

WE ARE ALL WEST VIRGINIA

A Civics Education Program

By
Secretary of State
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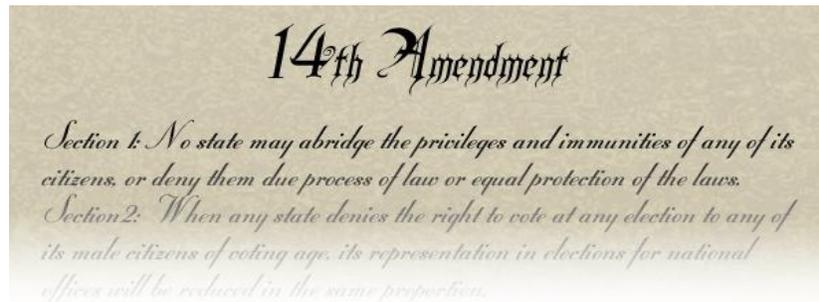
Why is Voting important?

“The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men.”~Lyndon B. Johnson, 36th President of the United States

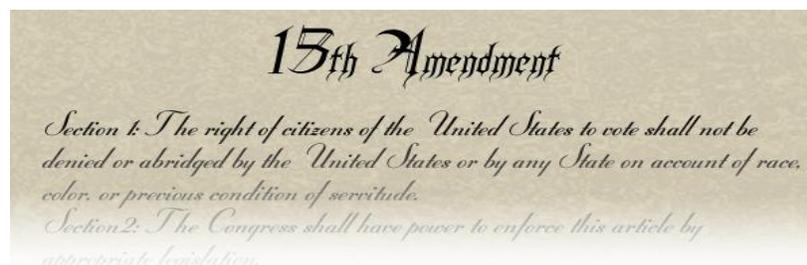
In order to gain an understanding of why voting is so important, let’s take a look back at the history of voting rights. Contrary to popular belief, the United States’ Constitution did not originally guarantee citizens the “right to vote”. The United States was created with the understanding that only certain individuals would make the decisions when it came to government.

There are several amendments to the U.S. Constitution which address the right to vote and who actually has this “right”.

- **14th Amendment**– All persons born within the U.S. are citizens and guaranteed rights and privileges (1868)



- **15th Amendment**– No citizen denied the right to vote based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude (1870)



- This amendment was intended to give freed slaves the same privileges offered to the white majority in the United States. States were able to get around this amendment by creating Jim Crow Laws and other barriers to prevent minorities from voting.

Jim Crow Laws were requirements for individuals to pass in order to become eligible to vote.

These included:

Literacy tests- These tests excluded under-educated Americans from voting. This was specifically focused towards African Americans.

Grandfather Clauses- A requirement which said if your grandfather was eligible to vote, then you are eligible to vote. This would exclude many African Americans whose ancestors were not eligible to vote because of slavery.

Poll Taxes- A fee would be required to vote. The intention is to stop lower income citizens from having a voice in government.

As you can see, the 15th Amendment did not accomplish what it had originally intended. Minorities still did not share equal rights when it came to voting in the United States. For more information on the 15th amendment [click here](#).

- **19th Amendment** No citizen shall be abridged of their right to vote based on sex. (1920)
 - This amendment gave women the right to vote.



Generations of women worked tirelessly to gain suffrage. This is by far one of the most important amendments to the Constitution when it comes to voting, because it gave the right to vote to half of the population of the United States. If you are a female and reading this document, you have/will have the right to vote because a battle was fought for you in history.

From protesting and picketing to large rallies, women ignored the resistance of opponents who many times verbally and physically assaulted them. Decades of protest and the will of women to never give up paid off, and today women can register and vote for the issues which they feel strongly about. For more information on the 19th amendment please [click here](#).

- **24th Amendment** – No poll tax is allowed or failure to pay any other tax shall prevent a person from voting (1964)
 - This amendment eliminated some of the Jim Crow laws which were a result of the 15th Amendment.

- **26th Amendment** – All persons 18 or older shall not be abridged of their right to vote (1971)
 - This amendment was passed in 1971 after 11 unsuccessful attempts by U.S. Senator Jennings Randolph (D), WV. Senator Randolph was from Harrison County, W.V. Randolph originally introduced the bill during his time in the U.S. House of Representatives.
 - The Vietnam War brought up the topic of why can 18 year olds fight and die for our country, yet they are not eligible to vote for the members of congress who send them overseas.
 - The amendment was also passed very quickly, because it was considered politically dangerous to be against giving troops the rights they deserved during the upcoming election in 1972. The potential for an opponent to rally voters against a candidate were too strong, not to support the amendment.
 - This amendment is the reason why eighteen year olds and seventeen year olds who will be eighteen by the date of the next General Election are eligible to vote. Seventeen year olds are not permitted to vote in municipal or special elections however.
- **Voting Rights Act of 1965** –Applied a nationwide prohibition against the denial or abridgment of the right to vote on the literacy tests on a nationwide basis. For more info on the Voting Rights Act of 1965 [click here](#).
 - Finally the barriers to vote were lifted for minorities.

Now that we have taken a moment to learn from the past, let's take a moment to look at some reasons why you personally should be interested in voting.

Reasons to Vote

So you can decide. Why let other people decide what is best for you when you have a voice: the vote.

It's your right. Young people, women and underrepresented groups all fought hard for the right to vote. Even today there are countries where people are still fighting for the right to vote. Vote in honor of those who can't.

Representation-Does it seem as if politicians don't "get" you? Want politicians in office who represent your needs and concerns? Then vote.

More money... Votes equal cash. Candidates give money to causes you care about: youth programs, the environment, HIV/AIDS or cancer research, to name a few. Find out where the candidates stand on these issues and vote for the ones that agree with you.

To cancel out someone else's vote. Whether it's your neighbor, your teacher, or somebody famous -- you probably know someone who is going to vote the opposite of you.

To bust the stereotype! Some adults think, "Young people are lazy, they don't care about their communities, they don't vote." Prove them wrong.

If you don't vote, someone else will. Our government was designed for citizen participation, so if you don't vote - other people are going to make the decisions for you.

It's your money. The county commissioners, governor, state treasurer, legislators, President and members of Congress you vote for will decide how to spend your money. Vote for those that agree with your point of view.

Schools matter. You elect local and state school board members who set public education policy and budgets.

You'll need a good job. When you're done with school, you need somewhere to work and you'll want job training, pay equity, fairness in hiring, and workplace safety.

Save the world. The air, the land, the water, we need them all.

It's your backyard. Crime prevention, laws and law enforcement, safe and affordable homes, traffic patterns, schools, parks and recreation...

I don't want other people making my choices for me. I want to have a voice in the things that affect me!

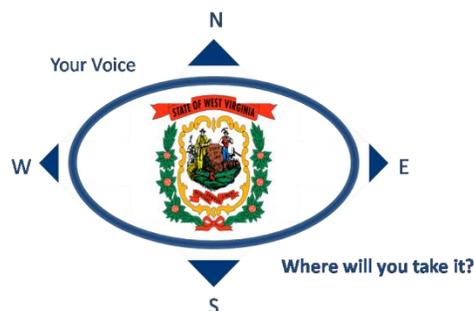
You may be thinking “This voting stuff sounds great, but what can I do? I’m not old enough to vote anyways.” There are many ways to be a part of the voting process before you are actually old enough to vote.

1. Spread the word- Get as many people who are eligible to vote registered. You can [go here](#) and print off copies of the West Virginia Voter Registration application until your printer is completely out of paper!
2. Find out when you can register- In West Virginia, you may register to vote if you are 17 years old and will be 18 by the date of the next general election. This means if you are 17 years old and will be 18 by November 6, 2012, you may register to vote with your local county clerk’s office. That’s right; you can be 17 and vote in WV!
3. Get involved- Click here to see some ideas on getting involved in Civic Life as a young adult.
4. Contact our office at www.wvsos.com or call toll free @ 1-866-767-8683. Secretary Tennant feels that government should be open and engaging to all the citizens of West Virginia, including the future leaders of the state. Work with your teachers to find a date and call the office to see if Secretary Tennant would be available to visit your school, or to do a webcast if her schedule does not permit traveling that day.



Voting is very important to your future. Hopefully learning some of the history, reasons, and ways you can get involved with voting will help you describe to others why it is so important. Knowledge is power and if you don’t learn how to use your civic “voice” when it comes to making decisions, you will never be heard.

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