

While this country was founded on the principles of opportunity and equality, they have not always been guaranteed to all members of our society. The historic struggle for the right to vote has taken place almost since the founding of our country. Women's crusade for the right to vote is unique, and today is often overlooked. For 70 years women lobbied on the state and federal level, picketed, protested and starved themselves for the rights of basic equality. This month, as we celebrate Women's History Month and the contributions that women have made to our country, it is important that we reflect on the struggles women faced throughout history to secure that.

I am honored to be the Secretary of State, an office that holds special significance for women in the Commonwealth. Kentucky's first female elected constitutional office was another native of the Bowling Green area, Emma Guy Cromwell, elected to the office of Secretary of State in 1924. Additionally, the office has long been the place where women come to advance their agenda. By registering to vote, or starting their own business, women's ability to improve their own situation often brings them through our doors.

Today, women face new battles on the road to equality. While women occupy over half the managerial positions and 46% of the work force, there are still only 15 female Fortune 500 CEOs. By and large, women still face wage discrimination and are not earning the same salaries as men in the same fields and even the same jobs. In Kentucky, the numbers are staggering, for every dollar a man makes nationwide, women average 77 cents, but in Kentucky, that number falls to 74% of what men make. Women in Kentucky face even greater hardships compared to women nationwide with health and well-being, we rank 46th in the Women's Law Center report card and our life expectancy is 3 years shorter than the national average.

Women must increase their civic participation so that their issues are heard and matter to elected officials. Voting is our voice in building the kind of country that we want for ourselves and our children. Although women have made up a greater percentage of the voting block in every Presidential election since 1980, we still only occupy 17.5% of Congress. We need to take the next step, increase participation not only in voting, but also in assuming leadership positions and running for office. For women's issues to matter and for government to have a

greater stake in improving the status of women, more women must occupy positions in public service.

I encourage all women of the Commonwealth to step up and be proud of the rights and privileges for which our grandmothers and great-grandmothers fought. Teach your daughters, and your sons, to engage in civic activity and work to make our communities and the Commonwealth a better place. And that engagement begins with registering and voting.