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March 2009: Women in Congress

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Florence Kahn of California (facing camera) and Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts in early 1927, in Congress’s first cloakroom for women Members. A House Page (far left) delivers a book to Kahn.

**Facts**

- A total of 246 women (158 Democrats and 88 Republicans) have served in the U.S. Congress.
- Of these women, 211 have served in the House, 28 in the Senate, and 7 in both houses.
- Of the 218 women who have served in the House:
  - 38 were elected to fill vacancies caused by the death of their husbands
  - 16 of the 38 were elected to additional terms
  - 25 women were elected to fill other vacancies

Edith Nourse Rogers / United States Representative, 1925–1960 / Republican from Massachusetts served in the House for 35 years and holds the record for length of service by a woman in Congress.
Of the 35 women who have served in the Senate:

- 13 were first appointed to fill unexpired terms
- 5 were first elected to fill unexpired terms
- 9 were chosen to fill vacancies caused by the death of their husbands
- 1 to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of her father
- Of these 10, three were subsequently elected to additional terms
- A total of 27 African American women have served in Congress (one in the Senate, 26 in the House)
- 7 Hispanic women have been elected to the House; all are serving in the 110th Congress
- 4 Asian American women have served in the House.
Elizabeth Hawley Gasque, the first woman U.S. Representative from South Carolina, filled a vacancy caused by the death of her husband, U.S. Representative Allard H. Gasque in 1938.

Clara G. McMillan also filled a vacancy caused by the death of her husband, Representative Thomas McMillan. South Carolina Democratic Party leaders chose her to run in the special election to fill her husband's coastal Carolina seat. She won election to the House with 79 percent of the vote.

Willa Fulmer worked as an aide to her husband, Congressman Hampton P. Fulmer, in the early 1930s. She earned $266 dollars per month, which put her in the upper salary bracket for Capitol Hill staff at the time. In 1944, she filled her husband's seat after his death, long enough for party officials to successfully insert long-term successor, John J. Riley. Congress adjourned a month after she took her seat.
Corinne Riley won a special election to fill the last nine months of the term of her late husband, John J. Riley. She became the fourth widow to represent South Carolina. During her brief eight-month term, Riley supported authorizing the Federal Communications Commission to require that television sets be equipped with high-frequency channels, a proposal she hoped would benefit an educational television system operating in her district. “We in South Carolina have worked long and hard to preserve this valuable resource which we call our VHF channel in Columbia,” Riley noted in her brief and only floor speech as a Member.

Her father, Olin Johnston, served in the state house of representatives before being elected governor in 1935. He resigned in his second term after winning election to the U.S. Senate. Patterson declared her candidacy for a South Carolina U.S. House seat in 1986, when four-term Republican Representative Carroll A. Campbell, Jr., declined re-nomination in order to run for governor. She served three terms and was defeated by Bob Inglis in 1992.


For Additional Information about Women in Congress and Women’s History Month see the following:

**Web sites**

Women In Congress / Office of the Clerk http://womenincongress.house.gov/
Includes historical essays, member profiles, and educational resources.

Women’s History Month / Government Wide Portal http://womenshistorymonth.gov/

Women’s History Month / Library of Congress http://www.loc.gov/topics/womenshistory/;

Women’s History Month / National Park Service http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/feature/wom/


Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/
The leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women’s political participation.

In Dacus Library

Y 1.1/2:SERIAL 14903 U.S. Document and Internet

Against the tide: one woman's political struggle / Harriet Keyserling
F275.42.K49 .A3  1998 (Special Collections – Library Use Only)

Congressional women: their recruitment, treatment, and behavior / Irwin N. Gertzog
JK1319 .G47  1984 General Collection

When women lead: integrative leadership in State legislatures / Cindy Simon Rosenthal
HQ1236.5.U6 .R67  1998 General Collection

How women legislate / Sue Thomas
HQ1236.5.U6 T493  1994
The impact of women in congress / Debra L. Dodson  
HQ1236.5.U6 .D63 2006 General Collection

Strangers In The Senate : Politics And The New Revolution Of Women In America / Boxer, Barbara, c1994  
HQ1391.U5 B69 1994 General Collection

A woman's place : the freshmen women who changed the face of Congress / Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky ;  
with Barbara Feinman ; foreword by Barbara Jordan  
E885 .M367 1994 General Collection

Women in Congress, by Annabel Paxton  
JK1030.A2 .P3 General Collection

Women on the Hill : challenging the culture of Congress / Clara Bingham  
JK1059 103rd .B55 1997 General Collection

Women, partisanship, and the Congress / Jocelyn Jones Evans  
HQ1391.U5 .J65 2005 General Collection

Women transforming Congress / edited by Cindy Simon Rosenthal  
HQ1236.5.U6 .W6675 2002 General Collection

➢ For individual biographies, search the Dacus Online Catalog for  
Women Legislators United States Biography

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on the second floor of Dacus Library.

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