

ORIGINAL SENATE
JOINT RESOLUTION
NO. SJ0003

ENGROSSED

ENROLLED JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 1, SENATE

SIXTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WYOMING
2019 GENERAL SESSION

A JOINT RESOLUTION recognizing December 10, 2019 as Wyoming Women's Suffrage Day.

WHEREAS, Wyoming is often referred to as the "Cowboy State," its more apt sobriquet is the "Equality State"; and

WHEREAS, women, like all persons, have always inherently held the right to vote and participate in their government; and

WHEREAS, Wyoming was the first government to explicitly acknowledge and affirm women's inherent right to vote and to hold office; and

WHEREAS, this inherent right, at the founding of the United States, was inhibited; and

WHEREAS, women, at the founding of the United States, were also prevented from holding office; and

WHEREAS, women's suffrage – the basic enfranchisement of women – began to burgeon in the United States in the 1840s and continued to gain momentum over the next decades, despite the oppressive atmosphere in which women were not allowed to divorce their husbands or show their booted ankles without risk of public scandal or worse; and

WHEREAS, during the 1850s, activism to support women's suffrage gathered steam, but lost momentum when the Civil War began; and

WHEREAS, in the fall of 1868, three (3) years after the American Civil War had ended, Union Army General Ulysses S. Grant was elected President, and chose John Campbell to serve as Governor of the Wyoming Territory; and

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WHEREAS, Joseph A. Carey, who was thereafter appointed to serve as Attorney General of the Wyoming Territory, issued a formal legal opinion that no one in Wyoming could be denied the right to vote based on race; and

WHEREAS, the first Wyoming Territorial Legislature, comprised entirely of men, required consistent and persistent inveigling to warm to the notion of suffrage; and

WHEREAS, abolitionist and woman suffrage activist, Esther Hobart Morris, was born in Tioga County, New York, on August 8, 1812, and later became a successful milliner and businesswoman; and

WHEREAS, Esther Hobart Morris, widowed in 1843, moved to Peru, Illinois, to settle the property in her late husband's estate and experienced the legal hardships faced by women in Illinois and New York; and

WHEREAS, Esther Hobart Morris married John Morris, a prosperous merchant, and in 1869 moved to the gold rush camp at South Pass City, a small valley situated along the banks of Willow Creek on the southeastern end of the Wind River Mountains in the Wyoming Territory just north of the Oregon Trail; and

WHEREAS, William Bright, a saloonkeeper, also from the once bustling frontier mining town South Pass City, was elected to serve in the Territorial Legislature and was elected as president of the Territorial Council; and

WHEREAS, the Territorial Legislature met in 1869 in Cheyenne and passed bills and resolutions formally enabling women to vote and hold property and formally assuring equal pay for teachers; and

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WHEREAS, William Bright introduced a bill to recognize the right of Wyoming women to vote; and

WHEREAS, no records were kept of the debate between Wyoming territorial lawmakers, although individuals likely asserted a myriad of motivations and intentions in supporting women's suffrage; and

WHEREAS, the Wyoming Territory population at the time consisted of six adult men for every adult woman, some lawmakers perchance hoped suffrage would entice more women to the state; and

WHEREAS, some lawmakers may have believed that women's suffrage was consistent with the goals articulated in post-Civil War Amendment XV to the United States Constitution guaranteeing 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 race, color, or previous condition of servitude"; and

WHEREAS, some lawmakers inherently knew that guaranteeing the right of women to vote was, simply, the right thing to do; and

WHEREAS, the Territorial Legislature advanced a suffrage bill stating, "That every woman of the age of twenty-one years, residing in this territory, may, at every election to be holden under the laws thereof, cast her vote. And her rights to the elective franchise and to hold office shall be the same under the election laws of the territory, as those of electors" and that "This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage"; and

WHEREAS, when invited to join the Union, demanding that women's suffrage be revoked, the Wyoming Legislature said,

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"We will remain out of the Union one hundred years rather than come in without the women"; and

WHEREAS, in July 1890, Esther Hobart Morris presented the new Wyoming state flag to Governor Francis E. Warren during the statehood celebration, making Wyoming the 44th state to enter the Union and the first with its women holding the right to vote and serve in elected office; and

WHEREAS, the United States did not endorse women's suffrage until 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; and

WHEREAS, despite the passage of the 19th Amendment, women of color continued to face barriers with exercising their right to vote, as American Indian men and women were not recognized as United States citizens permitted to vote until the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, and ongoing racial discrimination required the passage and implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, achieving voting rights for all women required firm and continuing resolve to overcome reluctance, and even fervent opposition, toward this rightful enfranchisement; and

WHEREAS, Wyoming, the first to recognize women's suffrage, blazed a trail of other noteworthy milestones, such as Louisa Swain, of Laramie, casting the first ballot by a woman voter in 1870; and

WHEREAS, in 1870 the first jury to include women was in Wyoming and was sworn in on March 7 in Laramie; and

WHEREAS, Esther Hobart Morris was appointed to serve as justice of the peace in February 1870, making her the first woman to serve as a judge in the United States; and

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WHEREAS, Wyoming women become the first women to vote in a presidential election in 1892; and

WHEREAS, in 1894 Wyoming elected Estelle Reel to serve as the state superintendent of public instruction, making her one of the first women in the United States elected to serve in a statewide office; and

WHEREAS, the residents of the town of Jackson in 1920 elected a city council composed entirely of women – dubbed the "petticoat government" by the press – making it the first all-women government in the United States; and

WHEREAS, in 1924 Wyoming elected Nellie Tayloe Ross to serve as governor of the great state of Wyoming, making her the first woman to be sworn in as governor in these United States; and

WHEREAS, all these milestones illuminate and strengthen Wyoming's heritage as the "Equality State"; and

WHEREAS, December 10, 2019 marks the 150th anniversary of the date women's suffrage became law.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WYOMING:

Section 1. That the Wyoming legislature commemorates 2019 as a year to celebrate the one hundred fiftieth (150th) anniversary of the passage of women's suffrage.

Section 2. That the Wyoming legislature is proud of its heritage as the first state to recognize the right of women to vote and hold office, hereby affirming its legacy as the "Equality State."

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Section 3. That the Secretary of State of Wyoming transmit a copy of this resolution to the National Women's Hall of Fame in support of Esther Hobart Morris' induction into the Women of the Hall.

Section 4. That the Wyoming legislature encourages its citizens and invites its visitors to learn about the women and men who made women's suffrage in Wyoming a reality, thereby blazing a trail for other states, and eventually the federal government, to recognize the inherent right of men and women alike to elect their leaders and hold office.

(END)

Speaker of the House

President of the Senate

Governor

TIME APPROVED: _____

DATE APPROVED: _____

I hereby certify that this act originated in the Senate.

Chief Clerk