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Activists urge lawmakers to highlight state's role in suffrage movement

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By Megan Rupp - [email](#)

ALBANY, N.Y. – State lawmakers and Votes for Women activists will draw special attention to recognizing the centennial anniversary of the "Spirit of 1776" wagon in the final days of the 2013 session, in the hope of spotlighting New York State as the birthplace of the Women's Rights Movement.

Friday marks the close of this year's session and both houses of the State Legislature are expected to pass a special resolution that would honor the 100th anniversary of the suffrage campaign wagon's first trip on July 1, 1913. The resolution would designate July 1, 2013 as the "Spirit of 1776" Wagon Day in New York State and highlight the state as the starting ground for the movement that spread across the country.

"One speech, one march, one wagon at a time...the women of New York have changed the world for all women," said Susan Zimet, New Paltz Town Supervisor and founder of Votes for Women 2020.

Zimet will join members of the bipartisan Legislative Women's Caucus who took the lead in sponsoring the resolution at Wednesday's 10 a.m. press conference in the Legislative Office Building. Included among them will be the chairs of tourism committees in both houses of the legislature: Senator Betty Little and Assemblywoman Margaret Markey.

"The 'Spirit of 1776' suffrage campaign wagon is a powerful historic symbol reminding us all of the 'new frontier' that was traveled and conquered by brave and determined women to whom we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude," Senator Little said. "Many of the suffragists didn't live to see the destination – the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution – but each and every one contributed to ensuring a brighter future not only for women, but for our nation and the world."

The legislation cites the "Spirit of 1776's" connection to current policies of economic and cultural tourism development, urging the completion of the upstate Women's Heritage Trail and preservation of key historic homes related to the campaign to achieve the right for women to vote.

"New York led America in extending the vote to women," Assemblywoman Markey said. "It's an honor for us to mark the centennial of the 'Spirit of 1776' wagon and to salute some of the crusading pioneers who helped galvanize the nation to adopt the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution."

Deborah Hughes, President and CEO of the Susan B. Anthony House in Rochester and a member of the Votes for Women 2020 advisory board, will also attend Wednesday's press conference.

"As New Yorkers we have a special place in history," Zimet said. "New York's women led the way from Seneca Falls to the Supreme Court. The importance of the work of these brave warriors who paved the way for myself and my daughter are unsung heroes who deserve to have their proper place in history. The passage of this resolution by our New York State elected leaders is a critical step in the recognition of the work ahead of us."

On July 1, 1913, Votes for Women activists Edna Kearns, Irene Davison and eight-year-old Serena Kearns departed from the state's Woman Suffrage Association headquarters in Manhattan to Long Island in the horse-drawn wagon now known as the "Spirit of 1776." Over the next month, the group gathered community support for women's right to vote, which was achieved in the state in 1917 and would later extend nationally in 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

"Having the 'Spirit of 1776' honored like this is the dream of our family," said Marguerite Kearns, granddaughter of Edna Kearns and a member of the advisory board of Votes for Women 2020.

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