

# The League of extraordinary women

By: Phil Kadner

Radicals are trying to destroy our country. Women want to vote.

Hard to believe that was the view once held by many in this country. The concept of women casting a ballot, actively participating in the democratic process, was considered extreme . . . by men.

Even after the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment was adopted after the Civil War declaring that the “right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,” women were not allowed to vote.

The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, called the most revolutionary document in the history of the world, states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” Women were certainly not their equals.

It wasn't until 1920, when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment became the law of the land, that women were at long last allowed to cast a vote for the men who had denied them equal rights since the founding of the nation.

I was reminded of that after receiving an invitation to speak recently at a local chapter of the League of Women Voters in the Palos-Orland Park area.

A group of about 30 women gathered in the home of a member from Palos Heights. They are organizing voter registration drives, preparing to host candidate forums and do what they can to educate voters (including men) about the issues and people running for office in November.

It's the sort of stuff the League has been doing since it was formed in 1920 by one of the leaders of the women's suffrage movement.

The women who had led that battle wanted to make sure that women registered to vote — and also were educated about the issues and the candidates. Yet, as one of its founding tenants, the League decided not to endorse any candidate for office. It was non-partisan. Still is.

Nearly a century later, political pundits are saying a tidal wave of angry women voters may alter the course of American history this fall. It's a predicted reaction not only to President Trump but to increasing outbursts of intolerance toward minorities and immigrants by private citizens and public figures. It's a backlash against increasing gun violence and the inability of our country to act decisively to make schools safe.

And, in a way, the recent wave of political activism is an outgrowth of the types of concerns that launched the crusade for women's suffrage in 1840.

Men in power continue to use their positions to abuse women and extort sexual favors from them.

The fight for equal rights, equal wages and fair treatment continues.

For hundreds of years, before *Roe v. Wade*, women were forced to have back-alley abortions in butcher shops because wealthy and influential men took the position that abortions were immoral

and made them illegal. Yet, the very men who impregnated the women often refused to take responsibility. The laws and the courts made it difficult for women to prosecute men in court, and even in cases of rape women often were victimized and accused of sexual promiscuity.

Things change. But not so much.

The League of Women Voters is the sort of organization that doesn't get much attention these days.

It does not scream for attention. It actually encourages civil discourse among those who hold differing points of view.

But it remains radical. It continues to insist on researching issues before taking a stand. It urges people to register to vote, but also to know the issues and the candidates. It advocates for responsible citizenship.

I am told that many chapters of the League of Women voters are seeing younger women join for the first time in decades. I hope this is true.

As one of the leaders of the suffrage movement announced in defiance after the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed, "All men, and women, are created equal." A revolutionary concept.

[Email: philkadner@gmail.com](mailto:philkadner@gmail.com)