

Theodore Roosevelt supports women's suffrage, 1912

Introduction

In this letter written in July 1912, during his campaign for president, Theodore Roosevelt informs the state and county chairmen of the Progressive Party of his plan to support women's suffrage. The document shows the many edits Roosevelt made as he refined his message.

Roosevelt wrote this letter supporting women's suffrage in 1912, but he had fought for equality for women much earlier in his life. As a senior at Harvard University in 1880, he had written about marriage equality and urged women not to change their last name upon marriage. As a New York State Assembly member in 1883, he introduced a bill supporting corporal punishment for men who abused their wives. Additionally, as president of the New York City Board of Police Commissioners from 1895 to 1897, Roosevelt hired women for positions of executive leadership in the police department.

Roosevelt concludes his letter with a recommendation: "I venture respectfully to suggest that you take this matter under advisement and, so far as possible, get the women to aid the men in this great struggle to lift to a higher plane, morally and materially, the conditions of life and labor for both men and women."

At the time of Roosevelt's letter, women had gained full suffrage in only six states: California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Arizona, Kansas, and Oregon would be added to the list later that year. The National Progressive Party wanted women to play important roles in the campaign, including as delegates to the national convention and as members of state and county committees. Women did attend the convention as delegates, alternates, and observers, and Jane Addams seconded the nomination of Theodore Roosevelt as the party's candidate for president.

Excerpt

In my key note speech I am favoring woman suffrage by states. . . . The Progressive party as a whole undoubtedly believes in it. We do not attempt to dictate what any State should do in this matter for we know that the needs and feelings of the States vary; but we do cordially commend the matter to the well thought out judgement of the people of each state, both the men and the women. Women should should make the fight within the Progressive Party. They should help in founding a party which will represent the whole people in their fight for social justice. One chief feature in that fight is the protection of working women and children in their struggle for fair hours, for decent wages and for living conditions which will make vice and poverty unnecessary.

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I therefore hope that wherever it is possible we shall see women delegates to the National Convention, and women members of the State and County Committees.

Questions for Discussion

Answer the following questions based on the introduction and excerpt, the transcript, and your knowledge of American history.

- What role does Roosevelt want women to take in securing more rights?
- To what level of government is Roosevelt directing his statement? Why do you think that is the case?
- What reasons does Roosevelt provide for supporting a larger political role for women?

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National Progressive Party
 HEADQUARTERS
 PROVISIONAL NEW YORK STATE COMMITTEE
 No. 1 MADISON AVENUE
 NEW YORK

July 30, 1912.

TO THE STATE AND COUNTY CHAIRMEN
 OF THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE PARTY, -

Gentlemen:

In ~~my key-note speech~~ ^{I favor} I am favoring woman suffrage by states; that many of the leaders of this party agree with me is shown by the fact that even in the non-suffrage states, women have been elected as delegates to the National Convention. The suffrage organizations have never been given representation in any party, and have sought to gain their rights outside of party lines. ~~In the boss-ridden, machine-ruled states east of the Mississippi no state has given women the vote; and the progress of the fight has been marked by broken pledges, false promises, cowardice and subterfuge.~~ ^{In a number of States the experiment of woman suffrage has been tried; in some it has not proved a straight one of the units which it is a Progressive Party as a whole unduly labors in it. We do not attempt to dictate what any State should do in this matter but we believe that it is necessary and feeling of its states vary, but we are decidedly commended the well thought out judgment of the people of each State and its women.}

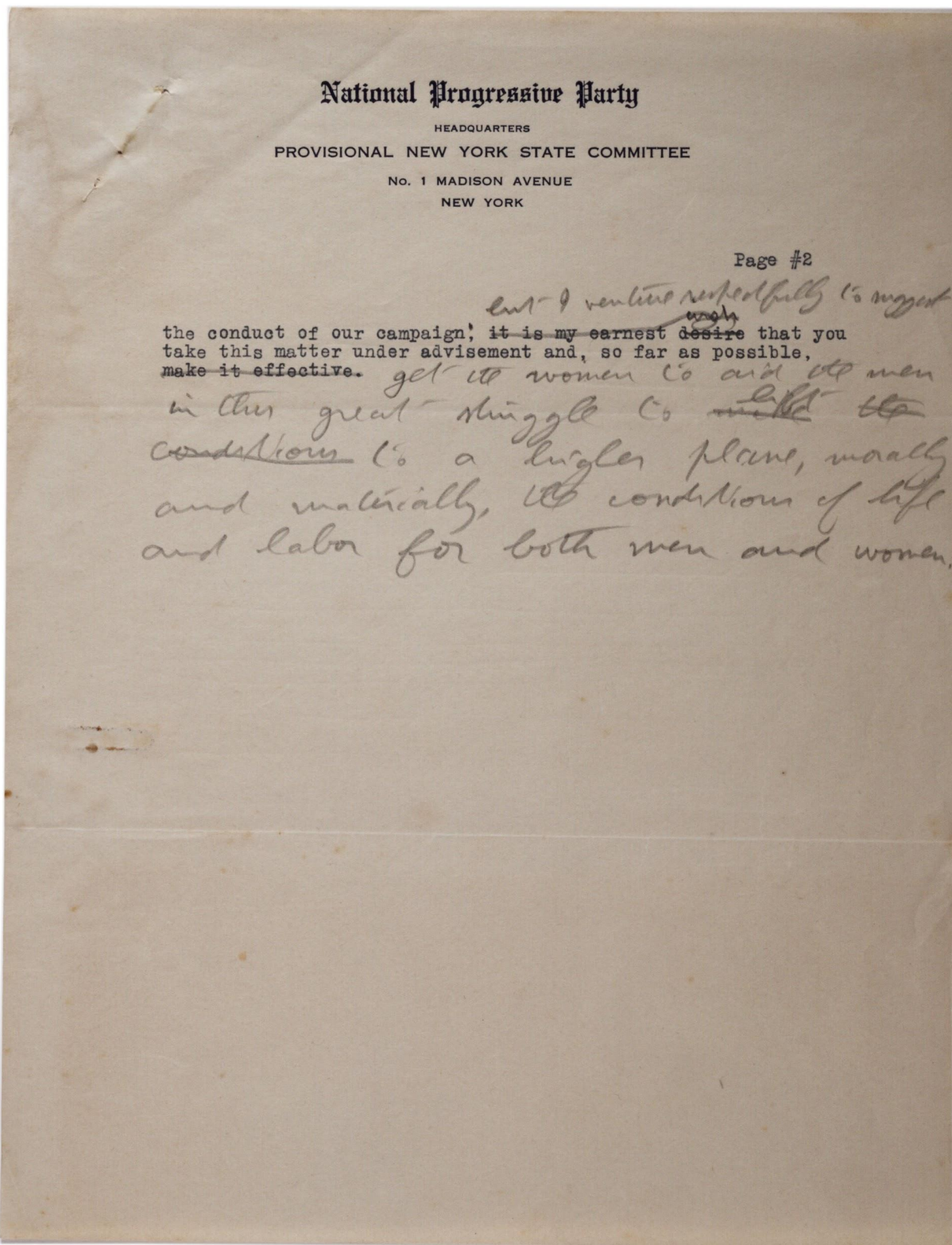
I believe the time has come when we should not only stand for votes for women, but that women should make the fight with the Progressive Party, within party lines, and should help in founding a party which will represent the people in their fight for social justice. ^{one chief feature in that} this includes the protection of working women and children in their struggle for fair hours, decent wages and living conditions which will make vice and poverty unnecessary.

I therefore favor women delegates to the National Convention, and women members of the State and County Committees.

I believe that the women members of such committees would constitute a very valuable State Campaign Committee. ^{I do} While it is not my desire in any way to dictate concerning ^{interfering in}

Theodore Roosevelt to State and County Chairmen of the Progressive Party, July 30, 1912. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC07818)

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Transcript of the First Draft

National Progressive Party
HEADQUARTERS
PROVISIONAL NEW YORK STATE COMMITTEE
No. 1 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK

July 30, 1912.

TO THE STATE AND COUNTY CHAIRMEN
OF THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE PARTY, -

Gentlemen:

In my key note speech I am favoring woman suffrage by states; that many of the leaders of this party agree with me is shown by the fact that even in the non-suffrage states, women have been elected as delegates to the National Convention. The suffrage organizations have never been given representation in any party, and have sought to gain their rights outside of party lines. In the boss-ridden, machine-ruled states east of the Mississippi no state has given women the vote; and the progress of the fight has been marked by broken pledges, false promises, cowardice and subterfuge.

I believe the time has come when we should not only stand for votes for women, but that women should should make the fight with the Progressive Party, within party lines, and should help in founding a party which will represent the people in their fight for social justice. Let us not forget that this includes the protection of working women and children in their struggle for fair hours, decent wages and living conditions which will make vice and poverty unnecessary.

I therefore favor women delegates to the National Convention, and women members of the State and County Committees.

I believe that the women members of such committees would constitute a very valuable State Campaign Committee. While it is not my desire in any way to dictate concerning the conduct of our campaign, it is my earnest desire that you take this matter under advisement and, so far as possible, make it effective.

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Transcript of the Final Version

National Progressive Party
HEADQUARTERS
PROVISIONAL NEW YORK STATE COMMITTEE
No. 1 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK

July 30, 1912.

TO THE STATE AND COUNTY CHAIRMEN
OF THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE PARTY, -

Gentlemen:

I favor woman suffrage by states; that many of the state leaders in the National Progressive party movement take the same view is shown both by the planks in various Progressive state platforms and by the fact that even in the non-suffrage states, women have been elected as delegates to the National Convention. The suffrage organizations have never been given representation in any party, and have sought to gain their rights outside of party lines. In a number of States the experiment of woman suffrage has now been tried; in actual practice it has been found to work well. The Progressive party as a whole undoubtedly believes in it. We do not attempt to dictate what any state should do in this matter for we know that the needs and feelings of the states vary; but we do cordially commend the matter to the well thought out judgement of the people of each state, both the men and the women. Women should should make the fight within the Progressive Party. They should help in founding a party which will represent the whole people in their fight for social justice. One chief feature in that fight is the protection of working women and children in their struggle for fair hours, for decent wages and for living conditions which will make vice and poverty unnecessary.

I therefore hope that wherever it is possible we shall see women delegates to the National Convention, and women members of the State and County Committees.

I believe that the women members of such committees would constitute very valuable Campaign Committees. I do not desire in any way to interfere in the conduct of our campaign; but I venture respectfully to suggest that you take this matter under advisement and, so far as possible, get the women to aid the men in this great struggle to lift to a higher plane, morally and materially, the conditions of life and labor for both men and women.