

**President Woodrow Wilson's Address to the Senate on the Nineteenth
Amendment
September 30, 1918**

1 GENTLEMEN OF THE SENATE: The unusual circumstances of a world war in which we
2 stand and are judged . . . will, I hope, justify in your thought, as it does in mine, the message
3 I have come to bring to you. I regard the concurrence of the Senate in the constitutional
4 amendment proposing the extension of the suffrage to women as vitally essential to the
5 successful prosecution of the great war of humanity in which we are engaged. . . . It is my
6 duty to win the war and to ask you to remove every obstacle that stands in the way of
7 winning it.

8 I had assumed that the Senate would concur in the amendment because no disputable
9 principle is involved but only a question of the method by which the suffrage is to be
10 extended to women. . . . Both of our great national parties are pledged, explicitly pledged, to
11 equality of suffrage for the women of the country. Neither party, therefore . . . can justify
12 hesitation as to the method of obtaining it, can rightfully hesitate to substitute federal
13 initiative for state initiative. . . . Its adoption is, in my judgment, clearly necessary to the
14 successful prosecution of the war and the successful realization of the objects for which the
15 war is being fought. . . .

16 This is a peoples' war and the peoples' thinking constitutes its atmosphere and morale, not
17 the predilections of the drawing room or the political considerations of the caucus. If we be
18 indeed democrats and wish to lead the world to democracy, we can ask other peoples to
19 accept in proof of our sincerity and our ability to lead them whither they wish to be led
20 nothing less persuasive and convincing than our actions. . . . Verification must be
21 forthcoming when verification is asked for. . . . It is asked for by the anxious, expectant,
22 suffering peoples with whom we are dealing and who are willing to put their destinies in
23 some measure in our hands. . . . Through many, many channels I have been made aware
24 what the plain, struggling, workaday folk are thinking upon whom the chief terror and
25 suffering of this tragic war falls. They are looking to the great, powerful, famous Democracy
26 of the West to lead them to the new day for which they have so long waited; and they think,
27 in their logical simplicity, that democracy means that women shall play their part in affairs
28 alongside men and upon an equal footing with them. If we reject measures like this, in
29 ignorance or defiance of what a new age has brought forth, of what they have seen but we
30 have not, they will cease to believe in us; they will cease to follow or to trust us . . . the

31 strange revelations of this war having made many things new and plain, to governments as
32 well as to peoples.

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34 Are we alone to refuse to learn the lesson? Are we alone to ask and take the utmost that our
35 women can give,—service and sacrifice of every kind,—and still say we do not see what
36 title that gives them to stand by our sides in the guidance of the affairs of their nation and
37 ours? We have made partners of the women in this war; shall we admit them only to a
38 partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?
39 This war could not have been fought, either by the other nations engaged or by America, if it
40 had not been for the services of the women,—services rendered in every sphere,—not
41 merely in the fields of effort in which we have been accustomed to see them work, but
42 wherever men have worked and upon the very skirts and edges of the battle itself. We shall
43 not only be distrusted but shall deserve to be distrusted if we do not enfranchise them. . . .

44 The women of America are too noble and too intelligent and too devoted to be slackers
45 whether you give or withhold this thing that is mere justice; but I know the magic it will
46 work in their thoughts and spirits if you give it them. . . . The tasks of the women lie at the
47 very heart of the war, and I know how much stronger that heart will beat if you do this just
48 thing and show our women that you trust them as much as you in fact and of necessity
49 depend upon them.

50 Have I said that the passage of this amendment is a vitally necessary war measure, and do
51 you need further proof? Do you stand in need of the trust of other peoples and of the trust of
52 our own women? Is that trust an asset or is it not? I tell you plainly, as the commander-in-
53 chief of our armies and of the gallant men in our fleets, as the present spokesman of the
54 people in our dealings with the men and women throughout the world who are now our
55 partners . . . that this measure which I urge upon you is vital to the winning of the war and to
56 the energies alike of preparation and of battle.

57 And not to the winning of the war only. It is vital to the right solution of the great problems
58 which we must settle, and settle immediately, when the war is over. We shall need them in
59 our vision of affairs, as we have never needed them before, the sympathy and insight and
60 clear moral instinct of the women of the world. The problems of that time will strike to the
61 roots of many things that we have not hitherto questioned, and I for one believe that our
62 safety in those questioning days, as well as our comprehension of matters that touch society
63 to the quick, will depend upon the direct and authoritative participation of women in our
64 counsels. We shall need their moral sense to preserve what is right and fine and worthy in

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65 our system of life as well as to discover just what it is that ought to be purified and
66 reformed. Without their counselings we shall be only half wise.

67 That is my case. This is my appeal. Many may deny its validity, if they choose, but no one
68 can brush aside or answer the arguments upon which it is based. The executive tasks of this
69 war rest upon me. I ask that you lighten them and place in my hands instruments, spiritual
70 instruments, which I do not now possess, which I sorely need, and which I have daily to
71 apologize for not being able to employ.