

Upon the victory in November 8, 1910, Governor Hay congratulated Mrs. DeVoe on the tactics used in the campaign. Washington women used low key, reasoned arguments and let men know they wanted to vote. Washington is called the “Five Star Suffrage State” since it was the fifth state in the Union to permanently enact women suffrage and the first state to do so in the twentieth century. Washington joined her sisters in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho. But there was still work to do since Native Americans could not generally become citizens until 1924; immigrant Asians were barred from citizenship well into the 20th century; and voters in 1910 were required to read and speak English.



Emma Smith DeVoe
(WSHS C2009.18.8)

Washington Influences the Nation

Governor Hay supported a new organization of western voting women—the National Council of Women Voters (NCWV) headed by Emma Smith DeVoe—that would work for women in other states to gain the right to vote.

As a women’s voting state, the governors were often called upon to testify about how women’s suffrage was working in Washington. Governor Hay wrote in February 1912, “During the short time woman suffrage has been in effect in this state a profound interest has been manifested among all women in the study of civic questions and the promotion of legislation and projects designed to advance the best interest of the people of the state. They are taking their responsibility seriously and proving a powerful agency of progress.”



Votes for Women
(WSHS photograph)

Washington women, notably Dr. Cora Smith Eaton, M.D. and Emma Smith DeVoe, were active in national women’s voting rights. After 1910, Washington women could vote for Congress and the President and were effective national lobbyists.

Governor Ernest Lister (1913–1919) also hailed the success of women’s suffrage in the state in 1913, “. . . I would say that the women of



Governor Ernest Lister
(State Archives photograph)

“ . . . women assist in the public affairs of the State by having the ballot.” Governor Ernest Lister, April 25, 1914. Women’s Independence Day Proclamation.

about two and one half years. I know of no one who was in favor of granting this right, who today opposes it; and large numbers of those who were opposed to the constitutional amendment granting equal suffrage, are now in favor of it. The results in the State of Washington have certainly indicated that the women of the State assist, rather than otherwise in public affairs, by having the right to vote.” First Lady Alma Lister was a partner in the pro-suffrage efforts—working to gain statements from voting-state governors to counter anti-suffrage sentiments in 1915.

After 1916, the state-by-state strategy of women’s voting rights changed to seeking a federal Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, called the “Susan B. Anthony Amendment.” Two factions worked toward the amendment: the National American Woman Suffrage Association under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, and the National Women’s Party headed by Alice Paul. Both groups called upon Washingtonians for support as a women-voting state.

The Ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

The 19th Amendment for women’s suffrage passed Congress June 4, 1919. Three-quarters of the states were needed to ratify the amendment, 36 at the time.

Because the legislature had already met in early 1919 and there were only biennial legislative sessions, any Washington ratification in 1919 or 1920 would require a special session of the legislature. Governor Louis Hart was reluctant to call the session. He received entreaties from influential suffragists, including Carrie Chapman Catt, that Washington as a voting state should be in the forefront of the effort. By February 1920 the other first western voting states—Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho—had ratified. Although legislators even volunteered to forgo a per diem for a suffrage special session, Hart still hesitated—waiting for more states to ratify.

As other issues came to the forefront, Hart decided to call a special session for March 22, 1920 to address the suffrage amendment, soldier bonuses for World War I veterans and a limited range of issues—likely to also solidify his leadership for a 1920 election campaign and to ensure national women’s voting for U.S. President that fall. By that date, only two states were needed before official ratification of the 19th Amendment. According to one account, “The capitol was thronged with women who had traveled from every corner of the state to participate in the occasion.”



Governor Louis Hart
(State Archives photograph)



Old Capitol where legislature met in 1920.
(Private Collection photograph)

“We find the Governors and other public men of the equal suffrage states among our most powerful aides . . .” Frances Maude Bjorkman to Governor Lister, October 14, 1913.