

WOMEN IN CONGRESS



Jeannette Rankin of Montana
First Woman to Serve in Congress
Collection of U.S. House of Representatives

“We will no longer wait for political power to be shared with us, we will take it.”

— Representative Cardiss Collins

Four years after Jeannette Rankin was elected to the House of Representatives in 1916, women won the right to vote nationally, with the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. At times, change for women in Congress has been almost imperceptible, as exemplified by the subtle shift in women’s committee assignments after World War II. At other times, change has been bold and dramatic, as evidenced by the 1992 “Year of the Woman” elections. Great triumphs and historic firsts highlight women’s initial foray into national political office.

FAST FACTS

- **First woman elected to the House of Representatives**
Jeannette Rankin of Montana was elected to the House of Representatives in 1916 and sworn into Congress in 1917.
- **First woman to serve in the Senate**
Rebecca Felton of Georgia was appointed to the Senate in 1922.

- **First woman elected to the Senate**
Hattie Caraway of Arkansas was elected to the Senate in 1931.
- **First Asian-American woman elected to Congress**
Patsy Mink of Hawaii was elected to the House of Representatives in 1964.
- **First African-American woman elected to Congress**
Shirley Chisholm of New York was elected to the House of Representatives in 1968.
- **First Hispanic woman elected to Congress**
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida was elected to the House of Representatives in 1989.
- **First woman to preside over the House of the Representatives**
Alice Robertson of Oklahoma was the first woman to preside over the House Chamber in 1922.
- **First woman to preside over the Senate**
Hattie Caraway of Arkansas was the first woman to preside over the Senate Chamber in 1943.
- **First woman to chair a committee in the House of Representatives**
Mae Ella Nolan of California was the first woman to chair a House committee in 1923.
- **First woman to chair a committee in the Senate**
Hattie Caraway of Arkansas was the first woman to chair a Senate committee in 1933.
- **First woman elected to party leadership in Congress**
Chase Going Woodhouse of Connecticut was the first woman to be elected to a party leadership position in 1949.
- **First woman Speaker of the House of Representatives**
Nancy Pelosi of California was the first woman elected Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2007.
- **Most committees chaired by a woman Member of Congress**
Mary Norton holds the distinction of the most committees chaired by a woman (four).
- **Longest congressional tenure for a woman Member of Congress**
On March 17, 2012, Barbara Mikulski of Maryland became the longest serving woman in the history of Congress. First elected to the House in 1976, she won election to the Senate a decade later in 1986.
- **Longest congressional tenure for a woman House Member**
Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts has the longest congressional tenure of any woman House Member—35 years.
- **State with the most women Members of Congress**
Historically, California has had the most women Members in Congress.

TEACHING TIPS

1. Have students use *Women in Congress* to create a timeline of important dates in the history of women who have served in Congress.
2. Ask students to write a hypothetical diary or journal entry from Jeannette Rankin shortly after her first election to Congress in 1916. Have students use Representative Rankin's profile in *Women in Congress* for background research. Compose a list of topics with students that could be included in the entry (potential benefits and drawbacks of being the first and only woman in Congress.) Then have students write another journal entry from Representative Rankin after she was elected to a second term in the House in which they compare and contrast the two experiences.
3. Begin a class discussion with Representative Mary Norton's quote, "*I'm no lady; I'm a Member of Congress.*" Ask students to think about the meaning of the quote, the possible context, and how the statement may have been related to the experience of the early women who served in Congress. Have students use *Women in Congress* to research the lives of the women pioneers who served in Congress.