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August 26 Marks Women's Equality Day

By ALLISON DUNNE

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Today is Women's Equality Day. Not only is there a New York ballot initiative surrounding it, but there is a push to put a famous wagon on permanent display.

According to The National Women's History Project, it was at the behest of New York Democratic Congresswoman Bella Abzug in 1971 that Congress designated August 26 as "Women's Equality Day," to commemorate the 1920 passage of the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote. Susan Zimet is founder of Votes for Women 2020 in New York, the non-profit organization planning suffrage centennial events in 2017, when women secured the right to vote in New York, and 2020.

"First of all, Happy Women's Equality Day to every woman out there, and to

every man on top of it," Zimet says. But it's a very, very, very important day for women across the country because it's a day to stop and reflect on the fights that the women before us had and the shoulders that we're standing on as modern-day women to accomplish what we do."

In New York earlier this year, the state legislature adopted a resolution calling on the governor to proclaim July 1 the "Spirit of 1776" Wagon Day in New York. It happened, and that wagon was on display in the capitol. Edna Buckman Kearns used the horse-drawn suffrage campaign wagon, heading from Manhattan to Long Island in early July 1913. Her granddaughter, Marguerite Kearns, has an educational website about women's history — the Suffrage Wagon News Channel. The site features a music video about the wagon.

Zimet, who had delivered the resolution about the wagon to Albany, and Marguerite Kearns want the wagon pulled out of storage and on permanent display.



<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wamc/files/201306/suffragewagon.jpg>

Credit Courtesy of Votes For Women 2020

“It was donated to the museum of, the New York State Museum,” says Zimet. “Most wagons that were used came off of the farms and then basically when the women got done, they would take them around, they would stand on them, they would do their speeches. After we got the right to vote, they all went back to the farms, except for two. One’s in the Smithsonian and one is in the New York State Museum. It was on display on the second floor of the capitol but it’s back in the storage of the New York State Museum. We would love to see that wagon displayed full time, all the time, because the story is too important.”

Women’s Equality Day not only commemorates when women were granted the right to vote, but focuses on women’s equality yet to be attained. Victoria Roberts Drogin is executive director and founder of the Women’s Leadership Institute at the School of Business at Mercy College in Westchester County.

“Women’s equality, it’s a complicated subject, but, in essence it’s very simple,” says Roberts Drogin says. “It’s women understanding how they can compete in the workplace, become successful, which will then allow them the opportunity to, it’s sort of a chicken and an egg thing. Women need to be educated to become successful in order to participate politically in achieving what they need, whether it’s workplace flexibility, pay equity, health care, any of the things that are relevant to success in any one of the number of demographics.”

The push continues for equal pay for equal work. U.S. Senator from Maryland Barbara Mikulski and Connecticut Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, both Democrats, have introduced the Paycheck Fairness Act. Here’s DeLauro.

“And we do have it in our power to close this wage gap, end unequal pay. All we need is the political will,” says DeLauro. “As has been said, I’ve introduced Paycheck Fairness in every congress since 1977. Simple principle: same job, same pay, men and women. It brings the pay discrimination law in line with other civil rights laws, gives teeth to the Equal Pay Act. It would put the burden on employers to explain why they are paying women less.”

In 2012, the typical full-time, yearlong female worker, on average, earned about 77 cents for every dollar earned by her male counterpart.

Meanwhile, Zimet, who is also the Democratic town supervisor of New Paltz, gives a brief history lesson.

“And it’s very, very interesting in New York State that the governor just this year created the Women’s Equality agenda line for the ballot making women’s issues of critical importance by actually running on it and giving women the opportunity to vote on that line,” says Zimet. “But it’s interesting that back in 1884, Belva Lockwood, who was the first woman to be able to actually practice in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, which was really pretty remarkable back then, actually ran for president on a platform that was called the National Equal Rights Party. And she ran for president with Marietta Stowe as her vice president, and they actually did pretty good but, let’s remember this is before women even had the right to vote. And so a women’s line is not actually new; it’s over 100 years old.”

In her role as president of Votes for Women 2020, Zimet is planning festivities for both 2017 and 2020, hoping to create a sort of heritage trail in New York linking women’s historic sites and houses.

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