



# Fact Sheet

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August 18, 2010

Available Online: [dpc.senate.gov](http://dpc.senate.gov)

## Senate Democrats Are On Your Side Continuing the Fight for Women's Equality

*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 sex.*

*-19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution*

August 18, 2010, marks the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, guaranteeing women the right to vote, and Women's Equality Day. The Amendment's ratification marked the culmination of 72 years of work by suffragists across the United States. Since 1971, Congress has designated August 26<sup>th</sup>, the day ratification of the amendment was certified, as Women's Equality Day, to both commemorate passage of the Amendment and to call attention to continuing efforts toward full equality for women. Senate Democrats celebrate the achievements of American women and are committed to a legislative agenda that supports the continuing fight for women's equality.

### *Long Fight to the Franchise*

Before 1776, several American colonies permitted women the right to vote, but those colonies subsequently rewrote their constitutions to revoke this right. [National Women's History Museum, accessed [8/16/10](#)] Women were allowed to vote in New Jersey, from 1787 until 1807, when the all-male legislature revoked women's right to vote.

The first official, recorded call for women's right to vote in the United States came at the nation's first women's rights convention in July 1848. [Library of Congress, [7/27/10](#)] More than 300 women and men attended the convention, and 68 women and 32 men signed the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, which called for a range of women's rights, and resolved "That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise." [National Women's History Museum, accessed [8/16/10](#); Rutgers, [8/10](#)]

Over the next 72 years, tens of thousands of American women and men fought to secure for women the right to vote. Carrie Chapman Catt, tireless women's right advocate and the last president of the National American Women Suffrage Association, estimated that supporters of the movement had conducted

"Fifty-six campaigns of referenda to mail voters; 480 campaigns to get Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 47 campaigns to get state constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions; 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to include woman suffrage planks; 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt

woman suffrage planks in party platforms; and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses... It was a continuous, seemingly endless, chain of activity.” [National Women’s History Project, accessed [8/16/10](#)]

In 1878, an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote was first introduced. [OurDocuments.gov, accessed [8/16/10](#)] Forty-one years later, on May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives passed the amendment, and the Senate passed it on June 4, 1919. The following year, on August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the amendment, securing the necessary approval of three-fourths of the states. Ratification of the amendment was certified on August 26, 1920.

The fight for women’s suffrage spanned generations of mothers, grandmothers and daughters. As Carrie Chapman Catt noted, “Young suffragists who helped forge the last links of that chain were not born when it began. Old suffragists who forged the first links were dead when it ended.” [National Women’s History Project, accessed [8/16/10](#)] Three of the movement’s heroes, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, did not live to see women vote. In fact, when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was finally ratified, only one signer of the Seneca Falls Declaration, Charlotte Woodward, a young worker in a glove manufactory, had lived long enough to cast her ballot. [Smithsonian Institution, accessed [8/16/10](#)]

## ***Women’s Political Participation Grows***

Even before ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, women were participating in the political process and holding elective office. In 1917, Representative Jeannette Rankin became the first woman to serve in Congress, and since then, 260 women have served in the U.S. Senate or U.S. House. [Women in Congress, accessed [8/16/10](#)] In the current, 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 17 women serve in the Senate and 76 women serve in the House of Representatives, the largest number of women to serve in either Chamber at one time. [Office of the Clerk, accessed [8/16/10](#); Rutgers, [1/10](#)] While 50.7 percent of Americans are women, they currently hold just 16.8 percent of the 435 voting seats in the House, and 17 percent of seats in the Senate. [U.S. Census Bureau, accessed [8/16/10](#); Rutgers, [1/10](#)] However, women do hold positions of leadership in both Chambers, and in January 2007, Representative Nancy Pelosi became the first woman to serve as Speaker of the House, the second position in the presidential succession line. As of earlier this year, 1,804 women served in legislatures in the 50 states, holding 24.4 percent of all legislative seats in the states, a ratio which has increased by less than four percentage points in the last sixteen years. [National Conference of State Legislatures, [4/22/10](#)]

Women also have an increasing presence on the United State Supreme Court. When she was sworn in as the 112<sup>th</sup> Justice of the Supreme Court on August 7, 2010, Elena Kagan also became the fourth woman to ever serve on the Court. She joined Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor on a Court that for the first time has three female justices. Justice Sandra Day O’Connor was the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court, appointed by President Reagan in 1981. While women now make up 33 percent of the Supreme Court, they make up just 22 percent of all federal judgeships and 26 percent of all state-level positions. [University at Albany, [2/10](#)]

Women hold seven of the 22 positions in President Obama’s Cabinet. [The White House, accessed [8/16/10](#)] Throughout the nation’s history, 40 women have held 45 cabinet or cabinet-level appointments. [Rutgers, accessed [8/16/10](#)]

## ***Senate Democrats Continue Fight for Equality***

Senate Democrats are committed to advancing equality for American women and their families. During the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senate Democrats have fought for women’s economic advancement

during a crippling recession, fought for tools to help women fight pay discrimination at work, and fought to improve health care for women and their families, among a host of other accomplishments that benefit women.

Women comprise 46.8 percent of the total U.S. work force, and nearly 40 percent of mothers are primary breadwinners, while more than 62 percent of mothers are breadwinners or co-breadwinners, earning at least one-quarter of their family's income. [Department of Labor, [11/09](#); The Shriver Report, accessed [8/16/10](#)] Yet women earn just 77 cents for every dollar earned by men. [U.S. Census, [11/09](#)]

Clearly, the battle for equality is far from over, but in January 2009, all those who believe in the promise of equality achieved a major victory when President Obama signed the *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009* into law (**P.L. 111-2**). In doing so, Congress and President Obama ended a nearly two-year battle to overturn a Supreme Court decision that made it more difficult for victims of pay discrimination to seek redress and receive justice. The *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act* restored the pay-check accrual interpretation of federal law, to ensure that employees who can prove pay discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability will not be forever barred from seeking redress because they did not learn they were victims of pay discrimination within six months after the discriminatory decision was first made.

As Americans contend with the painful effects of the deepest economic recession since the Great Depression, the Democratic-led Congress is responding with a bold plan to revive our struggling economy, put millions of people to work, and lay the foundation for America's economic competitiveness in the 21st century. Last February, Democratic leaders enacted the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5)*. The *Recovery Act* focused on job creation and retention, cut taxes for 95 percent of American workers, and improved unemployment benefits and provided assistance in paying COBRA health insurance premiums for Americans who lost their jobs through no fault of their own. The *Recovery Act* also includes investments in infrastructure, energy, technology, education, and training that will help turn economic crisis into economic opportunity.

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has played a crucial role in helping to reduce the rate of uninsured low-income children over the past twelve years. CHIP was created in 1997 to provide health insurance coverage to children who would otherwise be uninsured. The program is targeted to low-income families who do not qualify for Medicaid, but are unable to afford private insurance. The original legislation creating CHIP was scheduled to expire in 2007, and after two reauthorization bills were vetoed by former President George W. Bush, Congress passed a short-term extension of the program. In February 2009, Congress passed and President Obama signed the *Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (P.L. 111-3)*. The new law expands support for CHIP and is expected to cover 4.1 million children who would otherwise be uninsured. [Kaiser Family Foundation, [2/09](#)] The new law also improves coverage for low-income, uninsured pregnant women, allowing states the option to extend health coverage to these women and receive enhanced federal financial support for the coverage. [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, [5/11/09](#)] Finally, the law lifts the five-year waiting period for uninsured, low-income, legal immigrant children and pregnant women, giving states the option to extend coverage under CHIP and Medicaid.

Earlier this year, Congress passed and the President signed landmark health insurance reform, the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148)* and the *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act (P.L. 111-152)*. These two laws, together referred to as the *Affordable Care Act*, include many benefits for American women and their families. The *Affordable Care Act* caps what insurance companies can require women to pay in out-of-pocket expenses, such as co-pays and

deductibles, prohibits lifetime limits on how much insurance companies cover if beneficiaries get sick, and regulates the use of annual limits to ensure access to necessary care, until 2014 when annual limits are prohibited. The *Affordable Care Act* created the Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan (PCIP) for people who have health problems, but who lack access to health insurance, to help protect them from medical bankruptcy. The PCIP is accepting applications and more information is available at [www.HealthCare.gov](http://www.HealthCare.gov). The *Affordable Care Act* also ensures coverage of prevention and basic health services, including maternity benefits, to create a system that encourages innovations in health care to prevent illness and disease before women require more costly treatment. Today, maternity benefits are often not provided in health plans in the individual insurance market, even though a \$1 investment in prenatal care generates \$2.57 in savings from reduced health care costs. [Health Services Research, [12/89](#)] Finally, beginning in 2014, the *Affordable Care Act* prohibits insurance companies from denying women health insurance because of a pre-existing condition or excluding coverage of that condition, dropping coverage if a beneficiary becomes sick, or charging more because of health status or gender. Right now, a healthy 22-year-old woman can be charged premiums 150 percent higher than a 22-year-old man. [Department of Health and Human Services, accessed [8/16/10](#)]

Clearly, there is more work to do before American women truly achieve gender equality. Senate Democrats celebrate the achievements of American women and remain committed to a legislative agenda that supports the continuing fight for women's equality.