

Opinion: There should be no deadline for women's rights

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Type "Women's Right's 2019" in Google, and the first three results consist of new forms of internet violence against women, a victory over child marriage in Tanzania and the fact that women's rights are still not explicitly recognized in the United States.

The last search result summarizes a more than 200-year-long battle of American women fighting for equal rights by trying to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution. Abortion laws, the #MeToo Movement and the first female presidential candidates have brought the amendment back into coffee houses and dinner conversations. The state of Virginia may hold the key to a society where men and women are finally equal under the law.

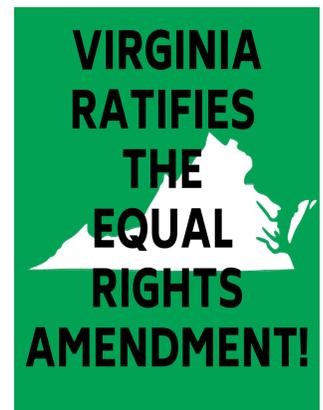
Virginia's transfer of power from Republicans to Democrats on Nov. 5 changed history forever. When federal judges drew a new House of Delegates district map that revised the boundaries of more than 26 districts, many House races in the state were more equally paired than ever before, which gave Virginia citizens the opportunity to vote for representatives likely to pass the ERA.

Virginia lawmakers did just that Jan. 15 by voting 59-40 in the house and 28-12 in the Senate to pass the ERA. Women wearing sashes saying "Equal Rights for Women," some with their daughters, looked down from the gallery, anxiously anticipating their equality. The measure was ratified Jan. 27.

When American women's rights activist Alice Paul introduced the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, she said, "If we keep on this way, they will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the 1848 [Seneca Falls] Convention without being much further advanced in equal rights than we are..." according to EqualRightsAmendment.org.

Almost 50 years after Paul spoke those words, Congress passed the ERA in 1972, which declared that the rights affirmed by the U.S. Constitution are held equally by all citizens without regard to their sex. When the amendment fell eight votes short of the 38 votes necessary to ratify the amendment, Congress extended the deadline to 1979, and again to 1982. Once the second deadline rolled around, the ERA was only three votes away from ratification. From that day, conservatives who fought against equal rights declared the ERA dead.

After 15 years of sitting in the same place with the same number of votes, two more states voted to ratify the constitution via the ERA. Now, Virginia's vote may unite 168.3 million women in the U.S. with their equal rights to men. The next step is an extended legal fight to enforce the amendment in



light of questions about the legitimacy of five states rescinding their ratification and the expiration of the deadline.

How is it that women have been fighting the same civil war for 200 years and there has not been more urgency to be equal? When Alice Paul first proposed the ERA, conservative female groups like the Concerned Women for America and the Eagle Forum feared that the ERA would threaten traditional gender roles, family and child-rearing and feared that women would lose their exemption from the draft and combat duty.

During World War II, women had no choice but to become equal to the men who left to fight in the war. America welcomed women with open arms in to the workforce in all aspects: politics, juries, math, technology, manual labor, and other male-dominated areas. Inequality returned when the troops returned home in 1945 after the war's end, and women reassumed their prior roles as "barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen." When Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 presidential election, outlets such as CNN Politics and The Atlantic published opinion pieces stating that America was afraid of female leadership. Peter Beinart, a writer for The Atlantic, wrote, "Given the anxieties that powerful women provoke, it's not surprising that both men and women judge them more harshly than they judge powerful men."

After Clinton's unpredictable loss, the general public was convinced that the United States was not socially ready to trust a woman in the White House. Female members of Congress such as The Squad – consisting of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan – make it clear that the issue with women who lead is not necessarily in the way that they lead, but solely in the fact that they are women. If you were silenced for 200 years, wouldn't you come out swinging, too?

Once again, the question occurs – this time more bluntly: how is it reasonable to wait 200 years for a group of people to be ready to properly acknowledge another group of people?

The women's rush to the work place during World War II should have been enough indication that women are ready and willing to step up and be equal. With little preparation and training time, women managed to take the places of their fathers, brothers, uncles and husbands to keep the economy afloat, all the while caring for their families.

The idea of women has expanded far beyond a pretty face and a pay gap. Women are an active and necessary demographic in America's economy. According to Catalyst.org, women make up 46.9 percent of the U.S. workforce and still only receive a pay of 68 cents to a white man's dollar.

Each state asked to ratify the ERA is home to a percentage of the 168 million women in America. Each of these states maintains a responsibility its people, thus women who are fighting for their rights. The stagnation of the ERA is the result of a society tightly gripping its control. American women are not having it.

Photo courtesy of www.EqualRightsAmendment.org

