

As the Legislative Women’s Caucus of New York State celebrates Women’s History Month, Senator Toby Stavisky honors the life and legacy of Doctor Mabel Ping-Hua Lee

As America celebrates the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment, granting women the right to vote, it is important to remember that the fight for equal rights is still far from over for many people living in this country.

“Doctor Mabel Ping-Hua Lee was a scholar, a visionary, and a relentless advocate for Women’s Rights,” explains Senator Stavisky. “As a Chinese immigrant, she chose to fight for what she believed in at a time when sexism, racism, and xenophobia made that fight too much for most to endure.”

Mabel was just 16 years old when she rode amongst the leaders of a massive parade in New York, calling for the right to vote. Although New York was three years ahead of the country when it began counting women’s votes in 1917, the Chinese Exclusion Act meant Chinese immigrants, both male and female, would not be allowed to cast their ballots for more than another quarter century.

“It is appropriate that we celebrate the one hundred year anniversary of the 19th amendment,” says Senator Stavisky. “But, it is vitally important that we do not try and rewrite history. Despite standing on the front lines with fellow suffragists, Mabel and other Chinese immigrants were denied their right to vote for additional decades. Mabel did not let herself be overcome by frustration. She continued to break down barriers through academic achievement, community organization and leadership. Despite being denied American citizenship, Mabel proved to be a shining embodiment of the American Spirit.”

Back in 1913, when she was just a teenager, Mabel wrote that true feminism “is nothing more than the extension of democracy or social justice and equality of opportunities to women.” More than a century later, the Legislative Women’s Caucus of New York State remains committed to ensuring that that equality remains, and those opportunities continue to grow. Senator Stavisky is proud to serve as treasurer of the caucus.

If you’d like to learn more about Dr. Ping-Hua Lee, and other brave female pioneers, their stories will be on display throughout the month of March on the first floor of the Legislative Office Building, starting on Monday, March 2nd.