



## Women's Equality Day, August 26—No Thanks to Florida

Every woman today--who has in her own name a job, bank account, credit card, a lease, a car, a mortgage, a diploma or a pension—can do so because she is standing on the shoulders of million women who fought for those privileges. Women like Susan B. Anthony who worked tirelessly for her entire lifetime, crisscrossing America by stagecoach and foot, giving speeches, gathering signatures only to present them year after year to laughter in Congress. And women like Alice Paul...well you know her story if you've seen the movie "Iron Jawed Angels", a movie we hope every local league in Florida will present next year on the 90th anniversary of the women's vote (and 90 years also for the League of Women Voters!)

We're celebrating Women's Equality Day on August 26-- commemorating the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which gave women the right to vote on that date in 1920. Florida was NOT one of the states that ratified the amendment, it should be noted. In fact, neither house of the Florida legislature had even voted on the measure. Though the Legislature was able to pass a law in 1921 that provided the vote to all residents, it was not until 1969 that Florida symbolically ratified the Nineteenth Amendment.

The passage of the 19th Amendment had no impact on economic equality. It took the efforts of President John F. Kennedy, former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, President Lyndon B. Johnson, most recently President Obama's signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Act. All of these efforts worked to eliminate discrimination, on the basis of sex, in education programs or activities receiving federal funds and required equal pay for equal work. Consequently, for the first time in history, nearly half of students in law, medicine and graduate schools are women.

We've witnessed remarkable milestones for women in our country. For the first time, a female has been elected Speaker of the House of Representatives, and two contenders for the 2008 presidential/vice-presidential election were women. Equality for all, however, will not come in a fancy box with a tied bow. Rather, the process toward equality continues to be messy and protracted.

Since the Equal Pay Act was signed in 1963, the wage gap has been closing at a very slow rate. In 1963, women who worked full-time, year-round made 59 cents on average for every dollar earned by men. In 2007, women earned 78 cents to men's dollar. That means that the wage gap has narrowed less than half a cent per year! (National Committee on Pay Equity.)

Where is the dedication coming from, to maintain the momentum that brought us to where we are now? Is earning 78 cents for every dollar a man earns for the same job acceptable? And at the basic level, women are losing ground in Florida. According to Florida Trend's 2009 study, women held

of board seats, down from 8.7% in 2006, and the number of companies with no women directors increased.

Women are represented even less in the corner offices, but there has been some progress. In the 2008 census, women held just 7% of executive posts — 49 — up from 39, or 5.4%, in 2006. Of Florida's Top 150 Public Companies, 63 had neither women directors nor women executives.

The League of Women Voters urges women particularly on Women's Equality Day to consider getting more involved with groups like the League to advocate for women's equality, in Florida and around the world. We wouldn't have the freedoms we have if others hadn't made such activities a priority.

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance" is a saying attributed to Thomas Jefferson; it's never been more appropriate. Our achievements obviously do not mark the end of our journey. So, let us celebrate what we have accomplished, honor those who have worked for our betterment and keep working until we gain equality for all.

To learn more about how the League of Women Voters of Florida is working to strengthen citizen knowledge and impact at your state and local level, and to renew or join, visit:  
[www.TheFloridaVoter.org](http://www.TheFloridaVoter.org)

In League,

Deirdre Macnab

President, LWV FLORIDA

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Please



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