

Response Letter from Iowa Secretary of State W.S. Allen to Anna Lawther, December 1918

State of Iowa Department of State
Des Moines

December 9th, 1918.

W. S. Allen, Secretary
R. M. Williams, Deputy

Miss Anna B. Lawther,
Dubuque, Iowa.

My dear Miss Lawther:—

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your kind favor of the 3rd inst., enclosing copy of letter, Dated November 19th, from Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, both referring to the failure of giving notice as required by law of the Equal Suffrage Amendment to the Constitution of the State.

On account of absence from the office I have not been able to answer more promptly, for which please pardon.

No one can regret more than myself the failure of this department to give the proper notice in the premises, as contemplated and provided for by the statutes and constitution relating to this subject. I can scarcely excuse myself for the omission. It was unfortunate, but I can assure you it was purely unintentional. I had trusted the matter of giving due attention to all legislative requirements of the last session, to one of my most trusted employees. One, who has rendered faithful and acceptable service in this office for more than twelve years last past, and who is himself personally in favor of the movement, but in some way the giving of this notice was overlooked until too late, and until the attention of the office was called to the omission by one of the prominent leaders of the Equal Suffrage movement in the State.

The intimation by Mrs. Catt, that something may have been purposely wrong in the matter, is the first hint or suggestion of this character that has so far been brought to my attention. I have never before had the honesty of my motives questioned or disputed.

I have been a firm believer for years in the right of women to vote in the same conditions as the right men, to cast the ballot at all elections for any and all purposes.

When a short time before the special election, at which the proposed constitutional amendment, granting the right of suffrage to women was to be submitted, I was one of the gentlemen who made an address here on the Capitol steps, at a reception give to Mrs. Field, who was carrying a monster

petition from California, to be presented to the Congress at Washington, for equal suffrage. I responded in behalf of the State in the absence of Governor Clarke, and the Honorable H. W. Byers, corporation counsel of the city of Des Moines, spoke in behalf of the city. On that occasion I predicted that the equal suffrage amendment would carry in Iowa by 20,000 majority.

I have always thought there was something irregular in that election, and like yourself and Mrs. Catt, I feel that the women of Iowa did not receive fair treatment at the polls.

It is true as stated that none of the leaders in the movement called our attention to this notice in time for its publication, but I feel that that does not fully excuse the omission on our part, although many of the prominent leaders of the state have themselves offered this in extenuation and excuse, partially, for such omission.

I think there should be no question but what the coming General Assembly will again pass this resolution, if presented, and if Congress shall in the meantime take action favorably, I believe such action will be approved and ratified by our legislature this winter.

I shall certainly be pleased to render whatever assistance I am able to do, to bring about this desired result.

I think If Mrs. Catt was fully informed as to the situation in Iowa and knew better as to the personnel of the men directly connected with the failure to publish notice, that her criticism would be less severe and devoid of any suggestion that anyone had intentionally failed to perform his duty.

I regret, Miss, Lawther, that I was not in the office when you called as I would have liked to have met you and talked the matter over with you. I hope that you will see me when next in the city.

Trusting that my explanation may at least be entirely satisfactory to yourself, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

WSA.REM.

W. S. Allen
Secretary of State.