



WIPP WORKS IN WASHINGTON

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By Ann Sullivan

Does the name Alice Paul ring a bell? Just in case you don't know, Alice Paul led the effort to give women the right to vote. She raised money for the cause, led a group of White House protesters known as the Silent Sentinels, was imprisoned three times, force-fed raw eggs when she staged a hunger strike and kept the pressure on President Wilson to support ratification of the 19th amendment. You could conclude that she was a fierce advocate on behalf of women.



Alice Paul c. 1920 © Library of Congress

Today, we don't go on hunger strikes or stage protests to stop traffic but we do raise money and we do advocate for the advancement of women-owned businesses. In celebration of Women's History Month, we offer the following ideas on policy changes that will enhance the growth of women owned businesses.

Bring Parity to the Women's Federal Contracting Program. The U.S. government is the world's largest consumer—annually offering half a trillion dollars in contracting opportunities. You may be surprised to know that the goal—not mandate—for federal agencies to buy from women owned companies is 5%. And the government has never met it. The Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) procurement program, designed to make that happen, does not have parity with other contracting programs. There are some bills to fix this in Congress—though none have been a priority for the leadership. That seems to be what the suffragettes fought for—parity. So why are we fighting for this 100 years later?

Strengthen Women's Business Centers. These 106 centers counsel and train 137,000 entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs, creating 700 new businesses a year at a cost of \$122 per person who takes advantage of the services these centers offer. They outperform their goals by 18% and enjoy a high customer satisfaction rating. Congress should invest in funding more of these centers and assisting the

ones currently in existence. The centers are required to match these federal grants by raising matching funds from other sources but with \$14.5 million in federal money for the whole program, they are boot strapped. Women deserve better.

More Capital for Women-owned Businesses. Women entrepreneurs continue to struggle to access capital to start or grow a business. WIPP found that women make an average of two attempts to access capital, securing a loan only 60% of the time. Many turn to SBA backed loans instead, but watch out for the paperwork. Crowdfunding is another recent development but the Securities and Exchange Commission threatens to shut it down with compliance costs that are unsustainable.

Bring Women to the International Marketplace. March 8th was International Women's Day—a good reminder that we should be expanding US women's business presence abroad through exporting. Many women business owners limit themselves to selling domestically because it is too daunting. A cleaner, streamlined exporting process—focused on getting our products abroad—would help. The dividends, by the way, are significant: women-owned businesses that exported have, on average, more than 100 times the total annual receipts, five times as many employees, and more than triple the receipts per employee than those that only sell domestically. WIPP's export education platform, [ExportNOW](#), encourages more women entrepreneurs to engage the global marketplace and increase their success.

The [histories](#) of women like Alice Paul, and the countless other Suffragettes, serve as reminder of how hard we have fought to achieve the present - but more work needs to be done. To quote Alice Paul, "When you put your hand to the plow, you can't put it down until you get to the end of the row." WIPP's advocacy is our way of putting our hands to the plow.