

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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DOLE RECALLS KANSAS ELECTION OF FIRST WOMAN MAYOR IN U.S.

Washington, DC -- Kansas Senator Bob Dole in a speech on the Senate floor today recalled the election by Kansas voters of the first woman mayor in American history.

The following is a text of his remarks:

"Tomorrow marks the 100th anniversary of an historic occasion. It was on April 4, 1887, that the citizens of Argonia, Kansas, elected the first woman mayor in America.

"The woman was Susanna Salter, and her election came on the heels of the Kansas legislature's approval of voting rights for women. Her election also was the result of a prank by a group of men in Argonia who didn't like the idea of women being allowed to vote.

"To make a long story short, Mrs. Salter and a number of other members of the local Women's Christian Temperance Union had met to put together a slate of candidates sympathetic to their cause. Their slate had not a single woman on it.

"The men of Argonia, meanwhile, printed joke ballots that were identical to the W.C.T.U.'s slate, except that it listed Mrs. Salter for mayor. It was the men's assumption that Mrs. Salter wouldn't get more than 20 votes - or in other words the vote of every W.C.T.U. member in Argonia.

"The prank backfired, however, and Mrs. Salter won election as the first woman mayor in American history. And her tenure was no less remarkable than any man who held the job before her.

"Indeed, Mrs. Salter brought a great deal of pragmatism to her leadership role. For instance, when a New York reporter came to visit for a story he was writing about this historic mayor, Mrs. Salter wasn't about to let him make her the centerpiece of ridicule. So at the council meeting with the reporter present, Mayor Salter waited a moment or two and then adjourned the meeting. No meeting, no story, no ridicule.

"When Susan B. Anthony first met Mayor Salter, the introduction evoked the comment, 'Why, you look just like any other woman, don't you?' And two Kansas newspapers, the Manhattan Nationalist and the Salina Journal, both wrote that it was fortunate for women to be so ably represented by the 'capable' Mayor Salter.

"So it was, 100 years ago, that a 27-year old woman in Argonia, Kansas, was elected our nation's first woman mayor. Even though history was made because of what started out to be a prank, the business of Argonia went on and the future for women in politics took another step forward.