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Women fought for decades before winning the right to vote in the U.S. with the ratification of the 19th Amendment Aug. 18, 1920.

They fought for the vote; DON'T WASTE IT

UPFRONT



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Krueger

cigarette cartons and taped to switches plucked from a tree in the backyard.

On the night before a big election, my parents

As a child, the perennial pageantry of politics was as familiar to me as Saturday cartoons and Captain Kangaroo.

My parents and grandparents always watched the national conventions on television, while I busied myself crafting pennants — blue donkeys, red elephants — cut from

spent what seemed like hours poring over a sample ballot unfurled across half the kitchen table as if they were plotting a complex route to buried treasure.

In my household, we took the matter of voting seriously.

It was an honor, a privilege, a right we had to do right by. It's what all Americans do, I was raised to believe.

It wasn't until I was nearly old enough to cast my first vote that I realized the pervasiveness and the privilege of politics in my home were not as

See **THEY** >> **A6**

They fought for a vote; we should never waste it

From PAGE A1

common in other homes across America. Many classmates had never watched a minute of a national convention. In their homes, politics was never discussed, voting never encouraged.

I still know adults who don't vote, don't care enough to learn about a candidate other than what they catch from social media or a campaign ad. Politics is too nasty, they say — and they aren't wrong about that. Their vote doesn't matter anyway — and they are very wrong about that.

It matters. While I was making donkey and elephant pen-nants, Rep. John Lewis was being beaten as he marched for the rights of Black Americans to vote. It mattered that much that he risked his life for the cause.

Others also fought for the right to vote. This week, we commemorated the 100th anniversary of women winning that right with the passage of the 19th Amendment.

So a quick history lesson: Thirty-six states were required for ratification. New Mexico became No. 32 on Feb. 19, 1920, pushed largely by Adelina Otero-Warren, the leader of the women's division of the state's Republican Party.

Newspapers swooned over the passage.

"Men can deceive each other much more easily than they can deceive women — the latter being providentially provided with the X-ray of intuitional perception," began an editorial published in the *Journal* that day. "Voting by women will improve humanity because it will compel men to seek and earn the approval of women."

On Aug. 18, 1920, Tennessee pushed the 19th Amendment over the finish line, but it wasn't until 10 days later that New Mexico joined in the festivities.

"At noon tomorrow, every whistle and bell in Albuquerque is expected to sound forth in celebration of the fact that 27,000,000 women in the United States have attained the dignity of equal suffrage with men," the *Evening Herald* wrote, adding that 30,000 of those women were



COURTESY OF SUSANA VILLALOBOS

Sarah Griggs, 96, was born the day New Mexico celebrated the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which won women in the United States the right to vote in 1920. She lived long enough to vote for the first major-party woman candidate for president in the 2016 election.

in New Mexico.

One of those women, though she wasn't a woman yet, was Sarita Maria Baca, born in the small ranching town of Magdalena the day of the bells and whistles.

I had the honor of meeting Baca four years ago on the eve of the November 2016 presidential election. She was 96, a bit hard of hearing, but still sharp and excited that she had lived long enough to cast her vote for Hillary Clinton, the first woman presidential candidate of a major party.

"If a woman can take care of a home and her children, why can't she take care of the country?" she told me then. "I believe a woman can do anything."

Griggs had always taken care of her home and her children. She also voted in every election and often volunteered as a poll worker.

On the morning we met, we were sure that Clinton was about to win. It felt historical.

That, of course, didn't happen.

Although Clinton had garnered more of the popular vote, she lost the Electoral College because she lost four crucial states — Florida, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan — by 1.2% or less of the vote.

Overall, only 58.1% of the country's voting-eligible population had bothered to vote.

On Jan. 27, 2017, a week after President Trump was inaugurated, Griggs passed away.

"I kept thinking she was so



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Three women cast their first votes in New York City after the ratification of the 19th Amendment on Aug. 18, 1920. "Calm about it," one woman said then.



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Suffragettes picket for the right to vote. Women fought for decades before winning that right in 1920.

upset and disliked him so much that she just decided to check out," her daughter told me.

Next week, Trump will be re-nominated during the Republican National Convention, gathered virtually this time in a divided country still largely under COVID-19 lockdown, and roiled by economic and racial turmoil.

This week, the Democratic National Convention is underway and there is history here with the nomination of Kamala Harris, a woman of color, as the vice presidential pick.

I wonder how many of you are watching. Maybe it's OK if you

don't. But it's not OK not to vote.

In New Mexico, the deadline to register to vote in the Nov. 3 presidential election is Oct. 6. You can already apply for an absentee ballot now through your county clerk's office. Early voting starts Oct. 17.

Although it almost seems cliché to say this, it's the most significant presidential election in our lifetime.

Then again, every election should be.

UpFront is a front-page news and opinion column. Reach Joline at 730-2793, jkrueger@abqjournal.com, Facebook or @jolinekg on Twitter.