

PNC Women in Business Webcast Series Transcript

Votes for Women

**September 15, 2020
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Chelsea Peterson:

Hello, and welcome. I am Chelsea Peterson, PNC's Director of Client and Community Relations for Tennessee and joining me is Shawn Bakker, the President of the Nashville Public Library Foundation. We are delighted to welcome you to today's very special PNC Virtual Women in Business Week Broadcast.

We're recording today from the Votes for Women room in Nashville, Tennessee where a hundred years ago Tennessee ratified the 19th Amendment into U.S. Constitution allowing women the right to vote. This was a hard won battle and one that is seldom chronicled in the classroom history books. That is why PNC is so pleased to support this effort across the country and here in Tennessee to share the stories of the heroines of the women's suffrage movement. We encourage everyone who is eligible to vote in November. And when you do, we hope that you remember this program and the special women, and men, that helped make it all possible.

And now I'd like to turn it over to Shawn who will talk a little bit more about the room and introduce our special guest speakers for today. Shawn?

Shawn Bakker:

Thank you, Chelsea, and thank you all for joining us. The Nashville Public Library Foundation provides private support to some of the amazing programs of the Nashville Public Library. The Civil Rights Room is one of those programs. The Civil Rights Room was created to explore our history that takes place here in Nashville and also not just stay in history but to invite people into the challenging conversations around what is happening today with civil rights.

In that same vein, we are going to participate in the work of the Votes for Women Room and explore over a hundred years of history that gave women the right to vote but we also are not going to stay in that history. We want to make sure that we understand what that means for us today, for voting rights and also for women's rights. Today we have the opportunity to be joined by two special women; Tracey Silverman, Senior Vice President of PNC here in Tennessee and Elaine Weiss, Author and Journalist.

You probably have seen Elaine in the news recently. She has been in The New York Times, she's been on CBS Sunday Morning, she has been on NPR and many other media outlets. We are grateful that both Tracey and Elaine are here with us today. Elaine did much of her research here in the Nashville Public Library and today that story is coming full circle as Elaine and Tracey are joined in conversation.

Tracey Silverman:

Elaine, hello. Thank you so much of joining us today. I'm thrilled and honored to be able to talk to the scholar on the women's suffrage movement. I've learned so much through reading your book and I'm just delighted to be able to ask you some questions that have been on my mind about this. First of all, I'd love to know how you got interested in this project and just kind of for the fact checking for all the audience who are listening, how did you learn about all the details that are in the book?

Elaine Weiss: Well, I can tell you that every detail is cited and footnoted in the book. You don't have to read the 750 endnotes at the end of the book but they are there. And I found most of that material in Nashville and then other repositories including the Library of Congress, of course, but Nashville was the first place I came to begin my research and I was able to find not only the official papers, the official documents that chronicle this important moment in our American history of expanding the right to vote to half of the nation, but I was able to find personal notes and personal letters and scribbles in the margin and all of that really helps a researcher and a writer to be able to create not only the public persona of the characters I'm writing about, the real life people, but also a bit of their thought process, a bit of their private lives, a bit of what they're thinking and feeling as they are actors in this amazing moment in history.

Tracey Silverman And at this moment in 1920 where the book takes place, you actually are kind enough to the readers to go all the way back at the very beginning and I wondered if you could just touch on the start of the women's suffrage movement and tell us a little bit about Seneca Falls and what happened there and also if you can just talk about how this was intertwined with the abolitionist movement?

Elaine Weiss: Sure. Well, as you might imagine, at the creation of our constitution the consolidation of the first colonies into the United States, women were excluded completely. They're not given the right to vote, they don't have, in most states, property rights or many legal rights, they can't bring suit in a court of law, they can't testify in a court of law, can't serve on a jury and of course they can't vote. And so for -- from the beginning, from the late 18th Century, women are complaining about this and talking about it but they're not organized yet.

And so we mark the first organized effort, the first women's rights convention happening -- in 1848. And it's a group of women who have been, again, discussing this for a long time and they are all abolition activists. They're very involved in the - - in the United States, in the early and mid-19th Century. And so it's Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and several of their friends who decide to have a public meeting to discuss women's position in the United States and to make a litany of the things that are wrong about how both the legal system and society treats them. And it's called the Declaration of Sentiments and it's incredibly modern set of concerns.

I mean, in this document, Elizabeth Cady Stanton talks about the lack of educational opportunities for women, professional opportunities and also she also talks about the need for equal pay for equal work. Now, that's a very modern concern for women today and it's something that Elizabeth Stanton pointed out in 1848. At this meeting in this really small town in Upstate New York where about 300 people come for a two-day meeting, one of the demands, one of the solutions that Elizabeth Stanton proposes to eliminate, to be able to improve the lot of women is the right to vote, the right to have a voice in her government to be able to have a representative, a direct representative that she has voted for in governments and whether that's at the local or state or national. And she proposes the franchise, suffrage, the right to vote. And most of the other people in that chapel in Seneca Falls thought it was a crazy idea; thought it was really too ridiculous, too far out, too radical to have the idea of women voting and it's a young man in the audience who stands up to defend her and promote this idea and that man is Frederick Douglas. And it's an extraordinary moment and you realize how intertwined the idea of emancipating the slaves and freeing all citizens, including women, to be able to vote. So these are twin causes for decades and through the Civil War.

And then there's a heartbreaking rift between them when only in the 14th and 15th Amendments, black men are afforded the right to vote and all women, black and white are left behind.

Tracey Silverman: And if they had just left that word out of the 14th Amendment maybe we wouldn't have had to go through the 19th Amendment ratification. So --

Elaine Weiss: Well it's definitely -- the 15th Amendment, the suffrages said that prohibits denying the -- to which is aimed to black men. But, of course, what the suffrages said was just add those three little letters, SEX, and then we'll all be covered. But they were told no, that the nation couldn't handle too big reforms at once. And we see this so often that two dispossessed groups are pitted against one another and that's why only one is let through and it causes great problems.

Tracey Silverman: So the years that followed, these women spent a lot of time traveling around and preaching the cause and we get all the way into the early 1900's and there's a little bit of a pause during World War I with their movement. I thought you might touch on that a little bit.

Elaine Weiss: Well, there's, again -- this movement for the right to vote for women goes on for more than seven decades. It's a slow process. And as you mentioned, the women, the suffrage organizers who are school teachers and nurses and members of the church, I mean, they are grassroots activists in every city in every town and they are traveling around especially the national and regional leaders to awaken the idea of women getting the right to vote. Most women, and certainly most men, are either ignorant of it or don't care much about it, don't realize how it could help women and help our democracy be stronger.

And so their mission through these seven, very frustrating decades, is to change hearts and minds, to educate as Susan Anthony said, educate, agitate and organize. And that's what they're doing for those seven decades and meanwhile they're working in the states to try to change state laws by referenda; basically meaning that male voters, the only voters who are allowed, get to decide whether women should have the right to vote and most often the answer is no.

And so they're also working on the national level to have a Congress act on a federal amendment, a constitutional amendment which will supersede all those state laws that prohibit women voting. And so they're working on this two-track system, process, and it's very slow and the federal amendment is introduced into Congress in 1878 and it sits there for 40 years. And they testify every year in whatever committee is hearing it and the amendment is thrown back in the file cabinet. So they're working at the state level, they're working at the local level, they're working at the national level.

When World War -- had been raging in Europe for several years before, we enter in the spring of 1917 and this causes a real change; both in the movement which was beginning to surge forward. It gives the women's participation in World War I was very different from how they participated in any other conflict that we were involved in and that meant they were taking on work assignments that they had never done before and sometimes they were forcing themselves into this because the government was very weary of it and they're in the fields trying to save the crops when the farmers were taken off to war. They're in the munitions factories making armaments, they're in -- they're making boats, they were making airplanes, they are railroad conductors, they're taking over the jobs of men and doing it very, very well. They

were also doing those efforts that are so important on the home front but are more traditional for women, rolling bandages for the Red Cross, taking care of the sick, being nurses in Europe; a very dangerous job and what happens is the suffrages realize that this moment could be of an advantage. And so they really taut the idea of women being full citizens, being patriotic, being out there and helping win the war.

The other wing, there are now two wings of the suffrage movement, one more radical than the other, the more radical group, the National Women's Party says, well, we don't agree with this war because we're fighting a war supposedly to make the world safe for democracy but where is our democracy at home if women can't vote? So they're out picketing -- and they are -- Congress. And they are [test] during World War I, they are arrested, force fed. They're tortured there and so you have these two very different, but very powerful roles of women during World War I and it's no coincidence that it's only after World War I has ended that Congress finally moves the amendment through and it goes to the states for ratification in summer of 1919.

Tracey Silverman:

So you touched on the split in the two parties and I definitely was fascinated about the funding related to each of those parties. So, I would love for you to talk about that a little bit.

Elaine Weiss:

Yeah, the funding is very interesting. Now, these are grass roots movements. They are, again, women, for the most part, organizing. They have some very influential and important and devoted male friends who are sometimes called the suffragettes. There are men's societies for suffrage in many states. But, it has to be -- this is a large, you know, millions of women are involved in this movement and it has -- they each have headquarters, they have staff, they have to run this very elaborate movement of women at local, state and national level and so I wanted to look at how this got paid for because every reform movement, every political movement has to raise money, and how did they do this?

As one of my -- the young editorial readers in my publishing house read the manuscript and they said, I don't know how these women did it without Facebook. So, they had to -- so they are constantly trying to fund their efforts. They're writing letters and they're very poignant and very striking letters saying what suffrage would mean for American women, why it's important, why it's important to you as a women citizen. They're very, very persuasive, they've very eloquent. Some of them are very heartbreaking and some of them are pretty striking and say, you need this vote, you need to send us money.

And so you see going through the papers of the organizations, you see envelopes that have been saved and I says here's a quarter. You know, I'm just a nurse in Wisconsin but this is all I can afford. But here, I'm sending you some money. Then there were some major benefactresses and that's important too and each of the suffrage organizations had a roster of these women. Some of them are extremely colorful women like Alva Belmont who -- both the National America, the more traditional mainstream larger suffrage movement also to the National Women's party. She gives her money to them. You see here wanting to have her way when she's in these -- when she's written the checks she wants to be able to have a say in policy. And there's friction, as always happens, and it was often said that Alice Paul, her women's party was even more strapped for cash. You didn't want to be caught in an elevator with or in a taxi cab with Alice Paul because she will have convinced you to give more money than you thought you wanted to, to her cause, by the time the trip is over.

There's another women who I was fascinated by who funds the -- gives a bequest to the National American Association, the larger one, in 1914. And this is the money, its \$2 million in 1914. That's a lot of money then, more than \$50 million today. And she gives it for the cause of women's suffrage and it is spent, I was looking at the Library of Congress, how was this money spent? And I found that part of it was spent to found the League of Women Voters, part of it was spent for the lobbying campaign in Congress. Some of it for the ratification campaigns in each of the states and its there that I found what happened in Nashville in the summer of 1920 by tracing this, how the money was spent, of this bequest and that's where I came upon the story that would become the central focus of my book.

Tracey Silverman: That's fascinating. So, just -- can you touch on what the political climate was like in 1920 and it's just crazy to me how similar it is to 2020.

Elaine Weiss: Oh yeah. You know, I had no idea, really, when I started writing the book how close the parallels would be and the parallels have been piling up, I have to say. What I did realize was that it was a very -- a time of unease. The nation had come out of a war that was very unpopular, we were one, it was making some very, very large decisions about the direction of the country; whether it was going to be an isolationist nation which was not involved in the affairs of the world or if it was going to be a leader of the free world in what would be called the American Century. It was also dealing with immigration issues and that was a very controversial topic about whether we should restrict immigration.

Another -- we were in a recession and it -- that was deepening and so there were a lot of economic woos. There were labor strikes all over the nation. Something like two -- in 1920. There was also racial unrest. There were eruptions of demonstrations and violence in quite a few American cities and they -- what I could not [know] when I wrote the book but certainly know now, I mentioned it a few times, but all of this last push for ratification of the amendment comes in the midst of a pandemic. This was the influenza pandemic of 1918 to 1920. And the suffrages were very affected by this, their campaigning was curtailed, of course, their meetings were curtailed and they -- the nation lost 600,000 people. And people had to wear masks and some people resisted wearing masks and so it was a time, very much like today, also in the summer of 1920 a very heated presidential election was taking place, and of course that's where we find ourselves right now.

So, the parallels are strong and one of the things we realize is that we're still dealing with many of these concerns.

Tracey Silverman: Exactly. So, that brings us to the summer ma of 1920 and here we are in Nashville, Tennessee and your book mainly focuses on that six weeks leading up to the special called session for the Tennessee legislature which we've just had another one of those this August. So, tell us about kind of, I guess, touch on if you would, what everyone was doing leading up to the session because there was a lot of movement around the state that was happening, a lot of [politicizing].

Elaine Weiss: Yes. In -- somewhere in June of 1920 it became obvious that Tennessee might be the pivotal last state needed to fully ratify the 19th Amendment. It had already garnered 35 ratifications and 36 were needed; three quarters of the 48 states in the union. So, through a series of circumstances, which I described in the book, Tennessee emerges as a place where it is possible but not probable that ratification could occur. Now, most everyone in Tennessee in the power structure did not want

this fight to come to Nashville, did not want Tennessee to have to be put in this very, very delicate position and so the governor does not want this ratification battle to come. He's in reelection campaign, a really tough one, and he does not -- vision.

The legislature is not thrilled about having to be called back in the middle of summer for a special session and one that could be very controversial in their districts. They're also up for reelection.

The suffrages of Tennessee, who are a wonderful plucky bunch of women, say we can do it, bring it on. We're organized, we're going to -- we can make this happen and they're saying this to the national suffrage leaders who are kind of skeptical about this and say, this is a southern state and most of the other southern states had already rejected the 19th Amendment because of -- on the rational of states rights and also the fundamentally racist notion that the 19th Amendment does grant a vote to all women citizens and this would extend to all black women citizens and that was not considered acceptable in many of the southern states.

And so having this last battle royal come to Tennessee, a southern state, was -- that made the suffrages very nervous and they were not at all sure that they could pull it out but it's their last best hope. And so all of the forces converge upon Nashville in the summer of 1920 and I have the privilege of chronically this very wild six weeks of maneuvers of dirty tricks of political gamesmanship of true courage and idealism too amongst the legislators, some legislators, and the suffrage advocates who have come from all around. Now, what's also really interesting to me was the -- another group came to Nashville. Some made of Nashvillian's, Native Tennesseans, but also women and men from other states. And these were the anti-suffrages. These were the people opposed to granting the right to vote to women.

And there were many women involved in this. And so you have anti-suffrage women which seems like an oxymoron but it's not and trying to understand and explain to my readers what the anti-suffrages feared, why they would be against giving their own sisters the vote and themselves, what did this mean? What does this mean for today? Is there a legacy of this kind of political thought and cultural and social thought because what it brings into (inaudible) is that this was not just a political decision, it wasn't just an electoral law change, this was a fundamental debate about the role of women in society, in American society, and the rights of women in American society.

So, much bigger, larger, more complicated, more passionate debate than just -- you have women on both sides, really, confronting one another with a very fundamental disagreement about what women's role and her political and legal rights should be.

Tracey Silverman:

So bring us all the way through, and I'm a political junkie, so the -- just the maneuverings that all the motions that were tabled and voted for and voted against were fascinating to me but you get down to the final vote and it looks like the tide has turned against the movement, it looks like they're going to lose and then there's kind of a surprise ending which is, you know, seems like fiction but it's true, it really happens. So tell us about what happened at the very end of the vote?

Elaine Weiss:

Exactly. So, the special session is finally convened and the suffrages have been out into the field and have really pulled and approached almost all of the legislature, all of the legislators, in their homes, in their home districts. They've been out here, they've been walking through the rain and the mud and the summer heat and they've

carried pledge cards saying, will you promise that once you get to Nashville, you will vote to ratify?

And they come back with what looks like a pretty solid lead. What happens once the legislatures -- once the legislators arrive in Nashville, they're assaulted by all sides and enormous pressure is put on them by corporate interests, by political interests, by their constituents, by their political mentors, by the political parties and by the presidential candidates. They're under extreme pressure and what you see happen under this pressure, and some of that did, quite frankly, involve bribes and getting the legislators drunk. You have -- you see to their distress and horror, the suffrages see that their support is eroding. It's just disappearing. It doesn't help that the Speaker of the House in the Tennessee legislature flips suddenly. He had been an advocate, he said he was going to sponsor this ratification amendment, he was going to lead it through the House and then he suddenly flips and says, no, I'm not only not going to do that, I'm going to actively leave the opposition in the state House and he does and uses every parliamentary maneuver possible to derail this.

The suffrages the night before realize they're coming up short. What had been, looked like a lead and a comfortable path towards ratification, the Senate has already ratified but it's the House where -- county delegation flips. They were for suffrage and for ratification and now they're against it. And so the suffrages are just miserable and it's clear they're going to come up short, they have very sophisticated polling data, they've gone and talked to every legislator and it looks like they're going to lose and they go in on August 18, which I believe is a Tuesday, for the final vote and there's a whole bunch of debating and parliamentary maneuvers and there's a dedicated core of legislators led by Joe Hanover of Memphis who is a young legislator, an immigrant who had come when he was just a little boy with his parents and settled in Memphis and he's put himself through college and law school and he's in the legislature to try to improve the lot of Tennesseans and he becomes the floor leader for the ratification advocates and he's very skillful and he keeps those who are still supporting ratification in line, whatever way he can, and he's very clever and upright about it, but he's facing some very nasty, dirty tricks from the other side.

He's kept them in line. The governor has come around to realize that this is important and he's become a champion for ratification and he's twisting arms in his office and it comes down to a series of procedural votes and there's a young, in fact the youngest legislator in the whole state House, 24-year-old freshman delegate from the East Tennessee town of Niota and he has worn a red rose in his lapel to all of the special session. The red rose, symbol of the anti-suffrages, those who intend to vote against ratification.

Tracey Silverman:

And this was actually called the War of the Roses, right?

Elaine Weiss:

It sure was. Yellow roses for ratification advocates and red roses for the opponents. And, yes, it's called the War of the Roses and everyone's wearing their symbols on their lapels, their hats, their dresses, there are garlands of the different colored flowers decorating the city and decorating the state House. And Harry Burn has worn this red rose all the time and has voted with the anti-ratificationists in every procedural vote. But now it's coming down to a final vote of whether to take -- and then whether to approve it or reject it.

And what happens is, Harry has wanted to duck this whole time. His political career, he's a young man, he wants a political career, he's supporting his widowed mother back in Niota. He realizes it's safer for him to just duck, to just vote no. That's what

most of his constituents in East Tennessee want, just like lay low, go with the flow and it won't hurt him. But that morning he received, the post office worked really efficiently in those days, he received a letter his mother had just posted to him from home in Niota and it's a real mom letter and she writes about the weather and about which relatives are sick and gives him a shopping list of things to bring home when he returns from Nashville but also gives him some advice. And it says, I've noticed, Harry, that you've not been listed among those voting for ratification. Be a good boy and help the ratificationists get it through.

And this pricks his conscious because personally he does believe women should have the right to vote, his mother is a very smart, well educated, well read woman, she is a staunch advocate for women having the right to vote and he realizes he can't play it safe anymore. And so when the role call comes to him, he actually votes differently than he's voted in all the previous motions and he votes, aye. And this -- there's another delegate who has also changed his vote, Banks Turner, under pressure from the governor, so it's a different kind of pressure. And he changes his vote and that leaves Harry with the possibility of breaking a tie.

Tracey Silverman: Breaking a tie, yeah.

Elaine Weiss: And he does.

Tracey Silverman: It's incredible.

Elaine Weiss: That vote makes history and, of course, we credit his mother a great deal.

Tracey Silverman: Absolutely. As a mother myself, I appreciate that level of importance we can have sometimes. So -- so, yeah, okay, so now it's over but was it really over and a lot more happened after that before it was finally signed into law.

Elaine Weiss: Yes. What happens next is really fascinating a little alarming. Basically the anti-ratificationists who are -- have some very, very powerful allies; both corporate allies, political allies, media allies, there's publisher of the Nashville Banner is an opponent -- and the [mite] of his newspaper to fan the flames against ratification. And what happens is that they can't accept this decision and they immediately accuse Harry of changing his vote because he took a bribe and they manufacture, it's really a chilling episode where they manufacture affidavits and supposed witnesses --

Tracey Silverman: -- witnesses, yes.

Elaine Weiss: Yeah, who say they saw Harry accepting this money and none of it was true and they're trying to smear this young legislator. And they even send a representative, one who is wife of the former governor of Louisiana who was leading one of the anti-suffrage women and they -- she goes out to East Tennessee and arrives on Harry Burn's mother's doorstep and tries to get her to bully her into signing a document saying that that letter was false, that she didn't send that letter to her son, that that's not why he changed his vote. And Mrs. Burn just throws her off the porch and says, no, I stand by suffrage and my son stands by suffrage and we're not going to budge on this.

And Harry has to go before his colleagues in the legislature and defend himself and say, no, I did not take a bribe. I voted for suffrage because I believe we had a moral responsibility to give this to the women of America. And it's always best for a son to listen to his mother.

Tracey Silverman:

I like it, yes.

Elaine Weiss:

So -- but that's not the end either because what happens then is a series of events in Nashville and then in Washington where those -- the anti's, those opposed to the idea of the 19th Amendment, work on two fronts. On the -- in the field they start what they call indignation rallies. They form petitions that gather signatures in each of the districts of the legislators who voted to ratify to try to get them recalled to try to -- they had -- they flood their offices with hundreds and thousands of telegrams, supposed from their constituents, not always, denouncing them for their vote. They have these very scary rallies, torch-lit rallies, just denouncing the legislators who had voted, including Harry Burn, they -- the vocabulary, the language gets very heated, very racist, very populist and it's --

Meanwhile the anti-suffrage lawyers are lodging injunctions trying to legally stymie the ratification process and the governor, it's the role of the governor to now sign a certification saying, yes, my legislature has voted to ratify and I put my signature on this and they lodge an injunction and everything gets held for several days. Oh, I forgot, there's an important thing. The Speaker of the House, Seth Walker, a very skilled and slippery legislator, changes his vote after Harry has broken that tie and uses a parliamentary maneuver where he can change his vote and ask for reconsideration and basically he holds the whole ratification process in limbo for three days where he can, at any moment, recall the House and say we're going to have another vote on this.

And basically what he's trying to do is through any means necessary, including bribery, including pressure, including threats, try to get some of the legislators who voted to ratify to change, to flip to the other side.

And the legislature has to stay in place for three days and they received these letters, telegrams, saying, oh you better go home, Mr. Legislator, your house is on fire or your wife is very sick or your child fell from a tree and you better get him. Just trying to lure them away to erode that majority vote for ratification. And meanwhile they're saying, you know, too bad, your mortgage may be pulled and really, really nasty stuff. And the legislature -- the suffrages have to keep everyone there and so they patrol the hallways of the hotels, they are on constant guard duty at Union Station in case the legislators try to leave. It's a really -- it's a strange time in Nashville for those days after the ratification vote.

Finally the injunction is lifted, the governor does sign the certification. It's sent by train to Washington but the anti-suffrage lawyers continue and they try to restrain the Secretary of State from accepting Tennessee ratification and allowing the 19th Amendment to become part of the Constitution. Those efforts do fail and August 26, a full week after August 18 ratification in Nashville, the 19th Amendment finally is, as they say, proclaimed to be part of the Constitution. But -- suffrage lawyers will continue the fight in the courts all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court challenging the legality of the 19th Amendment and that won't be settled until 1922. But what we really know is in the southern states, the 19th Amendment will be undermined. It -- on paper, legally, all women will have the right to vote in every election in every state. But for African American women, in the southern states, including Tennessee, the vote will be denied by [pro laws], by literacy tests, poll taxes, intimidation and violence. And so the 19th Amendment will not be able to deliver its promise of the vote to all women until the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Tracey Silverman: 1965, yeah. Yeah. So, I would love for you to talk a little bit about each of these groups kind of a little of what they did kind of afterwards because their goal was either met or not met but those groups continued on with some other activities. So, that people will have heard of today, so, can you touch on that?

Elaine Weiss: Sure. After the ratification of the 19th Amendment, the suffrage movement disperses for the most part. Their goal is, won, again, not for African American women and so those suffrage organizations, and there are many of them in every state where black women organized either in conjunction with the mainstream white women's suffrage organizations or separately because often they were not allowed in because of this extreme segregation all over the country but especially in the south and so their organizations like the National Association of Black Women's Clubs and the NAACP and church groups and citizen groups in those communities will continue to press for equal access to the vote for another 40 years. What will happen to the mainstream groups, the National American and the Women's Party, the National American really does disperse -- it was a big tent. There were women of both political parties, all political parties including socialists and progressives and farm labor women so those will disperse to their own interests. But, the legacy of the suffrage of the National Association Suffrage Movement -- and this is a direct daughter and heir to the suffrage movement.

In every city and town across America, what was a National American Affiliated suffrage group becomes a league of Women Voters Group and League of Women Voters s also celebrating its centennial this year in 19 -- 2020. Alice Paul and her National Women's Party, that more radical group, which is very active here in Nashville and I describe their very important role in the ratification decision, they stay on and they make the decision first not to become a third political party which they seriously considered to become a women's party not just in name but in function where they would select and support women candidates for office. You kind of wonder what would have happened if they had been able to go see that idea through.

What they do instead is they try to remain intact but with a broader focus and now it's -- they've won the vote but Alice Paul, the leader of the Women's Party says, okay, now we have to look at the next step for women, the next way to eliminate the legal and economic and educational and social disadvantages that women have in our society. And whether that's, you know, access to financial security or ability to enter into colleges and universities, we need to go to that next step. So she and her colleagues draft what they hope will be the 20th Amendment. The next amendment to the Constitution, the Equal Rights Amendment and it is based upon the language of the 19th Amendment and basically it says that the rights of citizens shall not be denied on account of sex. It's introduced into Congress in 1923.

Tracey Silverman: Wow.

Elaine Weiss: It's still not fully ratified. It has a very interesting and torturous progress through Congress. It sits in Congress even longer than the 19th Amendment, 50 years until Congress finally passes it. It goes to the states with a deadline which is now being challenged whether that was even legal to put. It doesn't meet the first deadline, it's given an extension, it does not meet the second because suddenly, even when it was looking like ratification was secure, a group of anti-ratification women emerges, this is Phyllis Schlafly and her Eagle Forum, again, a group of conservative women who believe this is going to endanger the American home -- and society the same arguments used by the anti-ratificationists for the suffrage amendment and they're able to stop the ratification progress and it sits in limbo, the Equal Rights

Amendment system limbo for another 30 years. Actually, almost 40 years, and now it has been ratified by the 38th state, which is three quarters of our 50 states which is needed for full ratification. But, it's probably going to be decided in the courts because of that deadline issue and the sort of long-term.

And certain states, including Tennessee, has actually rescinded its original ratification of the ERA. Whether that's legal or not is probably very questionable. I have to say that Tennessee even rescinded its ratification of the 19th Amendment just a few weeks later but it was moved because there's really no do-over's in the Constitutional Amendment ratification process. So, I doubt those are going to stand but, still, it's probably not going to happen until the courts decide.

But what we see is that women go into the political arena in many different ways. Some women run for Congress and run for the legislatures right away and there's the assumption that women will take their rightful role in the political and electoral process. Will be elected into high office including the presidency in not too many years. And, of course, that was a century ago.

Tracey Silverman:

So, what -- in today's world with so much social unrest and there are groups that are seeking change, what lessons do you think these groups today might gain from learning more about the women's suffrage movement?

Elaine Weiss:

I think there are really important lessons to be learned from looking and studying this extraordinary moment or series of decades in our history. And one of them is that activism does work, that change is possible. That citizens can see something wrong and organize and plan and structure a movement that will eventually succeed. We hope it doesn't take another seven decades. But the other part of the lesson is that the suffrage movement succeeded because it was able to marry the idea of protests and agitation -- creative and practical political pressure and strategies.

So they -- we think of the suffrage movement and we think of the demonstrations and the marches and the picket signs and the, you know, the floats and the [tableaus] and all those picturesque and important, really important, demonstrations of public support for this very fundamental change to our Constitution. But, they were also working inside and they were lining up male allies in the legislatures in Congress over generations. Remember, this -- three generations of suffrage women had to work on this and they had to deal with three generations of men in power. They are lobbying the success of line of presidents, of senators, of congressman, of state representatives. They are drafting legislation, they are collecting signatures for petitions, they are present at Constitutional conventions in the states. They are learning and master the political tools necessary to make fundamental legal change and so they are able to use both of these very important demonstrations of political strength and popular strength and bring them together, not without strife, not without disagreement, not without huge disappointments and defeats but they're able o bring both of those to bear and that's finally what makes the change. It's both the protests, the demonstration, the popular uprising, if you will, and the sustained political pressure. It's not a one and down. It's not losing on one issue and packing up and going home. These women had to persist through decades and we hope we can fast forward all that as we look and realize how much we need some fundamental societal and political and legal change but it's also true that we need to marshal political strategy, very specific articulated goals and very doable political strategies and realize that that's the way change can be made. You need both.

Tracey Silverman: And it's a great segue to just how I'd like to wrap up and just, please, I hope that everyone who's been able to listen to our conversation will absolutely embrace and exercise their right to vote and if you want to learn more, what's so great, this book of Elaine's is amazing but there's also a junior version, right? And what's kind of the target age for the junior version?

Elaine Weiss: I was very keen on telling the story to young people because it is a story of -- young people, because many of these activists from Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton and to Carrie Catt and Alice Paul come to this idea of women's equality by seeing something is wrong as their -- when they're very young. And they commit themselves to work towards a goal and I think that idea of young activism is really important now and I wanted young people to feel empowered that just because they're -- they can't vote yet and just because they are still in school doesn't mean that they can't advocate for something they really care about and also that they can't learn the skills; and whether that is knowledge of history, learning how a bill becomes law, learning how to lobby, all of those political skills, they can learn so that they're prepared when they are old enough to vote and old enough to be considered adults. They can really act on this and I wanted to give that sense of activism as a positive, as an important goal for young people. And the idea of voting for young people is so important. Because the [patient] of young people is not what it should be, I wanted to tell the story of what women and men sacrificed for them to be able to have this right and privilege of having a voice in their government.

So, if they care about anything and whether it is voting rights or social justice or the environment and climate change or gun control or any of -- a whole number of important causes that our society faces, they care about it. The vote is their most powerful tool. So, I wanted to teach that and make it -- convey to them the great dramatic story of how it happened.

Tracey Silverman: Well thank you so much for devoting so much time today and I really appreciate it and we'll wrap up there.

Elaine Weiss: Lovely to be with you as always. Thank you.

Tracey Silverman: Thank you.

Chelsea Peterson: Many thanks to Tracey and Elaine for such a wonderful discussion. And also thank you to our partners at the Nashville Public Library for highlighting such an important part of our history that forever changed the way women and girls are counted and heard in our country. For more information on the Votes for Women Room, be sure to visit, NPLF.org. And to learn a little bit more about PNC's advancement towards women's efforts, visit PNC.com/women.

Thank you so much for joining us today and have a wonderful rest of your day.