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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 9, 2010

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

“Votes for Women Celebration” Honors Suffrage Movement, 19th Amendment

In 1900, as a new century dawned, our nation was in a state of constant evolution: the Wright Brothers fixed-wing aircraft took flight, the Model T could be heard motoring down the road, and Pepsi-Cola was a freshly patented drink. Amidst the introduction of these innovations, a grassroots movement that would have a life-altering impact was underway. In 1920, decades of marches, jailings, and all-encompassing sacrifices gave way to passage of the 19th Amendment, which prohibits denying any citizen the right to vote based on their gender, therefore, granting women voting rights.

This victory was not shallow, as numerous suffragists were publicly ridiculed, socially exiled, threatened and beaten for raising their voices against this injustice. Women from various backgrounds overcame cultural boundaries to fight against this discrimination with pride and unity. Activists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott began the 70-year struggle by women to secure the right to vote, and this mission was carried through here in Kentucky by women, such as Lucy Burns, Dora Lewis and Alice Paul.

Following Congressional approval, on the first day of the 1920 Kentucky General Assembly, our Commonwealth ratified the 19th Amendment by a margin of 72-25 in the House and 30-8 in the Senate. Kentucky became one of only four southern states to approve the federal amendment, which went into effect after Tennessee followed suit and became the 36th state legislature to ratify the proposed amendment. This month, Kentuckians have the opportunity to celebrate this occasion.

August 26, 2010, marks the 90th anniversary of American women winning the right to vote. In honor of this day, the Kentucky Commission on Women invites every citizen to pay respect to the brave women and men who valiantly fought for women’s rights and attend “Votes for Women Celebration ... 90 Years and Counting.” The events will be held at the State Capitol building, beginning at 10:30 A.M. with a press conference kick-off. Other activities include an old-fashioned rally, period-era music and the chance to travel back in time to experience the movement. All voters and future voters are encouraged to attend and pay tribute to those ladies who risked their lives so all women could have a voice.

After the 19th Amendment became part of the U.S. Constitution, suffragist Alice Paul said, “I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality.” Since the passage of this amendment, women have played an important role in the political landscape from serving as members of the state house to accepting the Vice-Presidential nomination. As we celebrate this day, let’s not only remember those who laid the groundwork for women’s involvement in the political process, but also the women who have served as elected officials, reinforcing the path laid forth for our daughters and granddaughters.

For more information, you may contact the Commission of Women at (502) 564-2611 or through their website, www.women.ky.gov/votesforwomen.htm.

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