

Wisconsin Women's Political Firsts

Elected & Appointed Offices in State Government

Wisconsin
first State to ratify
19th Amendment
Giving Women the Vote

The Wisconsin Women's Suffrage Association was formed 50 years earlier, in 1869—the year the Wisconsin legislature passed a law allowing women to run for school boards and other elective school offices, though they still could not vote in school board elections until 1884!

Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-7679
Political Equality League, Milwaukee
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Dena Smith
first woman to serve as
WI State Treasurer

Initially appointed to the vacancy caused by her husband's death, she was elected to the office in 1960 becoming the first woman elected to a statewide constitutional office in Wisconsin.

Virginia Hart
first woman appointed to a
Governor's Cabinet Post

Appointed as Secretary of the Department of Regulations and Licensing.

Photo: WI Office of State Employment Relations Web Site

Barbara Thompson
first woman elected as
State Superintendent of Education



Shirley Abrahamson
first woman to serve as
WI Supreme Court Justice

Vel Phillips
first woman elected as
WI Secretary of State

And, the first African-American woman in the nation elected to a statewide office.

Earlier in her career, she was the first woman and first African-American elected to the Milwaukee City Council (1956), and the first black woman to serve as a judge in WI (1971).

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Photo used with permission



Senator Susan Engeleiter
first woman to serve as
Senate Minority Leader



Justice Shirley Abrahamson
After two decades on the Court, becomes the first woman to serve as Chief Justice of the WI Supreme Court

Senator Margaret Farrow
first woman to serve as
Lieutenant Governor



Senator Mary Panzer
first woman to serve as
Senate Majority Leader



JoCasta Zamarripa
first Latina elected to
WI State Legislature,
elected to the State
Assembly

Representative Pat Strachota
first woman to serve as
Assembly Majority Leader



Carolyn Stanford Taylor
first African American woman to serve as
WI State Superintendent of Public Instruction

1919

1957

1973

1976

1979

1985

1996

2001

2003

2011

2014

2019

1925

1964

1975

1977

1983

1987

1998

2002

2004

2012

2015



Mildred Barber
Helen Brooks
Helen Thompson
first women elected to the
WI State Legislature
elected to the State Assembly
Originally called "Assemblymen" like their male colleagues, the official title for all members was changed to "Representative to the Assembly" in 1969.

Governor's Commission on the Status of Women established
Kay Clarenbach, Chair

The Commission followed the WI Conference on the Changing Status of Women and remained in existence from 1964 to 1989.

Nationally, Kay Clarenbach was instrumental in the creation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Women's Political Caucus.

Kathryn Morrison
first woman elected to
WI State Senate



Wisconsin State Journal Photo used with permission

Marcia Coggs
first African-American woman elected to
WI State Legislature,
elected to the State Assembly

Pictured 4th from the right below.



Wisconsin Women's Council
formed as a state agency

The Council has a 15-member board appointed by the Governor and Legislative Leadership.



Women's Council Archives

Representative Betty Jo Nelsen
first woman to serve as
Assembly Minority Leader



Tammy Baldwin
first woman elected to
U.S. Congress from
WI, elected to the U.S.
House of Representatives

Previously, served in
WI State Assembly
(1992-1998)

Representative Shirley Krug
first woman to serve as
Democratic Assembly Minority Leader

Barbara Lawton
first woman elected as
Lieutenant Governor

Peg Lautenschlager
first woman elected as
WI Attorney General



Gwen Moore
first African-American woman elected to
U.S. Congress from WI,
elected to the U.S. House
of Representatives

Previously, served in WI
State Assembly and State
Senate (1989 to 2004)

Senator Judy Robson
first woman to serve as
Democratic Senate Minority Leader (2004)
and **Majority Leader** (2007).

Senator Mary Lazich
first woman to serve as
Senate President



Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin
After seven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, is the first woman elected to U.S. Senate from WI

When Seeking Status for Women
It's No Time to Be Ladylike
WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL-OCTOBER, 1965



TIMELINE OF WISCONSIN WOMEN'S POLITICAL FIRSTS (2015)

Source Materials

Legislative Reference Bureau, "Wisconsin Legislators—A Historical List," Wisconsin Briefs, 15-3, January 2015, legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb.

Legislative Reference Bureau, Wisconsin Blue Book, 2013-2014, legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb.

"The Women's Suffrage Movement," Wisconsin Historical Society, www.wisconsinhistory.org.

"Assembly Women of Distinction," Office of the Assembly Chief Clerk, www.wisconsin.gov; State of Wisconsin, Elected Officials, www.wisconsin.gov.

Photographs

"*Car Full of Suffragists*" Members of the Political Equality League, Milwaukee, WHS-7679, Wisconsin Historical Society, Photo Archives, www.wisconsinhistory.org

Kathryn Morrison, Wisconsin State Journal, www.madison.com

Vel Phillips, Wisconsin Journal Sentinel, www.wsjonline.com

Wisconsin Legislators, Current and Past Official Photos, www.wisconsin.gov

Senator Tammy Baldwin, Office of Senator Tammy Baldwin web site, www.baldwin.senate.gov (past official photo)

Congresswoman Gwen Moore, Office of Congresswoman Gwen Moore website, www.gwenmoore.house.gov (official photo)

Governor Tony Earl signing the executive order creating the Wisconsin Women's Council, with women leaders in the State Legislature and Administration. Pictured (left to right) Sen. Susan Engeleiter 2. (not identified) 3. Eileen Mershart (Deputy Secretary DOR) 4. Doris Hanson (DOA Secretary) 5. Rep. Barb Gronemus 6. Rep. Mary Lou Munts 7. Rep. Sharon Metz 8. Rep. Barb Ulichny 9. Rep. Marsha Coggs 10. Linda Reivitz (DHSS Secretary) 11. Rep. Lolita Schneiders 12. Roberta Gassman (Policy Advisor Governor's Office), Women's Council archives

Did we miss someone? Please contact the Women's Council at womenscouncil@wi.gov with suggested corrections or updates.

Disclaimer. The information and sequence of events on the *Timeline of Wisconsin Women's Political Firsts* is indicative only and not exhaustive. The information has been gathered from a variety of sources. Neither the Wisconsin Women's Council, its members and staff, nor any other party involved in providing this study warrant that the information contained in the here is in every respect accurate or complete.