



Opinion

Suffrage centennial is a celebration of democracy

By Suzanne Brock

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This is a year to commemorate two wonderful events. A hundred years ago, in 1920, after more than 70 years of effort, ridicule, protests and imprisonments, women finally won the right to vote in the United States. Shortly before the enactment of this hard-won victory, the League of Women Voters was established to provide women with the tools necessary to make informed choices once the right to vote was won. Over the years, the league's history has become closely tied to the suffrage movement. As more and more women began to take part in the voting process, more local and state leagues were formed, enabling women to become more engaged in the process of educating themselves and refining the tools to advocate for themselves and others. There are now more than 700 state and local leagues, in all 50 states, as well as D.C., the Virgin Islands and Hong Kong.

I originally joined the league in 1976 when I lived in Springfield. During the time I was a member there, I met a number of strong, motivated women, learned to interact with community groups, school committee members, the city's mayor and others in elected position to work together to improve issues in our community. Over the years, the League of Women Voters has grown and adapted to changes in society. As a nonpartisan grass-roots organization, the league continues to believe that all citizens should play a critical role in our democracy.

Today, many challenges threaten to compromise our democracy. The league continues to support voting rights for all citizens, to fight against voter suppression and to fight against discrimination at the local, state

and national levels. Over the years, the league has shown a commitment to register, educate and mobilize voters.

One area that I particularly appreciated as a member was participating in study groups. Through this activity league members are able to develop consensus on positions that we can then act on. This process allows the league to speak with one voice on issues important to members as well as to educate others on issues important to democracy. Our positions cover a wide range of topics at the national, state and local levels such as government issues, natural resources, health issues, election reform, women's health, education, and diversity and equity.

Moving forward, it is important to remember the efforts of the suffragists and what an honor and privilege it is to be able to engage in the voting process. As a woman and now a member of the League of Women Voters of Cape Cod, I truly appreciate the ability to vote every time I exercise that right. I also appreciate the ability to engage in exercising my right to advocate for those positions important to myself and others.

One hundred years after women won the right to vote and the league was founded, members of the league are proud of the great progress achieved when it comes to making democracy work. Going forward, league members nationwide will continue to educate and empower voters, because we will always believe that "democracy is not a spectator sport." Democracy requires citizen participation.

More information is available at lwv.org, lwmvma.org and lwvcapecod.org.

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