

Sub Hybee. Woman Suffrage
Sub Dr Howard Calver Brown Dad

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WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

SPEECH

OF

HON. GEORGE SUTHERLAND,

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

July 20, 1916.

Mr. SUTHERLAND. Mr. President, before the discussion of the naval appropriation bill is resumed I ask the indulgence of the Senate to say a word about Senate joint resolution No. 1, which proposes an amendment to the Constitution of the United States prohibiting any State from denying or abridging the right of citizens of the United States to vote on account of sex. I shall not enter upon a discussion of the general subject of woman suffrage—it is not an appropriate time for that. The premises by which we establish the justice and wisdom of a democracy, and consequently the justice and wisdom of universal manhood suffrage, likewise establish the justice and wisdom of universal womanhood suffrage. Any argument which I may use to justify my own right to vote justifies, as it seems to me, the right of my wife, sister, mother, and daughter to exercise the same right. If there had been drawn an east and west line through the center of the State of Pennsylvania, and the law had always been that those living south of the line should vote and those living north of the line should not, it would never be a sufficient answer to the unenfranchised men of the north demanding equal suffrage that by granting the demand we should simply double the vote. Very likely by such a division we should obtain a fair average of the ability, civic righteousness, and intelligence of the State, but the division, nevertheless, would be so arbitrary and unjust that it could never persist against enlightened public opinion. But, after all, such a division along a geographical line is not greatly more arbitrary than the existing separation of voters from nonvoters by the line of sex. Such a division is purely artificial, and is certain to disappear, just as the other superstitions which in the past have denied women equal opportunities for education, equality of legal status—including the right of contract and to hold property—and all the other unjust and intolerant denials of equality have disappeared, or are disappearing, from our laws and customs. The sentiment in favor of the enfranchisement of women is growing rapidly and definitely. Its ultimate triumph, I think, is sure. The sooner it

becomes an accomplished fact, the sooner the splendid, patriotic, intelligent women of the country will be enabled to devote their energies to helping us solve the perplexing social and governmental problems with which we are confronted, instead of expending these energies in the passionate struggle to secure the right to give us this help. It is said, however, that the question is purely a matter for the several States to determine, and that is quite true under the present provisions of the Federal Constitution. The Chicago platform definitely commits the Republican Party to the extension of the right of suffrage to women. This constitutes a tremendous step forward, and must result in giving to the movement an impetus which will carry it, if not to immediate success, at least very far toward immediate success. The platform recognizes the right of each State to settle the question for itself, which is, of course, merely to recognize the obvious. The national party, however, has not committed itself upon the subject of a constitutional amendment which, if adopted, would take from the States the power, which the platform declaration recognizes now exists, to impose a sex qualification upon voters. Upon this matter the platform is silent, and therefore leaves every member of the party free to determine the question for himself.

The real question which, therefore, remains is whether the proposed amendment would constitute such a fundamental invasion of the rights of the State as to take from it all reasonable justification. The Constitution provides very definitely for its own amendment. The power of Congress to propose and of three-fourths of the States to adopt includes amendments of every conceivable character. The power is plenary and without qualification except in one particular, which is "that no State without its consent shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate." This single exception serves to emphasize the fact, if emphasis were necessary, that the framers deliberately intended that the Constitution should be open to amendment in every other conceivable respect.

It is perfectly idle to complain that three-fourths of the States, containing less than half of the population, may impose unwelcome provisions upon the remaining one-fourth of the States, containing more than half the population of the country. That is the compact under which the Union exists and by which each State bound itself when it entered the Union. It must be said, however, that although the power of amendment is unlimited except in the single respect mentioned Congress is, nevertheless, bound to exercise a wise discretion as to the amendments which it proposes. If it be true that the amendment proposed by the present resolution is manifestly without wisdom, or if it undertakes to deal with a matter clearly and fundamentally the subject of exclusive State control, then it ought not to be adopted by Congress. It may be said, however, in the first place, that the demand for the submission of the proposed amendment is not only insistent but widespread. It is safe to say that many millions of voters in the United States as well as an additional many millions of unenfranchised citizens desire its submission. In the face of a demand of such proportions the objections to the amendment should be of the most cogent and compelling force to justify Congress in refusing affirmative action.

I submit with the utmost earnestness not only that no such objections exist but, to the contrary, that the reasons are persuasive in favor of the affirmative action. In the first place, there is precedent in the fifteenth amendment which prohibits the States from denying the right of suffrage on account of race. If the fifteenth amendment was justified, the proposed amendment is certainly justified with far greater force. Both of the great political parties having indorsed the principle of woman suffrage, the sole remaining question is, How shall the principle be realized in practice? It is true that the present Constitution leaves to the States the power to fix the qualifications of voters, but it will not do to say that the Federal Government is not concerned in the character of the qualifications to be prescribed. The concern of that Government is great; conceivably it might become vital. The President of the United States indirectly and the Members of both Houses of Congress directly are selected by the voters whom the States qualify. Surely a government the character of whose activities may be profoundly affected by those officials who are selected from time to time to discharge them is interested in the kind of people who have the sole power of selecting the officials. It is not true that the qualification of the electorate is entirely a matter of State concern. It is a matter which concerns both the State and the General Government. The Federal Government has already the power to regulate the time, place, and manner of holding elections. That power has been wisely exercised to bring about uniformity as to time and in many respects as to the manner of holding the elections. The result has been to curtail State action in some degree, to be sure, but it has been also to bring about uniform methods of much usefulness. I see no reason why the proposed amendment, if adopted, would not be likewise beneficial in bringing about a uniformity of suffrage qualification in the one important respect where uniformity is now so strikingly and, I think, unfortunately lacking.

Mr. SHAFROTH. I wish to suggest to the Senator from Utah, in whose remarks I fully concur, that it is as much an exercise of the rights of the States, after they adopt the constitutional amendment, to enforce it as it is the right of a State to reject the franchise before the adoption of the amendment. There has been strong objection urged to the adoption of a constitutional amendment granting the franchise to women on the ground that the elective franchise is a subject inherently in the province of the State, and might force onto a State a policy which might be detrimental to its interest. If that objection were valid, we could never adopt any constitutional amendment without the consent of every State. Therefore there is no such thing as an inherent right in a State to prescribe the qualification of electors as against such a constitutional amendment. It may be inherent until the constitutional amendment is adopted, but the adoption of the amendment is the very delegation of the authority, and to contend otherwise is to deny to three-fourths of the States their rights. The question, then, for the Nation is purely as to the justice of the cause of equal suffrage, and as to that the arguments are overwhelmingly favorable.

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