

NFWL/NRA STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP: WINNING ESSAYS

Essay Topics

1. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects the freedom of speech, and women have played influential roles in uniting the country on important issues. Give a recent example of how an elected female official brought a community together during difficult times, how her perspective as a female made the difference, and how she changed her community's viewpoint to respect women in leadership.
2. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton held the first Women's Rights Convention (WRC) and presented "The Declaration of Sentiments," in which she declared that women and men are equal. The WRC evolved into the National Woman Suffrage Association, which led to the 19th Amendment being passed and ratified. In the 1800s, who were other women setting the pathway for women's rights to become a reality? And how did their works of composition influence Americans to shift in favor of women's rights?
3. Women only represent 24% of elected officials in America, yet women are 54% of the American populous. Although the 19th Amendment has protected women's rights to vote for almost 100 years, why do women not hold the majority of elected offices in America? What does research show as hindrances for women running for office? How would you resolve this issue?

Female Politicians Deserve a Sporting Chance

By: Anne Crabill

Although the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted women the right to vote, it did not assure that women would be elected. The upcoming 2020 election will mark the legislation's centennial and American women have made considerable progress towards social equality. However, that progress should not engender complacency. Women are still not proportionately represented in public office--only 24% of elected officials are female, compared to 54% of the general population. Women must push for representation, fight for opportunities where they exist, and financially support one another to equalize their representation in public office.

Many sociologists and political theorists have cited prohibitive factors including unconscious bias, the financial and social cost of elections, traditional gender expectations, distaste for the contentious election process, and sexist media coverage. Despite these obstacles, the Women & Politics Institute explains that "women perform as well as men when they run for office." This finding suggests that while studies continue to pinpoint the reasons for election aversion, there's no reason to wait for those results to encourage female candidate emergence.

The complex issue of political under-representation will require a multifaceted remedy. A good starting point is an examination of the characteristics of successful female leaders. Research has shown that there is a strong correlation between women in the top echelon of industry and politics and those who were highly competitive athletes. As a three sport high school athlete, I was intrigued to learn that 94% of women in the C suite of Fortune 500 companies were successful athletes. These accomplished women learned how to work with a team, to withstand harsh public scrutiny, and to persevere--many of the character traits that are required to succeed in politics. These women have advocated for themselves and asked coaches to invest in their abilities; skills that can be transferred to fundraising and campaigning.

Female collegiate athletes could be identified and mentored for careers in public service. In our society, sports are a meaningful way to build connections. Unfortunately, sports have historically helped perpetuate the idea of the 'good old boys club' where the men talk about last night's game and the upcoming golf outing and women are mostly excluded. In the article, "Politics and Sport: Strange, Secret Bedfellows," Kyle Green and Doug Hartmann explain that "sport can help solidify a politician's reputation, identity and social status." Female golfers, in particular, who have already dispelled the notion that GOLF stands for "gentlemen only, ladies forbidden," may be particularly well suited to succeed in politics. Golf, like many other sports, is a way to transcend politics and build connections both within and across party lines.

Additionally, local groups like “Lillian’s List” in NC should expand their role of providing female candidates with financial and organizational support. This group was named in honor of Lillian Exum Clement, a lawyer who was the first woman elected to the North Carolina General Assembly (in 1920 by a landslide) and the first to serve in any state legislature in the South. Candidates supported by this organization tend to do well in local and statewide elections. On a national level, EMILY’s List also supports female candidates (It stands for “Early Money Is Like Yeast” which makes the “dough” rise).

Modern American society is ready to embrace more women in political life. To accelerate that process, we should identify and support strong confident women who are well equipped to shift the paradigm. Athletes in particular may be the ones who have developed skills sets that could help pave the way to equal representation in public office.

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A Woman Can Not Be Held Back
By: Jessica Goldschlager

The woman rises from her seat. In a defining moment of history, this middle-aged woman reads the document set before her, declaring, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men *and women* are created equal.” By proclaiming that both genders are of equal value to society at the Seneca Falls Convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was challenging the prevailing beliefs held by both men *and women* in regards to gender roles. This event set the groundwork for the later passage of the 19th amendment, which enabled females to wield political and societal power through suffrage. Nearly a century later, women continue to be underrepresented in elected offices. It is well-known that incumbents enjoy a statistical advantage when undergoing the re-election process. Incumbents can draw from political connections for campaign funds and are generally more well-known than their political adversaries. This advantage can be quantified, with Professor of Political Science Herbert Weisberg estimating that incumbents achieve an estimated six point bonus in general elections. This disadvantage newcomers face may account for the lack of female officeholders. Females did not first occupy a federal office until the year 1916, when Jeannette Rankin was elected as the representative of Montana. Thus, male officials have had a near two hundred year advantage over their female peers to establish connections and earn funds. This incumbency advantage may account for the fact that women officeholders compose 21% of the Senate and only 19.6% of the House of Representatives, since less incumbents run for reelection in the Senate than the House on average. To resolve this issue, members of Congress should be limited in the amount of terms any single person can serve. This will diminish the incumbency advantage, enabling new office-runners an equal playing ground in elections. However, the incumbency advantage is only one of the many obstacles politically hindering women.

The diversity of female political ideals also contributes to a lack of females in elected office. Political fragmentation influenced politics from as early as late 1800s, when a variety of female organizations utilized contrasting strategies to support the suffrage movement. The National American Woman Suffrage Association, for instance, was determined to earn female suffrage on a state by state level. In contrast, Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party pushed for a federal amendment. These two conflicting parties were often battling each other for support and resources, so that the 19th amendment was delayed in its passage until after Paul annexed a large portion of NAWSA's support. This is an early instance in which the diversity of female opinions weakened their political force. If, however, a single female party were to be established with a general platform, such as in preventing domestic violence, the female voice would be

stronger and more authoritative, resulting in more females overcoming the incumbency issue and gaining political office.

After researching the transformation of societal standards over the past two centuries, I learned that any female can overcome adversity and politically influence society. Although I do not plan on occupying a political office, I plan on making my own societal impact by becoming an occupational therapist, changing the lives of disabled children. I am incredibly thankful for women before me, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who have helped pave my path to success. Opportunities are available to all females which were not available a century ago. Unfortunately, women still endure the crushing weight of discrimination. If women were to unite behind a message that all females could agree upon, we would have greater strength and even greater opportunity nationwide.

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Inspiring Women to Run
By: Margaret Kleiman

When I was in first grade, my grandmother gave me a placemat of the Presidents. Immediately, I noticed there were no female faces. I learned women elected officials are hard to find – from the White House to the state house to the chambers of city and county councils.

Women ran for office even before they could vote. In 1872, forty-eight years before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Victoria Woodhull ran for President. In 1887, Susanna Madora Salter became the first woman mayor. In 1916, Jeannette Rankin was elected to Congress. In 1920, after a seventy-year battle, the Constitution was amended to ensure suffrage would not be “denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

Women across America, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt and Ida Wells-Barnett, fought tirelessly for women’s suffrage. Surely, newly enfranchised voters would embrace their right to seek political office. However, equal representation in politics never materialized.

The Nineteenth Amendment is almost 100 years old. While American women regularly cast ballots, their names rarely appear on them. Despite constituting 54% of the population, only 24.9% of state legislators are women. There are six women governors. With 19.3% of the seats in Congress held by women, America ranks 101th – behind China, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia – in the number of women serving in national legislatures.

When women run for office, they win at equal rates to men. Polls reveal voters welcome female office holders. Why aren’t more women running?

Research by Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox reveals a “persistent gender gap in political ambition.” The gender gap starts in childhood. Boys are socialized to think about politics as a career. They are exposed to more political media and discussions. They are more likely to be encouraged to run for student government. They play more competitive sports, priming them for political competition.

A Girl Scout Research Institute survey reported 74% of teen and tween girls see politics as “a man’s world.” To cultivate political ambition, girls seek mentoring from female politicians, leadership opportunities, and positive media stories about women politicians. Above all, girls want encouragement.

Lawless and Fox suggest parental encouragement has “the potential to be the great equalizer.” Encourage girls to cultivate their leadership skills and competitive spirit through

student government, sports and debate teams. Engage us in public policy discussions. Encourage us to learn about the political process. Plant the seed that someday we could run for office, maybe even get our face on the Presidential placemat.

Eleanor Roosevelt said: “If women want to be in politics, they need to grow skin as thick as a rhinoceros.” How do we eliminate the self-doubt that prevents women from competing? Help women recognize that leadership in their homes, businesses and communities can translate into political leadership. Create mentorship opportunities with current politicians. Provide financial support to women candidates, especially early in campaigns. Encourage mothers to share the burden of housework with other family members. Most of all, believe in women. We have so much to bring to the table. Sometimes, we just need an invitation.

My father served our country in uniform. I hope to serve my community and nation by running for office. I would jump at the opportunity to learn from 100 women elected officials.

We’re at a crossroads in America today. We need women’s faces in the halls of power. We need women’s voices at decision-making tables. If America hopes to thrive going forward, we must encourage our best and brightest citizens – women and men – to step up leading our nation to an inspiring future.

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Sticking to Her Guns: One Legislator's Rise from Victim to Victory
By: Madeline Peltzer

Imagine you are sitting with your family in a crowded restaurant when a truck crashes through the front window and a man jumps out, a gun in each hand, and opens fire on patrons. "He's 12 feet away from me," thought Dr. Suzanna Gratia-Hupp, 32, as she grabbed for the gun in her purse. "I've got him." Then she realized she had made what she calls the stupidest decision of her life. She had obeyed Texas law and left her gun in her car. Helpless, Suzanna witnessed the execution of her father, mother, and 21 other men and women in the infamous Luby's Cafeteria Massacre of 1991, the worst mass-shooting in American history at the time. That day changed the course of her life. She, in turn, helped to change the law.

In an effort to prevent a repeat of the tragedy she experienced, Suzanna exercised her right to free speech and made it her mission to champion the Constitutional right to bear arms. She told me that she testified before Texas legislators in favor of a bill on concealed carry which, had it already been legal, would have allowed her to keep her gun with her. "I view myself as a victim of [past] legislators. . . who left me defenseless," she stated. "I honestly believe they legislated me out of the right to protect myself and my family." Suzanna's personal, powerful story was key to the bill's passage and it was eventually signed into law.

Although the odds were against her, Suzanna's passion led her to run for the Texas House of Representatives. "I was a Republican candidate for a traditionally Democratic seat in a Democratic district," she explained to me. "My party chairman warned me that winning was impossible." She proved him wrong. As her community sought to pick up the pieces in the incident's aftermath, Suzanna's story transcended party lines and united Texans of all stripes. Suzanna not only became the first Republican to hold the office but also the first woman. Throughout her 12 years of public service, Representative Hupp sponsored and co-sponsored a host of legislation affirming Texans' right to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their property. She also testified before Congress on four occasions and countless times in over 25 states. She has spoken nearly 1,000 times to audiences all over America, on television, and on the radio. In addition, as a board member, she inspires students like me through Patriot Academy, a Texas-based leadership and political training program with which I have been involved the past three years. To this day, she remains a sought-after expert on the Second Amendment.

Rep. Hupp believes that the combination of her tragic experience and her roles as a daughter, wife, mother, and

professional have given her a unique perspective on self-defense and made her an effective leader and legislator. “I wasn’t the rifle-waving, camouflage-wearing Joe Redneck that people think of when we’re talking about gun rights,” she explained to me. She did not grow up in a house with guns or gun enthusiasts. She also did not shoot for sport, and she abhors hunting. The only reason she owned a gun was because a concerned friend gave it to her and trained her to use it for self-protection. Rep. Hupp shattered stereotypes surrounding gun owners and her compelling testimony resonated with countless Americans. “I made people stop and think,” she said. Rep. Hupp’s success has commanded the attention and respect of her colleagues, constituents, and fellow citizens.

As a young woman pursuing a career in politics, I am inspired by Rep. Hupp. She is a woman of strength, action, and selfless dedication. Despite her grief, she stepped into the national spotlight to share her perspective and has been a voice for the Second Amendment for over 20 years. In today’s polarized society, her ability to inject clarity and civility into a topic that is so often divisive, rally her fellow Texans together, and pave the way for life-saving change is truly remarkable. Representative Hupp is an example to me of the positive impact one woman can have on her community, state, and nation.

Victoria Woodhull: A Woman of Firsts**By: Faith VanVleet**

Despite the fact that the majority of historical figures students learn about are male, nearly everyone knows the names of such legendary women's rights leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Yet there remain many other women whose contributions to history are just as significant, yet not as well known. One of these women is Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for president, and an outspoken leader of the women's rights movement.

Victoria Woodhull was a first in many sectors of society. In her early life, she and her sister opened their own stock brokerage firm on Wall Street- Woodhull, Claflin & Co; the first brokerage firm operated by a woman. Despite an outpouring of media criticism and stereotypes concerning a firm being operated by a woman, Woodhull's business was successful for a time and attracted the attention of wealthy railroad tycoons such as Cornelius Vanderbilt. Not only did her business show that women could be successful in a domain that had been previously considered the realm of men, she also paved the way for the first woman to gain a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, Muriel Siebert, who became a member of the NYSE in 1967. With the profits from their business, both sisters were also the first women to run a newspaper, published in 1870. Coming from a poor family of 10 children, her ascent from poverty makes her accomplishments even more remarkable.

Woodhull would rise even further. Using her newspaper as a means of publicity, she began campaigning to run for president in 1872, under a political party called the Equal Rights Party. Just a year before, Woodhull accomplished another first, becoming the first woman to address a congressional committee by making an argument based in the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause that, "Women are the equals of men before the law, and are equal in all their rights," and therefore, the right to vote.

Her candidacy and acceptance within the women's suffrage movement did not last, however. Numerous personal scandals and criticism from opponents of women's suffrage, as well as from her fellow suffragists, who feared her more radical positions would detract support from their cause. Though her beliefs that women and men should be held to the same sexual standards, and that women should be able to pursue their own careers did not gain wide support, her leadership meant a step in the right direction for women's rights, and would draw American's attentions towards issues that they had previously backed away from.

Woodhull's story is not as well-known as many other leaders in the women's suffrage movement, yet her position

as a woman of firsts showed the nation that it was possible for a woman to operate a newspaper, be a part of the business community, and even run for president. Though her life and cause were marred by personal difficulties and missteps, her example shows that anything is possible with perseverance. As someone who is interested in studying history and pursuing a major in education, I think it is especially important that students learn the contributions that women have made to history; not just to know two or three token women, but to know how all female leaders have shaped history, so that the women of today can be inspired to shape our future.

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Resilience: Female Voices in Moments of Crisis
By: Abby Wiederhold

You've heard it before: the passé platitude that because a leader is a female, she is more likely to be emotionally unstable in trying times than her male counterparts. This school of thought is becoming increasingly outdated, but it is still held not only by those on a global scale, but by many Americans as well. While we cannot suppress the First Amendment right to free speech of those who subscribe to this belief, a doctrine that has been upheld since the ratification of the Bill of Rights in December of 1791, we can show them the feats of valorous female leaders who helped their constituents face trials and tribulations. An exemplary female leader who embodied the spirit of compassion and true leadership was Senator Elizabeth Warren during and after an event that shocked her state of Massachusetts and the nation as a whole.

The cloudy, dry morning began with excitement and anticipation from nearly 23,000 runners awaiting their chance to explore their physical limits and bond with their community. Mere hours later, it prematurely ended with 3 bystanders killed and over 200 injured in an abhorrent attack on humanity. April 15, 2013 would forever alter the lives of all who were affected. As chaos gripped the Boston area while the perpetrators evaded the law, the city was placed on lockdown. Peering out the windows of their homes only to be greeted by desolate streets and the flashing of emergency vehicle lights, many Bostonians searched for leadership and guidance.

Two days after the bombing, then-junior Senator Warren addressed her constituents with a powerful message on the Senate floor that rang throughout the Capitol. In her speech, Senator Warren declared that “we will not be afraid, and we will not let it change us” and “we will grieve together, hurt together, and pray together.” She also praised the actions of first responders and benevolent bystanders and honored those killed in the attack, including 8-year-old Martin Richard, by sharing elements of their lives and hobbies. This clear decision by Senator Warren to directly defy the terrorists' goal to spread animosity and fear and instead broadcast love and communal strength demonstrated her ability to resolutely lead with a level-head just 4 months into her term as Senator. Being both a newly-elected Senator and the first female Senator in Massachusetts history, her unique circumstances made it even more imperative to step up, prove herself, and lead her state through tragedy. She demonstrated to the people of Massachusetts that she was reliable and concerned with their best interests.

The events of the 2013 Boston Marathon have passed, but survivors still deal with mental and physical trauma each waking hour. Married couple Jessica Kensky and Patrick Downes both lost limbs in the bombing and were treated at

the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. The Department of Defense granted rare special permission for Kensky and Downes' admission as civilians. The two credit military medical expertise in treating explosion wounds for expediting their recovery, and dedicate much of their time lobbying for victims of terrorist attacks to gain easier access to such facilities. On December 7, 2016, Senator Warren heard their pleas and introduced the Jessica Kensky and Patrick Downes Act. The introduced bill would ensure victims of terrorism gain easier access to military physicians and would establish set medical procedures in the event of a terrorist attack.

While empowering women like Senator Warren give us an ideal to strive towards, there is still work to be done. A survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union showed that 81.8 percent of female leaders surveyed had encountered psychological violence in the form of threats, harassment, or misogynistic remarks and images. In Canada, female politicians have begun to rally against death threats and vitriolic speech directed towards them on the Internet. To combat these threats, we as Americans must unite in making politics a safe environment for all. Rather than things like appearance, gender, race, or sexuality serving as a reason to attack someone, let us engage in meaningful discourse on political beliefs and policies. We as young women will face many obstacles in proving ourselves as effective leaders, but we are resilient. We are the leaders of tomorrow. Nevertheless, in the spirit of Senator Warren, we too shall persist.

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