

Women in U.S. Politics: Democratic Women Firsts

HISTORY: *Ironically, women could be elected to public office before they were granted the right to vote. After a 72 year struggle, on August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, and one-half of the citizens of the United States were at last enfranchised. Though neither party originally supported the suffragists, the Democratic Party is proud that we have historically stood up for the rights of women, children and families.*

PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEE: *With the full backing, and sometimes prodding, of his wife Eleanor, Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first U.S. President to highlight women and their issues. President Clinton has continued this Democratic tradition and made women full partners in government.*

- Franklin Roosevelt was the first President to appoint a woman to his cabinet. In 1933, Frances Perkins became the Secretary of Labor. He was also the first President to appoint an African-American woman. In 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of the National Council of Negro Women, was named head of the Office of Minority Affairs.
- Under the leadership of President Clinton, women make up 42% of appointments. Many of them are the first women to hold their positions, including Attorney General Janet Reno, Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary, who is also the first African-American to serve in that position, National Economic Advisor Laura D'Andrea Tyson, and Deputy Chief of Staff Evelyn Lieberman.
- President Clinton nominated 45 women out of a total 141 nominees to the federal bench.

PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL: *The Democratic Party is the only major party to have a woman as Vice Presidential candidate and nominee.*

- In 1924 Democrat Lena Jones Springs became the first woman to have her name placed in nomination as the vice presidential candidate of a major political party. She was nominated from her home state, South Carolina, at the Democratic Convention in New York City.
- In 1984, the Democratic Party became the first major political party to nominate a woman for Vice President. Geraldine Ferraro ran on the Democratic ticket with Walter Mondale.

GUBERNATORIAL: *The first seven women who served as governors were all Democrats. To date, of the 13 women who have served as governors, 11 have been Democrats.*

- In 1925, Democrat Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming became the first woman governor in the country. Appointed to fill her deceased husband's term, she served for two years, and in 1928 was named a U.S. vice presidential candidate at the Democratic National Convention.
- In 1974, Democrat Ella Grasso of Connecticut became the first woman governor elected in her own right. She was re-elected in 1978.

Note: *We note with pride that Democratic women became the first woman Governor, Senator, Chairwoman of a Congressional Committee, cabinet member, vice presidential nominee, state legislator, and chair of a major political party.*

CONGRESSIONAL: *Of the total 172 women who have served in the U.S. Congress, almost two-thirds, or 110, have been Democrats. Nineteen have been women of color, and 17 Democrats. Today, 64% of women serving in the 104th Congress are Democrats.*

- The first woman to serve in the U.S. Senate was Democrat Rebecca Latimer Felton of Georgia. Appointed in 1922, she served one day. In 1932, Democrat Hattie W. Caraway of Arkansas became the first woman elected to serve a full term in the Senate. Originally appointed in 1931 to fulfill her deceased husband's term, Caraway was then re-elected in both 1932 and 1938. In 1943, Caraway became the first woman to preside over the U.S. Senate. She served as president pro tempore for the first session of the 78th Congress.
- The first woman to head a Congressional committee was Mary Teresa Hopkins Norton. A Democrat from New Jersey, she chaired the D.C. Affairs Committee from 1931 - 1937, when she became chair of the House Committee on Labor.
- In 1965, Democrat Patsy Mink of Hawaii became the first woman of color and the first Asian-Pacific woman elected to Congress. She served until 1977 and was re-elected in a special election in 1990.
- In 1968, Democrat Shirley Chisholm of New York, became the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1972, she once again made history becoming the first African-American -- male or female -- to run for President. Chisholm also founded the National Political Congress of Black Women.
- In 1992, Democrat Carol Mosley-Braun became the first African-American woman to win a major party Senate nomination and to be elected to the U.S. Senate. In the same year, Lucille Roybal-Allard of California and Nydia Velazquez of New York become the first Democratic Latinas to serve in Congress.

PARTY: *In 1913, the Democratic Party required each state have a National Committeewoman and in 1980, the Party voted to make half of the DNC members and half of the Convention Delegates female.*

- In 1900, Elizabeth Cohen of Utah became the first woman delegate to a Democratic National Convention. She delivered a seconding speech for the nomination of presidential candidate William Jennings Bryant in Kansas City, MO.
- The Democratic Party became the first major political party to elect a woman as its Chair. Jean Westwood was elected to that post in 1972, at the Democratic National Convention meeting in Miami Beach, Florida.
- In 1976, Barbara Jordan became the first Democratic woman to give a co-key note address.

OTHER ELECTED: *Democrats are pleased of other firsts for Democratic women.*

- In 1896, Democrat Martha Hughes Cannon of Utah became the first woman ever elected to a state legislature. Two years later she was re-elected to the State Senate. Today, 55% of all women state legislators are Democrats.
- A Democratic governor appointed the first woman to serve as state Attorney General. Anne Alpern of Pennsylvania was appointed to the post in 1959. Today, a record 84 women hold statewide elective office. Unfortunately, while women overall made significant gains in the '94 elections, Democrats lost 4 seats. Of the total 84 women, 36 are Democrats and 45 are Republican.