PA promotes full participation, equity and economic self-sufficiency for all working women. The organization works on all issues that touch women's lives and sponsors programs and scholarships to improve women's lives and careers. BPW/PA is a statewide organization comprised of 1200 members in 70 local organizations and 12 districts.

For more information on BPW/PA, go to [www.bpwpa.org](http://www.bpwpa.org).

###