

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. SJ0003

Wyoming's Women Suffrage Day.

Sponsored by: Senator(s) Ellis, Anselmi-Dalton, Driskill, Hutchings, Nethercott, Schuler and Steinmetz and Representative(s) Burlingame, Clifford, Connolly, Dayton, Duncan, Flitner, Kinner, Newsome and Wilson

A JOINT RESOLUTION

for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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10 WHEREAS, abolitionist and woman suffrage activist, Esther
11 Hobart Morris, was born in Tioga County, New York, on August
12 8, 1812, and later became a successful milliner and
13 businesswoman; and

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

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20 WHEREAS, Esther Hobart Morris married John Morris, a
21 prosperous merchant, and in 1869 moved to the gold rush camp
22 at South Pass City, a small valley situated along the banks
23 of Willow Creek on the southeastern end of the Wind River

1 Mountains in the Wyoming Territory just north of the Oregon
2 Trail; and

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

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

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

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

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22 WHEREAS, the Wyoming Territory population at the time
23 consisted of six adult men for every adult woman, some

1 lawmakers perchance hoped suffrage would entice more women to
2 the state; and

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4 WHEREAS, some lawmakers may have believed that women's
5 suffrage was consistent with the goals articulated in post-
6 Civil War Amendment XV to the United States Constitution
7 guaranteeing the "right of citizens of the United States to
8 vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or
9 by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition
10 of servitude"; and

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

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

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2 WHEREAS, when invited to join the Union, demanding that
3 women's suffrage be revoked, the Wyoming Legislature said,
4 "We will remain out of the Union one hundred years rather
5 than come in without the women"; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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10 **Section 1.** That the Wyoming legislature commemorates
11 2019 as a year to celebrate the one hundred fiftieth (150th)
12 anniversary of the passage of women's suffrage.

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

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

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

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(END)