

# Open Address to the U.S. Congress - Dec. 13, 1917

**Carrie Chapman Catt**

December 13, 1917— Washington, D.C.

*This speech was written as an open letter to the members of Congress and was delivered on several occasions in late 1917 and 1918 during Catt's speaking tours, including as Catt's presidential address at the 49th annual convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Catt did not actually present this speech to Congress, but NAWSA sent copies to all Congressmen and state legislators.*

Woman suffrage is inevitable. Suffragists knew it before November 6, 1917; opponents afterward. Three distinct causes make it inevitable.

(1) *The history of our country.* Ours is a nation born of revolution; of rebellion against a system of government so securely entrenched in the customs and traditions of human society that in 1776 it seemed impregnable. From the beginning of things nations had been ruled by kings and for kings, while the people served and paid the cost. The American Revolutionists boldly proclaimed the heresies:

*"Taxation without representation is tyranny."*

*"Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."*

## **Our Theories Make Woman Suffrage Inevitable**

The Colonists won and the nation which was established as a result of their victory has held unfailingly that these two fundamental principles of democratic government are not only the spiritual source of our national existence but have been our chief historic pride and at all times the sheer anchor of our liberties.

Eighty years after the Revolution Abraham Lincoln welded those two maxims into a new one:

*"Ours is a government of the people, by the people and for the people."*

Fifty years more passed and the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, in a mighty crisis of the nation, proclaimed to the world: *"We are fighting for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts- for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government."*

All the way between these immortal aphorisms political leaders have declared unabated faith in their truth. Not one American has arisen to question their logic in the one hundred and forty-one years of our national existence. However stupidly our country may have evaded the logical application at times, it has never swerved from its devotion to the theory of democracy as expressed by those two axioms.

Not only has it unceasingly upheld the THEORY but it has carried these theories into PRACTICE whenever men made application.

Certain denominations of Protestants, Catholics, Jews, non-land holders, workingmen, Negroes, Indians, were at one time disfranchised in all, or in part, of our country. Class by class they have been admitted to the electorate. Political motives may have played their part in some instances but the only reason given by historians for their enfranchisement is the unassailability of the logic of these maxims of the Declaration.

Meantime the United States opened wide its gates to men of all the nations of the earth. By the combination of naturalization granted the foreigner after a five-years' residence by our national government and the uniform provision of the State constitutions which extends the vote to male citizens, it has been the custom in our country for three generations that any male immigrant, accepted by the national government as a citizen, automatically

becomes a voter in any State in which he chooses to reside, subject only to the minor qualifications prescribed by the State. Justifiable exceptions to the general principle might have been entered. Men just emerging from slavery, untrained to think or act for themselves and in most cases wholly illiterate, were not asked to qualify for voting citizenship. Not even as a measure of national caution has the vote ever been withheld from immigrants until they have learned our language, earned a certificate of fitness from our schools or given definite evidence of loyalty to our country. When such questions have been raised, political leaders have replied: "What! Tax men and in return give them no vote; compel men to obey the authority of a government to which they may not give consent! Never. That is un-American." So, it happens that men of all nations and all races, except the Mongolian, may secure citizenship and automatically become voters in any State in the Union, and even the Mongolian born in this country is a citizen and has the vote. With such a history behind it, how can our nation escape the logic it has never failed to follow, when its last unenfranchised class calls for the vote? Behold our Uncle Sam floating the banner with the one hand, "Taxation without representation is tyranny." And with the other seizing the billions of dollars paid in taxes by women to whom he refuses "representation." Behold him again, welcoming the boys of twenty-one and the newly-made immigrant citizen to "a voice in their own government" while he denies that fundamental right of democracy to thousands of women public school teachers from whom many of these men learn all they know of citizenship and patriotism, to women college presidents, to women who preach in our pulpits, interpret law in our courts, preside over our hospitals, write books and magazines and serve in every uplifting moral and social enterprise.

Is there a single man who can justify such inequality of treatment, such outrageous discriminations? Not one.

Woman suffrage became an assured fact when the Declaration of Independence was written. It matters not at all whether Thomas Jefferson and his compatriots thought of women when they wrote that immortal document. They conceived and voiced a principle greater than any man. "A Power not of themselves which makes for righteousness" gave them the vision and they proclaimed truisms as immutable as the multiplication table, as changeless as time. The Hon. Champ Clark announced that he had been a woman suffragist ever since he "got the hang of the Declaration of Independence." So it must be with every other American. The amazing thing is that it has required so long a time for a people, most of whom know how to read, "to get the hang of it." Indeed, so inevitable does our history make woman suffrage that any citizen; political party, Congress or Legislature that now blocks its coming by so much as a single day, contributes to the indefensible inconsistency which threatens to make our nation a jest among the onward-moving peoples of the world.

### **Our Practice Makes Woman Suffrage Inevitable**

(2) *The suffrage for women already established in the United States makes woman suffrage for the nation inevitable.* When Elihu Root, as President of the American Society of International Law, at the eleventh annual meeting in Washington, April 26, 1917, said, "The world cannot be half democratic and half autocratic. It must be all democratic or all Prussian. There can be no compromise," he voiced a general truth. Precisely the same intuition has already taught the blindest and most hostile foe of woman suffrage that our nation cannot long continue a condition under which government in half its territory rests upon the consent of half the people and in the other half upon the consent of all the people; a condition which grants representation to the taxed in half its territory and denies it in the other half; a condition which permits women in some States to share in the election of the President, Senators and Representatives and denies them that privilege in others. It is too obvious to require demonstration that woman suffrage now covering half our territory, will eventually be ordained in all the nation. No one will deny it; the only question left is when and how will it be completely established.

### **Our Leadership Makes Woman Suffrage Inevitable**

(3) *The leadership of the United States in world democracy compels the enfranchisement of its own woman.* The maxims of the Declaration were once called "fundamental principles of government." They are now called "American principles" or even "Americanisms." They have become the slogans of every movement toward political liberty the world around; of every effort to widen the suffrage for men or women in any land. Not a people, race or class striving for freedom is there, anywhere in the world that has not made our axioms the chief weapon of the struggle. More all men and women the world around with far-sighted vision into the verities of things, know that the world tragedy of our day is not now being waged over the assassination of an Archduke,

nor commercial competition, nor national ambitions, nor the freedom of the seas - it is a death grapple between the forces which deny and those which uphold the truth of the Declaration of Independence.

Our "Americanisms" have become the issue of the great war!

Every day the conviction grows deeper that a world humanity will emerge from the war, demanding political liberty and accepting nothing less. In that new struggle there is little doubt that men and women will demand and attain political liberty together. Today they are fighting the world's battle for democracy together. Men and women are paying the frightful cost of war and bearing its sad and sickening sorrows together. Tomorrow they will share its rewards together in democracies which make no discriminations on account of sex.

These are new times and as an earnest of its sincerity in the battle for democracy, the government of Great Britain has not only pledged votes to its disfranchised men and to its women, but the measure passed the House of Commons in June, 1917, by a vote of 7 to 1 and will be sent to the House of Lords in December with the assurance of Premier Lloyd George that it will shortly become a national law. The measure will apply to England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and all the smaller British islands.

Canada too has enfranchised the women of all its provinces starting from the Pacific Coast to Northern New York, and the Premiere predicted votes for all Canadian women before the next national election.

Russia, whose opposing forces have made a sad farce of the new poverty, is nevertheless pledged to a democracy which shall include women. It must be remembered that no people ever passed from absolute autocracy into a smoothly running democracy with ready-made constitution and a full set of statutes to cover all conditions. Russia is no exception. She must have time to work out her destiny. Except those maxims of democracy put forth by our own country, it is interesting to note that the only one worthy of immortality is the slogan of the women of New Russia, "Without the participation of women, suffrage is not universal."

France has pledged votes to its women as certainly as a Republic of Italian men have declared woman suffrage an imperative issue when the war is over and have asked its consideration before. The city of Paris (Bohemia) has appointed a Commission to report a new municipal suffrage plan which shall include women. Even autocratic Germany debated the question in the Imperial Reichstag.

In the words of Premier Lloyd George; "There are times in history when the world spins along its destined course so leisurely that for centuries it seems to be at a standstill. Then come awful times when time rushes along at so giddy a pace that the track of centuries is covered in a single year. These are the times in which we now live."

It is true; democracy, votes for men and votes for women, making slow but certain progress in 1914, have suddenly become established facts in many lands in 1917. Already our one-time mother Country has become the standard bearer of our Americanisms, the principles she [?] denied, and - cynical fact - Great Britain, not the United States, is now leading the world on to the coming democracy. (*The present bill provides that the parliamentary vote shall be extended to women. All other suffrage rights on equal terms with men have long been enjoyed by the women of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. The women of Canada have had municipal suffrage for many years, the qualifications varying in different provinces, and the women of Australia and New Zealand have long had full suffrage on equal terms with men. The Scandinavian countries too have outstripped us in applied democracy and have taken the second lead. Universal suffrage including women is already established in Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland, even Sweden long ago gave women equal political rights with men except the vote in Parliament. The King has twice recommended that this disability be removed and action is promised soon.*) Any man who has American blood in his veins, any man who has gloried in our history and has rejoiced that our land was the leader of world democracy, will share with us the humbled national pride that our country has so long delayed action upon this question that another country has beaten us in what we thought was our especial world mission.

### **The Logic of the Situation Calls for Immediate Action**

It is not clear that American history makes woman suffrage inevitable? That full suffrage in twelve States makes its coming in all forty-eight States inevitable? That the spread of democracy over the world, including votes for the women of many countries, in each case based upon the principles our Republic gave to the world, compels action by our nation? Is it not clear that the world expects such action and fails to understand its delay?

In the face of these facts we ask you, Senators and members of the House of Representatives of the United States, is not the immediate enfranchisement of women of our nation the duty of the hour?

Why hesitate? Not an inch of solid ground is left for the feet of the opponent. The world's war has killed, buried and pronounced the obsequies upon the hard-worked "war argument." Mr. Asquith, erstwhile champion anti-suffragist of the world, has said so and the British Parliament has confirmed it by its enfranchisement of British women. The million and fifteen thousand women of New York who signed a declaration that they wanted the vote, plus the heavy vote of women in every State and country where women have the franchise, have finally and completely disposed of the familiar "they don't want it" argument. Thousands of women annually emerging from the schools and colleges have closed the debate upon the one-time serious "they don't know enough" argument. The statistics of police courts and prisons have laid the ghost of the "too bad to vote" argument. The woman who demanded the book and verse in the bible which gave men the vote, declaring that the next verse gave it to women, brought the "Bible argument" to a sudden end. The testimony of thousands of reputable citizens of our own suffrage States and of all other suffrage lands that woman suffrage has brought no harm and much positive good, and the absence of reputable citizens who deny these facts, has closed the "women only double the vote" argument. The increasing number of women wage-earners, many supporting families and some supporting husbands, has thrown out the "women are represented" argument. One by one these pet misgivings have been delegated to the scrap heap of all rejected, cast-off prejudices. Not an argument is left. The case against woman suffrage, carefully prepared by the combined wit, skill and wisdom of opponents, including some men of ill repute, during sixty years, has been closed. The jury of the New York electorate heard it all weighed the evidence and pronounced it "incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial." Historians tell us that the battle of Gettysburg brought our Civil War to an end, although the fighting lasted a year longer, because the people who directed it did not see that the end had come. Had their sight been clearer, a year's casualties of human life, desolated homes, high taxes and bitterness of spirit might have been avoided. The battle of New York is the Gettysburg of woman suffrage movement. There are those too blind to see that the end has come, and others, unrelenting and unreasoning, who stubbornly deny that the end has come although they know it. These can compel the women of the nation to keep a standing suffrage army to finance and fight on until these blind and stubborn ones are gathered to their fathers and men with clear vision come to take their places but the casualty will be sex antagonism, party antagonism, bitterness, resentment, contempt, hate and the things which grow out of a rankling grievance and democratically denied process. These things are not mentioned in the spirit of threat, but merely to voice well known principles of historical psychology.

Benjamin Franklin once said "The cost of war is not paid at war time, the bills come afterwards" So too the nation, refusing justice when justice is due finds the costs accumulating and the bills presented at unexpected and embarrassing times. Think it over.

If enfranchisement is to be given to women now, how is it to be done? Shall it be by amendment of State constitutions or by amendment of the Federal Constitution? There are no other ways. The first sends the question from the Legislature by referendum to all male voters to the State; the other sends the question from Congress to the Legislature of the several States.

### **Three Reasons for the Federal Method**

We elect the Federal method. There are three reasons why we make this choice and three reasons why we reject the state method. We choose the Federal method 1.) because it is the quickest process and justly demands immediate action. If passed by the Sixty-fifth Congress, as it should be, the amendment will go to forty-one Legislatures in 1919, and when thirty-six have ratified it, will become a national law. In 1869 Wyoming led the way and 1919 will round out half a century of the most self-sacrificing struggle any class ever made for the vote. It is enough. The British women's suffrage army will be mustered out at the end of their half century of similar endeavor. Surely men of the land of George Washington will not require a longer time than those of the land of

George the Third to discover that taxation without representation is tyranny- no matter whether it be men or women who are taxed! We may justly expect American men to be as willing to grant to the women of the United States generous consideration as those of great Britain have done.

2) Every other country dignifies woman suffrage as a national question. Even Canada and Australia, composed of self-governing states like our own, who regard it. Were the precedent not established our own national government has taken a step which makes the treatment of woman suffrage as a national question imperative. For the first time in our history Congress has imposed a direct tax upon women and has thus deliberately violated the most fundamental and sacred principle of our government, since it offers no compensating "representation" for the tax it imposes. Unless separation is made it becomes the same kind of tyrant as was George the Third. When the exemption for unmarried persons under the Income Tax was reduced to \$1000, the Congress laid the tax upon thousands of wage-earning women - teachers, doctors, lawyers, bookkeepers, secretaries and the proprietors of many businesses. Such women are earning their incomes under hard conditions of economic inequalities largely due to their disfranchisement. Many of these, while fighting their own economic battle, have been contributors to the campaign for suffrage that they might bring easier conditions for all women. Now those contributions will be deflected from suffrage treasuries into government funds through taxation. Women realize the dire need of huge government resources at this time and will make no protest against the tax but it must be understood, and understood clearly, that the protest is here just the same and that women income taxpayers with few exceptions harbor a genuine grievance against the government of the United States. The national government is guilty of the violation of the principle that the tax and the vote are inseparable; it alone can make amends. Two ways are open: exempt the women the Income Tax or grant them the vote - there can be no compromise. To shift responsibility from Congress to the States is to invite the scorn of every human being who has learned to reason. A congress which mandates the law and has the power to violate a world-acknowledged axiom of just government can also command the law and the power to the Congress of the United States, we must and do look for this act of primary justice.

3) If the entire forty-eight States should severally enfranchise women, their political status would still be inferior to that of men, since no provision for national protection in their right to vote would exist. The women of California or new York are not wholly enfranchised for the national government has not denied the States the right to deprive them of the vote. This protection can come only by Federal action. Therefore, since women will eventually be forced to demand congressional action in order to equalize the rights of men and women, why not take such action now and thus shorten and ease the process. When such submission is secured, as it will be, forty-eight simultaneous State ratification campaigns will be necessary. By the State method, thirty-six States would be obliged to have individual campaigns, and those would still have to be followed by the forty-eight additional campaigns to secure the final protection in their right to vote by the national government. We propose to conserve money, time and woman's strength by the elimination of the thirty-six State campaigns as unnecessary to this stage of the progress of the woman suffrage movement.

### **Three Reasons Against the State Method**

The three reasons why we object to the State amendment process are: 1) The constitutions of many States contain such difficult provisions for amending that it is practically impossible to carry an amendment at the polls. Several States require a majority of all the votes cast at an election to insure the passage of an amendment. As the number of persons voting on amendments is usually considerably smaller than the number voting for the head of the ticket, the effect of such provision is that a majority of those men who do not vote at all on the amendment are counted as voting against it. For example, imagine a State casting 100,000 votes for Governor and 80,000 on a woman suffrage amendment. That proportion would be a usual one. Now suppose there were 45,000 votes in favor and 35,000 against woman suffrage. The amendment would have been carried by 10,000 majority in a State which requires only a majority of the votes cast at the election, the amendment would be lost by 10,000 majority. The men who were either too ignorant, too indifferent or too careless to vote on the question would have defeated it. Such constitutions have rarely been amended and then only on some non-controversial question which the dominant powers have agreed to support with the full strength of their "machines."

New Mexico, for example, requires three-fourths of those voting at an election, including two-thirds from each county. New Mexico is surrounded by suffrage States but the women who live there probably can secure

enfranchisement only by federal action. The Indiana constitution provides that a majority of all voters is necessary to carry an amendment; thus the courts may decide that registered voters who did not go to the polls at all may be counted in the number, a majority of whom it is necessary to secure. The constitution cannot be amended. The courts have declared that the constitution prohibits the legislature from granting suffrage to women. What then can the women of Indiana do? They have no other hope than the Federal Amendment. Several State constitutions stipulate that a definite period of time must elapse before an amendment defeated at the polls can again be submitted. New York has no such provision and the second campaign of 1917 immediately followed the first in 1915; but Pennsylvania and New Jersey, both voting on the question in 1915, cannot vote on it again before 1920. New Hampshire has no provision for the submission of an amendment by the Legislature at all. A Constitutional Convention alone has the right to submit an amendment, and such conventions can not be called oftener than once in seven years. The constitutional complications in many of the States are numerous, varied and difficult to overcome.

All careful investigators must arrive at the same conclusion that the only hope for the enfranchisement of the women of several States is through Congressional action. Since this is true, we hold it unnecessary to force women to pass through any more referenda campaigns. The hazards of the State constitutional provisions which women are expected to overcome in order to get the vote, as compared with the easy process by which the vote is fairly thrust upon foreigners who choose to make their residence among us, is so offensive an outrage to one's sense of justice that a woman's rebellion would surely have been fomented long ago had women not known that the discrimination visited upon them was without deliberate intent.

The continuation of this condition is, however, the direct responsibility now of every man who occupies a position authorized to right the wrong. You are such men, Honorable Senators and Representatives. To you we appeal to remove a grievance more insulting than any nation in the wide world has put upon its women.

2) The second reason why we object to the State process is far more serious and important than the first. It is because the statutory laws governing elections are so inadequate and defective as to vouchsafe little or no protection to a referendum in most States. The need for such protection seems to have been universally overlooked by the lawmakers, Bipartisan election boards offer efficient machinery whereby the representatives of one political party may check any irregularities of the other. The interests of all political parties in an election are further protected by partisan watchers. None of these provisions is available to those interested in a referendum. In most States women may not serve as watchers and no political party assumes responsibility for a non-partisan question. In the State of New York women may serve as watchers. They did so serve in 1915 and in 1917; nearly every one in the more than 5,000 polling places was covered by efficiently trained women watchers. The women believe that this fact had much to do with the favorable result.

In twenty-four States there is no law providing for a recount on a referendum. Voters may be bribed, colonized, repeated and the law provides for no possible redress. In some States corrupt voters may be arrested, tried and punished, but that does not remove their votes from the total vote cast nor in any way change the results. When questions which are supported by men's organizations go to referendum, such as prohibition, men interested may secure posts as election officials or party watchers and thus be in position to guard the purity of the election. This privilege is not open to women.

That corrupt influences have exerted their full power against woman suffrage, we know well. I have myself seen blocks of men marched to the polling booth and paid money in plain sight both men and bribers flaunting the fact boldly that they were "beating the \_ women." I have myself seen men who could not speak a word of English; nor write their names in any language, driven to the polls like sheep to vote against woman suffrage and no law at the time could punish them for the musses of the vote so cheaply extended to them, nor change the result.

It is our sincere belief based upon evidence which has been completely convincing to us that the returns were juggled and the amendment counted out. We have given to such campaigns our money, our time, our strength, our very lives. We have believed the amendment carried and yet have seen our cause announced as lost. We are tired of playing the State campaign game with "the political dice loaded and the cards stacked" against us before we begin. The position of such an amendment is precisely like that of the defendant in a case brought before an

inexperienced judge. After having heard the plaintiff, he untactfully remarked that he would listen to the defendant's remarks but he was bound to tell him in advance that he proposed to give the verdict to the plaintiff. From this lower court, often unscrupulous in its unfairness, we appeal to the higher, the Congress and the Legislatures of the United States.

3) The third reason why we object to the State method is even more weighty than either or both of the others. It is because the State method fixes responsibility upon no one. The Legislatures pass the question on to the voters and have no further interest in it. The political parties, not knowing how the election may decide the matter, are loth to espouse the cause of woman suffrage, lest if it loses, they will have alienated from their respective parties the support of enemies of woman suffrage.

Contributors to campaign funds have at times stipulated the return service of the party machinery to defeat woman suffrage, and as such contributors are silly enough to make certain of their protection, they often contribute to both dominant parties. Thousands of men in every State have become so accustomed to accept party nominations and platforms as their unquestioned guide that they ruffle to act upon a political question without instruction from their leaders. When the leaders pass the word along the line to defeat a woman suffrage amendment, it is impossible to carry it. It is not submitted to an electorate of thinking voters whose reason must be convinced, but to such voters, plus political "machines" skillfully organized, servilely obedient, who have their plans laid to defeat the question at the polls even before it leaves the legislature. From a condition where no one is irresponsible for the procedure of the amendment through the hazards of an election, why every enemy may effectively hide his enmity and the methods employed behind the barriers of constitutions and election laws, we appeal to a method which will bring our cause into the open where every person or party, friend or foe involved in the campaign, may be held responsible to the public. We appeal from the method which has kept the women in this country disfranchised a quarter of a century after their enfranchisement was due, to the method by which the vote has been granted to the men and women of other lands. We do so with the certain assurance that every believer in fair play, regardless of party fealties, will approve our decision.

These are the three reasons why we elect the federal method and the three reasons why we reject the State method. We are so familiar with the objections Congressional opponents tirge against suffrage by the federal method that we know those objections also curiously number three.

### Three Objections Answered

Objection No. 1. *War time is not the proper time to consider the question.* Two neutral countries, Iceland and Denmark, and three belligerent countries, Canada, Russia and Great Britain, have enfranchised their women during war time and they have been engaged in war for three and a half years. That which is a proper time for such countries is surely proper enough for us.

More, it is not our fault, you will admit, that this question is still unsettled in 1917. If our urgent advice had been taken it would have been disposed of twenty-five years ago and our nation would now be proudly leading the world to democracy instead of following in third place. Had Congress "got the hand of the Declaration of Independence" then more men today would know understand what a world's war "to make the world safe for democracy" means.

In 1866 an Address to Congress was adopted by a Suffrage Convention held in New York and presented to Congress later by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They protested against the enfranchisement of Negro men while women remained disfranchised as asked for Congressional action. That was fifty-one years ago in 1867, the Federal suffrage Amendment now pending was introduced in Congress at the request of the National Woman Suffrage Association and has been reintroduced in each succeeding Congress.

The representatives of this Association have appeared before the Committees of every Congress since 1878 to urge its passage. The women who made the first appeal, brave, splendid souls, have long since passed into the Beyond, and every one died knowing that the country she loved and served classified her as a political pariah. Every Congress has seen the Committee Rooms packed with anxious women yearning for the declaration of their nation that they were no longer to be classed with idiots, criminals and paupers. Every State has sent its

quota of women to those Committees. Among them have been the daughters of Presidents, Governors, Chief Justices, Speakers of the House, leaders of political parties and leaders of great movements. List the women of the last century whose names will pass into history among the immortals and scarcely one is there who has not appeared before your committees- Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Mary A. Livermore, Lillie Devereux Blake, Julia Ward Howe, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frances Willard, Clara Barton and hundreds more. There are hundreds of women in the suffrage convention now sitting who have paid out more money in railroad fare to come to Washington in order to persuade men that "women are people" than all the men in the entire country ever paid to get a vote.

Perhaps you think our pleas in those Committee Rooms were poor attempts at logic. Ah, one chairman of the committee long ago said to a fellow member; "There is no man living or dead who could answer the arguments of those women," and then he added, "but I'd rather see my wife dead in her coffin than going to vote." Yet, there are those of you who have said that women are illogical and sentimental! Since Congress has already had fifty-one years of peace in which to deal with the question of woman suffrage, we hold that a further postponement is unwarranted.

Objection No. 2 *A vote on this question by Congress and the Legislatures is undemocratic; it should go to the "people" of the States.* You are wrong, gentlemen, as your reason will quickly tell you, if you will reflect a moment. When a State submits a constitutional amendment to male voters, it does a legal, constitutional thing, but when that amendment chiefly concerns one-half the people of the State and the law permits the other half to settle it the wildest stretch of the imagination could not describe the process as democratic. Democracy means "the rule-of-people," and, let me repeat, women are people. No state referendum goes to the people; it goes to the male voters. Such referenda can not be democratic. Were the question of woman suffrage to be submitted a vote of both sexes, the action would be democratic, but in that use would not be legal nor constitutional.

Male voters have never been named by any constitution or statute the representatives of women; we therefore decline to accept them that capacity. The nearest approach to representation allowed votes to women are the members of congress and the Legislatures. These members are apportioned among the several States upon the basis of population and not upon the basis of number of voters. Therefore every congressman theoretically represents the women of his constituency as well as the male voters. He is theoretically responsible to them and to they may properly go to him for redress of such grievances as fall within jurisdiction. More, every member of Congress not only represents small constituency confined to his district, but all the people of country, since his vote upon national questions affects them all. Women whether voters or non- voters, may properly claim members of congress as the only substitution for representation provided by the constitution. We apply to you, therefore, to correct a grievous wrong which your constitutional jurisdiction gives you authority to set right.

Objection No. 3 *States Rights.* You pronounce it unfair that thirty-six States should determine who may vote in the remaining twelve; the possible Republican Northern States should decide who may vote in Democratic Southern States. It is no more unfair than that some counties within a State should decide who may vote in the remaining counties is no more unfair than that the Democratic city of New York should disfranchise the women of the Republican cities of Albany and Rochester as it has just done. Forty-eight States will have the opportunity to ratify the Federal Amendment and every State, therefore, will have its opportunity to disfranchise its own women in this manner. If any State fails to do it, they may agree that that State would probably not enfranchise its own women by the State method, but if it would not so enfranchise them that State is behind the times and is holding our country up to the scorn of other nations. It has failed to catch the vision and the spirit of Democracy sweeping over the world. This nation cannot, must not, wait for any State, ignorant, backward. That State more than all others needs woman suffrage to shake its dry bones, to bring political questions into the home and set discussion going. It needs education, action, stimulation to prevent atrophy. In after years posterity will utter grateful thanks that there was a method which could throw a bit of modernity into it from the outside.

It is urged that the women of some such States do not want the vote. Of course if the thought of an entire State is antiquated, its women will share the general stagnation but there is no State where there is not a large number of women who are working, and working hard, for the vote. The vote is permissive, a liberty extended. It is never a burden laid upon the individual, since there is no obligation to exercise the right. On the other hand, the refusal to permit those who want the vote to have and to use it is oppression, tyranny and no other words describe the

condition. When therefore, men within a State are so ungenerous or unprogressive, or stubborn as to continue the denial of the vote to the women who want it, men on the outside should have no scruples in constituting themselves the liberators of those women.

Despite these truths there are among you those who still harbor honest misgivings. Please remember that woman suffrage is coming; you know it is. In this connection, have you ever thought that the women of your own families who may tell you now that they do not want the vote are going to realize someday that there is something insincere in your protestations of chivalry protection and "you are too good to vote, my dear," they are going to discover that the trust, respect, and frank acknowledgment of equality which men of other States have given their women are something infinitely higher and nobler than you have ever offered them? Have you thought that you may now bestow upon them a liberty that they may not yet realize they need, but that tomorrow they may storm your castle and command? Do you suppose that any woman in the land is going to be content with unenfranchisement when she once comprehends that men of other countries have given women the vote? Do you not see that when that time comes to her she is going to ask why you, her husband, her father, who were so placed, perhaps, that you could observe the progress of world affairs, did not see the coming change of custom and save her from the humiliation of having to beg for that which women in other countries are already enjoying? Have you known that no more potent influence has aroused the sheltered and consequently narrow visioned woman into a realization that she wanted to be a part of enfranchised class than the manner in which men treat enfranchised women? There is no patronizing "I am holier than thou" air, but in equality of "fellow citizens." One never sees that relation between men and women except where women vote. Some day that woman who does know the world is moving on and leaving her behind will see and know these things. What will she say and do then? What will you do for her now?

There are many well known men in Great Britain who frankly confess that their desire to give British women the vote is founded upon their sense of gratitude for the loyal and remarkable war service women have performed. They speak of suffrage as a reward. For years women have asked the vote as a recognition of the incontrovertible fact that they are responsible, intelligent citizens of the country and because its denial has been an outrageous discrimination against their sex. British women will receive their enfranchisement with joyous appreciation but the joy will be lessened and the appreciation tempered by the perfect understanding that "vote as a reward" is only an escape from the uncomfortable corner into which the unanswerable logic of the women have driven the government. Mutual respect between those who give and those who receive the vote would have been promoted had the inevitable duty not been deferred. We hope American men will be wiser.

Other men of other lands have thrown aside traditions as tenderly revered as yours in response for the higher call of Justice, Progress, and Democracy. Can you, too, not rise to this same call of duty? Is any good to be served by continuing one injustice in order to resent another injustice? We are one nation and those of us who live now and make our appeal to you are like yourselves not of the generation whose differences created the conditions which entrenched the tradition of State's Rights. We ask you, our representatives to right the wrong done us by the law of our land as the men of other lands have done.

Our nation is in the extreme crisis of its existence and men would search their very souls to find just and reasonable causes for every thought and act. If you, making this search shall find "State's Rights" a sufficient cause to lead you to vote "no" on the Federal Suffrage Amendment, then, with all the gentleness which should accompany the reference to a sacred memory, let us tell you that your cause will bear neither the test of time nor critical analysis, and that your vote will compel your children to apologize for your act.

Already your vote has forwarded some of the measures which are far more distinctly State Rights questions than the fundamental demand for equal human rights. Among such questions are the regulation of child labor, the eight-hour law, the white slave traffic, moving picture, questionable literature, food supply, clothing supply, prohibition. All of these acts are in the direction of the restraint of "personal liberty" in the supposed interest of the public good. Every instinct of justice, every principle of logic and ethics is shocked at the reasoning which grants Congress the right to curtail personal liberty but no right to extend it. "Necessity knows no law" may seem to you sufficient authority to tax the incomes of women, to demand exhausting amounts of volunteer military service, to commandeer women for public work and in other ways to restrain their liberty as war measures. But by the same token the grant of more liberty may properly be conferred as a war measure. If other lands have

been brave enough to extend suffrage to women in war time, our own counter, the mother of democracy, surely will not hesitate. We are told that a million or more American men will be on European battle fields ere many months. For every man who goes, there is one loyal woman and probably more who would vote to support to the most that man's cause. The disloyal men will be here to vote. Suffrage for women now as a war measure means suffrage for the loyal forces for those who know what it means "to fight to keep the world safe for democracy."

The framers of the Constitution gave unquestioned authority to Congress to act upon women suffrage. Why not use that authority and use it now to do the big, noble, just thing of catching pace with other nations on this question of democracy? The world and posterity will honor you for it.

### **In Conclusion**

In conclusion, we know, and you know that we know, that it has been the aim of both dominate parties to postpone woman suffrage as long as possible. A few men in each party have always fought with us fearlessly, but the party machines have evaded, avoided, tricked and buffeted this question from Congress to Legislatures, from Legislatures, to political conventions. I confess to you that many of us have a deep and abiding distrust of all existing political parties - they have tricked us so often and in such unscrupulous fashion that our doubts are natural. Some of you are leaders of those parties and all are members. Your parties we also know have a distrust and suspicion of new women voters. Let us counsel together. Woman suffrage is inevitable - you know it. The political parties will go on - we know it. Shall we then be enemies of friends? Can party leaders in twelve States really obtain the loyal support of women voters when those women know that the same party is ordering the defeat of amendments in States where campaigns are pending, or delaying action in congress in the Federal Amendment? Gentlemen, we ask you to put yourselves in our places. What would you do? Would you keep on spending your money and your lives on a slow, laborious, flimsy state method, or would you use the votes you have won to complete your campaign on behalf of suffrage for all women in the nation? Would you be content to keep a standing army of women to hold off for the special work of educating men in the meaning of democracy; would you raise and spend millions of dollars in the process; would you give up every other thing in life you hold dear in order to keep State campaigns going for another possible quarter of a century? Would you do this and see the women of other countries leaving you behind, or would you make "a hard pull, a long pull and a pull altogether" and finish the task at once? You know you would choose the latter. We make the same choice.

Do you realize that in no other country in the world with democratic tendencies is suffrage so completely denied as in a considerable number of our own States? There are 13 black States where no suffrage for women exists, and 14 others where suffrage for women is more limited than in many foreign countries.

Do you realize that when you ask women to take their cause to State referendum you compel them to do this; that you drive women of education, refinement, achievement, to beg men who cannot read for their political freedom?

Do you realize that such anomalies as a College President asking her janitor to give her a vote are overstraining the patience and driving women to desperation?

Do you realize that women in increasing numbers indignantly resent the long delay in their enfranchisement?

Your party platforms have pledged woman suffrage. Then why not be honest, frank friends of our cause, adopt it in reality as your own, make it a party program and "fight with us"? As a party measure--a measure of all parties--why not put the amendment through Congress and the Legislatures? We shall all be better friends, we shall have a happier nation, we women will be free to support loyally the party of our choice and we shall be far prouder of our history.

"There is one thing mightier than kings and armies"--aye, than Congresses and political parties-- "the power of an idea when its time has come to move." The time for woman suffrage has come. The woman's hour has struck. If parties prefer to postpone action longer and thus do battle with this idea, they challenge the inevitable. The idea will not perish; the party which opposes it may. Every delay, every trick, every political dishonesty from now on will antagonize the women of the land more and more, and when the party or parties which have so

delayed woman suffrage finally let it come, their sincerity will be doubted and their appeal to the new voters will be met with suspicion. This is the psychology of the situation. Can you afford the risk? Think it over.

We know you will meet opposition. There are a few "woman haters" left, a few "old males of the tribe," as Vance Thompson calls them, whose duty they believe it to be to keep women in the places they have carefully picked out for them. Treitschke, made world famous by war literature, said some years ago: "Germany, which knows all about Germany and France, knows far better what is good for Alsace-Lorraine than that miserable people can possibly know." A few American Treitschkes we have who know better than women what is good for them. There are women, too, with "slave souls" and "clinging vines" for backbones. There are female dolls and male dandies. But the world does not wait for such as these, nor does Liberty pause to heed the plaint of men and women with a grouch. She does not wait for those who have a special interest to serve, nor a selfish reason for depriving other people of freedom. Holding her torch aloft, Liberty is pointing the way onward and upward and saying to America, "Come."

To you the supporters of our cause, in Senate and House, and the number is large, the suffragists of the nation express their grateful thanks. This address is not meant for you. We are more truly appreciative of all you have done than any words can express. We ask you to make a last, hard fight for the amendment during the present session. Since last we asked a vote on this amendment your position has been fortified by the addition to suffrage territory of Great Britain, Canada and New York.

Some of you have been too indifferent to give more than casual attention to this question. It is worthy of your immediate consideration--a question big enough to engage the attention of our Allies in war time, is too big a question for you to neglect.

Some of you have grown old in party service. Are you willing that those who take your places by and by shall blame you for having failed to keep pace with the world and thus having lost for them a party advantage? Is there any real gain for you, for your party, for the nation by delay? Do you want to drive the progressive men and women out of your party?

Some of you hold to the doctrine of State's rights, as applying to woman suffrage. Adherence to that theory will keep the United States far behind all other democratic nations in action upon this question. *A theory which prevents a nation from keeping up with the trend of world progress cannot be justified.*

Many of you have admitted that "State's Rights" is less a principle than a tradition- a tradition, however, which we all know is rooted deep in the memory of bitter and, let us say, regrettable incidents of history. But the past is gone. We are living in the present and facing the future.

Gentlemen, we hereby petition you, our only designated representatives, to redress our grievances by the immediate passage of the influence to secure its ratification in your own state, in order that the women of our nation may be endowed with political freedom that our nation may resume its world leadership in democracy.

Woman suffrage is coming--you know it. Will you, Honorable Senators and Members of the House of Representatives, help or hinder it?

*This speech is also reprinted in "Man Cannot Speak For Her: Volume II Key Texts of The Early Feminists" by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, pp. 503-532. Greenwood Press, Inc. Westport, CN.*

*PDF version*

***Neither the Catt Center nor Iowa State University is affiliated with any individual in the Archives or any political party. Inclusion in the Archives is not an endorsement by the center or the university.***