

Jeannette Rankin

1880–1973



WHY SHE MADE HISTORY A feminist, pacifist, and crusader for electoral reform, Jeannette Rankin was the first woman member of Congress. She opposed entry of the United States into World War I, and was the only legislator to vote against entering World War II. This unpopular stand ultimately cost Rankin her political career.



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As you read the biography below, think about the impact Rankin made over the years. What will she be remembered for most?

Born in 1880 and raised near Missoula, Montana, Jeannette Rankin was the oldest daughter of a schoolteacher mother and an entrepreneur father. She graduated from the University of Montana in 1902 and later attended the New York School of Philanthropy. She became a social worker and an active supporter of the women's suffrage movement.

In 1914 Jeannette Rankin led a successful drive for women's voting rights in her native state of Montana. Two years later, running in the Republican Party, she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. This was four years before women won the right to vote nationwide.

During her first term in Congress, Rankin helped draft a constitutional amendment to give women the right to vote. She led the debate on the issue, but it was later defeated in the Senate and not passed until 1919.

As a member of the House of Representatives, she actively worked on legislation that benefited women. She introduced legislation to provide funding for health clinics and create programs that would reduce the infant mortality rate.

Rankin was an outspoken isolationist and advocate for peace. She was one of only 49 members of Congress who opposed the United States' entry into World War I. Rankin's anti-war stand ultimately cost her the Republican Senate nomination in 1918.

After the horrors of World War I, the United States refused involvement in foreign wars. As World War II began, the nation remained neutral. In 1940 Rankin won election to the House running on an anti-war platform.

After Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, however, the nation's isolationist position suddenly changed. Yet Rankin again created uproar when she became the only legislator to vote against entering the war. She

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Biography

was the lone House member to vote against both wars, thus ending her political career.

Following her years as a legislator, Rankin remained active in social reform and civic affairs. She worked with the National Consumers League and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Later she was a strong opponent of the Vietnam War. At age 87, she led 5,000 women on a march to Capitol Hill to protest U.S. involvement in the war. She remained an active feminist and pacifist until her death at age 93.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Analysis** How did Jeannette Rankin's political career come to an end?

2. **Expressing and Supporting a Point of View** What do you think was Jeannette Rankin's greatest accomplishment? Provide reasons or examples to support your answer.

ACTIVITY

Write a dialogue between two citizens who had both voted for Jeannette Rankin, one an isolationist and the other an interventionist. What would the two agree on and what would they disagree on?