# *Onto the National Stage*

## CONGRESSWOMEN IN AN AGE OF CRISES, 1935–1954

Thirty-six women entered Congress between 1935 and 1954, a tumultuous two decades that encompassed the Great Depression, World War II, and the start of the Cold War. Women participated in America's survival, recovery, and ascent to world power in important and unprecedented ways; they became shapers of the welfare state, workers during wartime, and members of the military. During this time the nation's capital took on increasing importance in the everyday lives of average Americans. The Great Depression and the specter of global war transformed the role of the federal government, making it a provider and protector. Like their male counterparts, women in Congress legislated to provide economic relief to their constituents, debated the merits of government intervention to cure the economy, argued about America's role in world affairs, and grappled with challenges and opportunities during wartime.

Distinct trends persisted from the pioneer generation of women in Congress. Second-generation women still made up only a small fraction of the total congressional membership. At their peak, 15 women served in the 83rd Congress (1953–1955)—about 2.8 percent. These numbers afforded women scant leverage to pursue a unified agenda, though few seemed inclined to champion what would later be called "women's issues." The widow-familial succession remained for women a primary route to political office.

Subtle changes, however, slowly advanced women's status on Capitol Hill. By and large, women elected to Congress between 1935 and 1954 had more experience as politicians or as party officials than did their predecessors. In the postwar era,


*Congresswoman Nan Honeyman of Oregon joins members of the House Naval Affairs Committee during an inspection tour of the Naval Air Station at Seattle, Washington. Honeyman, an ally of the Franklin Roosevelt administration, had advocated the construction of a major naval facility along the Columbia River in Oregon.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

they were appointed more often to influential committees, including those with jurisdiction over military affairs, the judiciary, and agriculture. Also, several women emerged as national figures and were prominently featured as spokespersons by their parties; this was a significant break from tradition.

## Change and Continuity: *Political Experience, Committee Assignments, and Familial Connections*

Compared with the pioneer generation, the women Members elected during this period had far more political experience. Half the women in the second generation (18) had served as public officeholders or as party officials. Six served in state legislatures or other statewide offices. Chase Woodhouse of Connecticut served two terms as a popular secretary of state. Four women held local political office, and 11 served as party officials at the state and national levels. The level of education of this group of Congresswomen mirrored that of the pioneer generation; two-thirds (24 of 36) had received some kind of postsecondary education. Political experience made women more attractive as candidates for national office. In 1934, Caroline O'Day of New York told campaign crowds that the "political apprenticeship" of women had come to an end. With 31 women running for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1934—and a record 38 in 1936 (12 of them nominated by the major parties)—O'Day's contention seemed validated.[1]

The median age at which women were elected to Congress (49 years) was slightly lower. This figure is important largely because it determines a Member's ability to accrue the seniority requisite for leadership positions. By comparison, the average age of all House Members entering Congress from 1931 to 1950 was 45 years; nearly 30 percent of the men were 39 or younger. The median age at retirement during this era ranged from 53 to 57 years.[2] Three women, all during World War II, were elected in their 30s—Winifred Stanley of New York, 33, the youngest woman elected to Congress to that date; Katharine Byron of Maryland, 37; and Clare Boothe Luce of Connecticut, 39. The oldest woman elected to Congress during this period was 66-year-old Hazel Abel of Nebraska, a distinguished state official who served a brief Senate term in 1954.

The Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, through the direct and indirect efforts of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, helped boost the number of Democratic women in Congress. Many of the women who rose in the 1930s to prominent positions in the federal government had known the First Lady since the days when she worked in Greenwich Village settlement houses and registered women voters across New York state.[3] In making these appointments, President Roosevelt broke with precedent; Frances Perkins was the first woman to serve in the President's Cabinet (Labor Secretary), former House Member Ruth Bryan Owen was the first woman to serve as U.S. Ambassador (to Sweden), and Florence Allen was the first woman judge on the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Connections to Eleanor Roosevelt proved to be influential in several Congresswomen's careers. Caroline O'Day, for example, was among Eleanor Roosevelt's confidantes. The pair had traversed New York in the 1920s, organizing women voters and working on Governor Al Smith's 1928 presidential campaign. In the 1934 midterm elections, Roosevelt made campaign appearances on O'Day's behalf, becoming the first First Lady to stump for a candidate. O'Day's campaign was successful, and she remained in Congress for nearly a decade. Congresswoman Nan Wood Honeyman of Oregon, an unflagging supporter of FDR, had known Eleanor Roosevelt since their days at finishing school in New York City. Helen Gahagan Douglas of California conferred often with the First Lady. Eleanor Roosevelt campaigned for successful Democrats Katharine Byron of Maryland and Chase Woodhouse, among others, and she inspired young women to consider political life. Coya Knutson of Minnesota recalled that a June 1942 radio address by Eleanor Roosevelt prodded her to become active in civic affairs. "It was as if the sun burned into me that day," Knutson said.[4]

Impressive political résumés helped more women secure influential committee assignments, particularly during and after the Second World War, when women were assigned to prominent panels such as Agriculture, Armed Services, Naval Affairs, Public Works, Rivers and Harbors, Merchant Marine and Fisheries, Judiciary, and Interior and Insular Affairs. Five women were assigned to the Foreign Affairs Committee, and four served on the Banking and Currency Committee during this era. Other assignments reinforced patterns set during the first generation of women in Congress, when women legislated on second- or third-tier panels like Education, Veterans' Affairs, Post Office and Civil Service, and Government Operations. Many of these committees dealt with issues that had long been considered part of a woman's sphere. Women served on more than 30 House committees during this era. In the Senate, where only two women served an entire term or longer, women won

appointments to roughly 20 committees.[5] A trailblazer, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine was a member of the powerful Appropriations and Armed Services panels. Four women chaired six congressional committees during the period from 1935 to 1954: Representative Mary Norton of New Jersey—District of Columbia (1935–1937), Labor (1937–1947), Memorials (1941–1943), and House Administration (1949–1951); Representative O'Day— Election of the President, Vice President and Representatives in Congress (1937–1943); Representative Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts—Veterans' Affairs (1947–1949 and 1953–1955); and Senator Hattie Caraway of Arkansas— Enrolled Bills (1933–1945).

House leaders, particularly Speakers Joe Martin of Massachusetts and Sam Rayburn of Texas, promoted women to key positions. As Republican Minority Leader in 1943, Martin secured seats for Margaret Chase Smith and Clare Boothe Luce on Naval Affairs and Military Affairs, respectively, to recognize women's contributions to the war effort and to bring "a woman's viewpoint" to traditionally all-male committees.[6] Rayburn steered several women onto important committees, including Chase Woodhouse, with whom he had a frank and warm relationship. "You get the same pay as we do, don't you?" Rayburn once asked her. "Yes, sir, for a change," Woodhouse replied. "And you worked three times as hard to get here as any of us did," he said.[7] Speaker Rayburn, who shared Woodhouse's disdain for fundraising and admired her efforts to keep lobbyists at arm's length, confided to her, "If I had twenty-four like you, I'd be happy."[8] Later in his Speakership, Rayburn helped persuade reluctant committee chairmen to accept Coya Knutson and Martha Griffiths of Michigan as members of powerful panels.

*With many men away on overseas military duty during World War II, American women played an increasingly important role in the national economy during the war. Some, like this woman, filled nontraditional roles. She is working as a riveter on an aircraft assembly line.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The widow's mandate, or familial connection, remained prevalent in the second generation of women in Congress. Fourteen of the 36 women who were elected or appointed directly succeeded their husbands. Another woman, Leonor Sullivan of Missouri, won election in 1952 to the St. Louis district served by her late husband for much of the 1940s. Dixie Graves of Alabama was appointed to the U.S. Senate in 1937 by her husband, Governor Bibb Graves. In all, 44 percent of the women from this generation came to Congress through familial connections. The persistence of this trend explains another statistic—nearly half the women elected or appointed in this era (17) served one term or less. This was particularly true of southern widows like Willa Fulmer of South Carolina, Florence Gibbs of Georgia, Elizabeth Gasque of South Carolina, Rose Long of Louisiana, and Clara McMillan of South Carolina, who were chosen by party leaders as temporary placeholders until a permanent male successor could be found. For the first time in both chambers, a woman succeeded a woman; Representative Stanley succeeded retiring Congresswoman O'Day in a New York At-Large seat in 1943, and Hazel Abel was elected Senator from Nebraska in 1954, succeeding Republican appointee Eva Bowring.

## Legislative Interests and Achievements:

### *Ongoing Great Depression*

Between 1933 and 1938, Congress passed the New Deal, a sweeping package of regulatory and economic recovery policies to alleviate the effects of the Great Depression. These changes affected virtually every facet of American life—transportation, banking, stock market regulation, agricultural practices, labor

practices (including the minimum wage, the maximum length of the workday, and collective bargaining), public works, and even the arts. Many of President Franklin Roosevelt's proposals were approved by Congress in the first 100 days of his term, including the Emergency Banking Relief Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Recovery Act.

A "second" New Deal began in 1935, as the focus on shoring up the economy shifted to providing a long-term economic safety net for all Americans. In 1935, congressional passage of the Social Security Act created unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, and public assistance programs such as Aid to Families of Dependent Children.[9] These programs helped the American family and were particularly critical to women, who often silently bore the brunt of the Great Depression. Unmarried women, single mothers, and wives in need of jobs to support their families were disadvantaged not only by the scarcity of employment but also by the widespread belief that a woman's place was at home tending to the family.[10] As chair of the Labor Committee, starting in 1937, Representative Mary Norton shaped late New Deal legislation, particularly the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, which she personally shepherded through committee and onto the House Floor for a vote. The act provided for a 40-hour workweek, outlawed child labor, and set a minimum wage of 25 cents per hour. Norton later helped establish a permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee to prevent racial and gender discrimination in hiring and helped secure pensions for elective and executive offices by expanding the retirement system for federal employees.

After his overwhelming re-election victory in 1936, President Roosevelt hatched an aggressive legislative plan to place as many as six additional Justices on the Supreme Court. Made public in February 1937, FDR's proposal was a thinly disguised effort to add Justices favoring his economic policies to the high court, which had recently nullified key New Deal programs such as the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Public controversy ensued, and Congress refused to restructure the judiciary.[11] The court-packing episode is widely viewed as the beginning of the end of the New Deal reforms, as southern Democrats aligned with Republicans to block the administration's initiatives at home. The First Lady and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes stumped in Congresswoman Honeyman's Portland district during her 1938 re-election campaign, which she lost largely because of her unflagging support for FDR. During the next three elections, Republican women critics of the New Deal won election to Congress—Jessie Sumner of Illinois (1938), Frances Bolton of Ohio (1940), Smith (1940), Luce (1942), and Stanley (1942).


*A World War II recruiting poster for the Women's Army Corp (WAC). Legislation authored by Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers created the WAC shortly after America entered World War II. In the Army and other military branches, women took on important assignments, among them roles as support staff, nurses, and pilots.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

### *Intervention Versus Isolation*

By the late 1930s, with European countries arming for war and tensions increasing due to Japanese expansion in the Pacific, Congress shifted its focus to preparing for war and to America's role in world affairs. In the years after World War I, a strong isolationist movement spearheaded by Members of Congress from midwestern states gripped the country. The isolationists believed that the Woodrow Wilson administration's pro-Allied slant and big business interests had drawn the United States into World War I, and they were committed to avoiding another world war. From 1935 to 1937, Congress passed a series of neutrality acts


*Willa L. Fulmer of South Carolina, wife of the late Congressman Hampton P. Fulmer, stands next to Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn for a photo commemorating her swearing-in as a Representative in November 1944. Fulmer, like many other widows elected to Congress, served only as a temporary placeholder for her party, filling out the brief remainder of her husband's term.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

that incrementally banned arms trade with belligerent countries, the extension of credit to warring countries, travel on belligerent ships, and the arming of American merchant ships. The final bill, the Neutrality Act of 1937, provided that at the President's discretion, belligerent countries could purchase nonembargoed goods on a "cash-and-carry" basis, that is, the goods would be paid for when they were purchased and transported on the belligerent country's own vessels.

Opposition to American intervention in a potential world conflict centered in the late 1930s around two groups, pacifists and isolationists. In addition to monitoring the growing fascist threat in Europe and Asia, the FDR administration was waging a protracted battle at home with a core group of isolationists in Congress who resisted increasing pressure to provide economic and military support for America's traditional partners in the Atlantic Alliance.[12] Jessie Sumner epitomized the isolationist perspective. Elected to the first of four terms in 1938, Sumner was especially critical of American foreign policy in the months immediately after war broke out in Europe in September 1939. She lashed out at the Roosevelt administration for what she viewed as a pro-British bias, insisting, "our historical experience warns us that we cannot safely become an arsenal for belligerents."[13]

Caroline O'Day, a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in the 1920s, was the most significant female voice for pacifism in the late 1930s. In 1939, after Germany invaded Poland, beginning the Second World War, O'Day opposed the amendment of earlier neutrality acts that prohibited selling arms or extending credit to belligerent nations. Joining isolationists like Sumner, she also voted against the 1940 Selective Service Act, the nation's first peace-time draft, saying, "As mothers whose sons would be obliged to go to war; as women who, with the children, would remain at home to be the victims of air raids and bombing of cities, we should have the right to vote against it, and express our desire for peace."[14] However, O'Day ultimately supported the war effort when she learned about the nature of the Nazi atrocities in Europe. "We as individuals and as a nation must consent to play our proper role in world affairs," said O'Day, who was at heart, more an internationalist than an isolationist.[15]

Congress eventually voted to repeal the arms embargo against countries fighting Nazi Germany and, for the first time, allowed American merchant ships to convoy arms and equipment to Great Britain. The majority of the women in Congress supported the Roosevelt administration's foreign policy. Clara McMillan of South Carolina, a mother of five young sons, reasoned that preparing for America's seemingly imminent entry into the war would best preserve her sons' safety. Congress-woman Rogers broke with fellow Republicans to vote against the neutrality acts and for the 1940 Selective Service Act, citing the danger posed by Adolf Hitler's Germany. The Selective Service Bill passed Congress and was extended by a narrow margin a year later. Between 1940 and 1947, more than 10 million conscripts served in the U.S. military.

Japan's surprise attack against the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, unified the country for war. More than 2,400 persons were killed, and 19 U.S. Navy ships were sunk or disabled. An anticlimactic but oft-celebrated event in the pacifist crusade occurred the next day, when Jeannette Rankin of Montana cast the lone vote against declaring war on Japan. During her previous term, in 1917, Rankin had voted against U.S. entry into World War

I. A devoted pacifist, she served in a variety of peace organizations before being re-elected to Congress in 1940. Rankin's vote against war on Japan effectively ended her House career. "When in a hundred years from now, courage, sheer courage based upon moral indignation is celebrated in this country," editor William Allen White observed, "the name of Jeannette Rankin, who stood firm in folly for her faith, will be written in monumental bronze, not for what she did but for the way she did it."[16]

*Expanding Women's Responsibilities in Wartime*

Once the nation was committed to war, women in Congress legislated to make available unprecedented opportunities for women as members and supporters of the U.S. armed services. Congresswoman Rogers authored the May 1942 Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) Act, which created up to 150,000 noncombat positions (primarily in nursing) for women in the U.S. Army. Nearly 350,000 women eventually served as WAACs and in similar groups in other branches of the military, including the navy (WAVES), the coast guard (SPAR), and the marines (MCWR). Another 1,000 women became Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs).[17] Representative Rogers also shaped the landmark Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights), which authorized the Veterans' Administration to help servicemen adjust to civilian life by providing financial aid for school and job training, employment programs, federal housing loans, and medical care. Frances Bolton, a moderate isolationist before the war, soon embraced military preparedness. She authored the Bolton Act of 1943, creating the U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps, which was responsible for training nearly 125,000 women as military nurses. Bolton later toured Europe to observe these women at work in field hospitals. After the war, she advocated a greater role for women in the military and even suggested they be made eligible for future drafts. Margaret Chase Smith also strongly supported women's participation in the

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—WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE


*Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas of California addresses the 1945 World Youth Rally in New York City. Douglas, elected in the fall of 1944, was a staunch internationalist and an advocate for the creation of the United Nations Organization.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

military. Her landmark Women's Armed Forces Integration Act, passed in 1948, ensured the permanent inclusion of women in the military.

The war provided new opportunities for some groups of American women. By 1942, so many men had been taken out of the economy to fill the military ranks that women were recruited to make up for the "manpower" shortage. The War Manpower Commission created an enduring image of the era with its "Rosie the Riveter" campaign, which aimed to bring women—single and married—into the workforce. Posters of Rosie's muscular, can-do image as a production line worker at an armaments plant projected an unconventional image of women as a source of physical strength. Between 1941 and 1945, some 6 million new women entered the workforce—swelling their ranks to about 19 million and a then-all-time high of 36 percent of the U.S. workforce.[18]

Labor Committee Chairwoman Mary T. Norton urged women not to retreat into the home when the men returned from war. "This is the time for women everywhere to prove that they appreciate the responsibility they have been given," Norton said at the war's end. "Women can't be Sitting-Room Sarahs or Kitchen Katies. They have homes to keep up, food to prepare, families to clothe . . . but they have their world to make. . . . American women today stand on the threshold of a glorious future . . . .They can grasp it . . . or they can let it slide." Norton spoke passionately about the pressure on women from industry and labor unions to vacate jobs for GIs seeking employment: "Women are going to be pushed into a corner, and very soon at that." It would be, she predicted, a "heartbreaking" setback.[19]


*Two women work at a clip spring and body assembly line for .30 caliber cartridges at an arsenal in Pennsylvania during World War II. Women filled numerous jobs on the wartime home front that were essential to equipping troops deployed overseas.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE FDR LIBRARY/ NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

### *Shaping the Postwar Peace*

Women Members were involved not only in preparing for and waging war, but also in creating the framework for a lasting peace. In 1944, women rode a wave of internationalist sentiment to Congress, partially signaling the triumph of FDR's foreign policy over the prewar isolationists. Three prominent internationalists—Emily Taft Douglas of Illinois, Chase Going Woodhouse, and Helen Gahagan Douglas—were elected to the House of Representatives. Emily Douglas was a forceful and articulate advocate for the implementation of the Dumbarton Oaks accords that created a postwar United Nations (UN). From her seat on the Banking and Currency Committee, Woodhouse helped execute the Bretton Woods Agreements, which created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Helen Douglas, a former Hollywood actress, enthusiastically endorsed postwar U.S. reconstruction aid to Europe and supported the creation of the Atomic Energy Commission to ensure that civilians, as well as the military, would have some control over atomic technology. At the opposite end of the spectrum, isolationist Jessie Sumner retired from the House in 1947, citing her frustration with the President's power to set an expansive global U.S. foreign policy.

### *Civil Rights*

The social and economic dislocation that resulted from the Second World War reopened a long-running debate about civil rights in America.[20] Reformers believed that the African-American contributions to the war effort underscored the moral imperative of repealing segregationist laws in the United States. Frances Bolton challenged her colleagues on this point during a debate on outlawing the

poll tax used to disenfranchise African Americans:[21] "Even at painful cost, America must be true to her own vision, to her own soul, to her responsibility to tomorrow's world. We talk so much of democracy, of freedom. Can we have either so long as great sections of our land withhold freedom?" Congresswomen took public and, often, conflicting positions on civil rights. In the late 1930s, Senator Dixie Bibb Graves received national press attention as an opponent of federal action against lynching; she insisted that the practice was in decline and that federal statute would intrude on states' rights. Her colleague Hattie Caraway agreed and later opposed efforts to outlaw poll taxes. Representative O'Day supported antilynching laws. Representative Helen Mankin of Georgia, elected to an abbreviated term in 1946, was an outspoken opponent of the politics of Governor Eugene Talmadge and of Jim Crow laws that disenfranchised southern blacks. Widely popular with the black community in her Atlanta-based district, Mankin was unseated in the fall 1946 elections, when Talmadge officials altered the rules for the Democratic primary. Marguerite Church of Illinois and Helen Douglas challenged segregationist dining policies in the Capitol. At the very end of the period, Iris Blitch of Georgia, a Talmadge protégé, won election to the first of four House terms and signed the "Southern Manifesto," opposing federal efforts to end racial segregation in the South.

*Madame Chiang (left), wife of Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, confers with Congresswoman Marguerite Church of Illinois. Church took a keen interest in how American foreign aid dollars were spent in the effort to win the global struggle against communism.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

### *The Cold War and McCarthyism*

As the Second World War ended, the victorious alliance between Washington and Moscow began to weaken. Soviet forces, which had broken the backbone of the German army, occupied virtually every Eastern European capital. Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin believed Russian security interests required control of western invasion routes used by the Germans to invade his homeland twice during his lifetime. Rather than evacuate Eastern Europe and East Germany, the Soviet Red Army tightened Moscow's grip and installed pliant communist regimes. A war of words and mutual suspicions developed. By 1947, officials in Washington had decided to try to contain communism by economic and military means—implementing the Marshall Plan to rebuild Western Europe and West Germany and helping countries plagued by communist insurgencies. The first Soviet test of an atomic bomb in 1949, the founding of the communist People's Republic of China the same year, and communist North Korea's invasion of South Korea in June 1950 seemed to confirm Americans' worst fears about the expansion of international communism.[22]

Several women in Congress were vocal advocates of a hard-line American policy toward the Soviet Union. Jessie Sumner raised concerns early on about the nature of Stalinist foreign policy, arguing that Americans should beware of supporting postwar international organizations because, she believed, they would be co-opted by communist powers. Congresswoman Luce also criticized Soviet motives, especially in regard to Polish sovereignty and, along with other Members of Congress, accused the Roosevelt administration of capitulating to Stalin's demands for a Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Congresswoman Edna Kelly of New York, elected to the House in 1949, was an ardent anticommunist who gained the influential post of head of the European Affairs Subcommittee on the Foreign Affairs panel. Kelly and others, such as Woodhouse, backed the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949,

*"Grable" was a 15-kiloton atomic weapon—stronger than the nuclear blasts that leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II—detonated in 1953, at a Nevada test site. The nuclear mushroom cloud became a symbol of the Cold War and a constant reminder that the superpower confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union could spiral into nuclear destruction.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

*Women of the 83rd Congress (1953–1955). Seated, from left: Vera Buchanan of Pennsylvania, Leonor Sullivan of Missouri, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, Marguerite Church of Illinois, Gracie Pfost of Idaho. Standing, from left: Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts, Frances P. Bolton of Ohio, Ruth Thompson of Michigan, Cecil Harden of Indiana, Maude Kee of West Virginia, and Elizabeth St. George of New York.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

supported the Marshall Plan, and advocated large foreign-aid packages to help governments resist communist insurgents.

The restructuring of U.S. national security policy and the billions of dollars spent on the global war on communism changed America's international role. Not all Congresswomen agreed that such expenditures were in the best interests of the American people. Maude Kee of West Virginia questioned the urgency of giving multibillion-dollar aid packages to foreign countries when residents of her rural Appalachian district suffered from high unemployment and a low standard of living. Vera Buchanan of Pennsylvania publicly raised concerns about the threats of officials in the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration to annihilate the Soviet Union, using nuclear weapons in "massive retaliation" for military provocation. Marguerite Stitt Church of Illinois questioned expenditures of vast sums on military hardware for foreign countries, instead of on job-training and economic programs for women in developing countries. Other women from this period, such as O'Day and Woodhouse (and later in the Cold War, Edith Green and Coya Knutson) brought a domestic perspective to the national security debate, arguing that improved economic and educational opportunities would best protect Americans' freedom. Helen Douglas linked U.S. civil rights reforms with Cold War national security objectives. Winning the support of potential allies in the global struggle against communism required fundamental changes at home. Racial segregation in America, Douglas said on the House Floor, "raises the question among the colonial peoples of the earth . . . as to whether or not we are really their friends, whether or not we will ever understand their longing and right for self-determination."[23]

*Congresswomen were more likely to bring a domestic perspective to the national security debate, arguing that improved economic and educational opportunities would best protect Americans' freedom.*

Indeed, the domestic consequences of the Cold War were profound. American officials had to garner public support for huge outlays for the containment policy and, in making their case about the dangers of communism abroad, stoked fears of communist infiltration at home. The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which held numerous high-profile public hearings, became a soapbox from which anticommunist Members of Congress called attention to the "red menace."[24]

During its 37-year history, no woman served on HUAC (later renamed the Internal Security Committee), though several, including Edith Nourse Rogers and Edna Kelly, supported its usefulness. Both Helen Douglas and Emily Douglas attacked HUAC for its brusque tactics, which included publicizing unsubstantiated rumors. "No men are pure and unbiased enough to have this immense power to discredit, accuse and denounce which this committee wields," Helen Douglas declared. "It is un-American in-itself to be condemned in the press or before the public without trial or hearing."[25] In a speech entitled "My Democratic Credo," Douglas identified the real dangers to democracy as demagoguery and repressive domestic controls justified in the name of national security.[26] "Have we talked about communists so much that we have begun to imitate them?" she asked.[27] In a 1950 campaign for one of California's seats in the U.S. Senate, Representative Richard Nixon of California, a member of HUAC, successfully employed smear tactics to defeat Congresswoman Douglas, whom he labeled a communist sympathizer. Representative Reva Bosone of Utah, formerly a Salt Lake City judge, was turned out of office two years later, partly because her opponent attacked her for opposing a bill granting wide-ranging powers to the newly created Central Intelligence Agency.

In the U.S. Senate, Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin made the shocking claim in a February 1950 speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, that he possessed a list of 205 communists employed at the State Department. He then labeled World War II hero and Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall a traitor and rebuked President Harry Truman and Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson for being "soft" on communism. As chairman of the Government Operations Committee's Subcommittee on Investigations in the 83rd Congress (1953–1955), McCarthy commenced hearings to root out "subversive activities" in the federal government. His tactics received widespread attention from the press but ferreted out no communists. However, many of the government employees and private citizens who were called before his committee had their careers and reputations ruined.[28]

Few of his contemporaries publicly countered McCarthy's unsubstantiated charges. Outgoing Representative Woodhouse told the *New York Times*, "It is the job of every balanced, conscientious person to steer us away from the dangers of hysteria and to label as traitors those in public positions who attempt to gain personal benefit from playing on the fears of the masses of the people."[29] Margaret Chase Smith, a freshman Senator, directly challenged McCarthy in a Senate Floor speech that demonstrated great moral courage. In an address she later called her "Declaration of Conscience," Senator Smith said, "those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism . . . are all too frequently those who, by our own words and acts, ignore some of the basic principles of Americanism—the right to criticize; the right to hold unpopular beliefs; the right to protest; the right of independent thought." Although she did not mention McCarthy by name, her meaning was unmistakable. She also took her colleagues to task for condoning the permissive context in which McCarthyism was allowed to flourish and in which Senate debate had been "debased to the level of a forum of hate and character assassination."[30] McCarthy's downfall came in the spring of 1954 when he investigated the U.S. Army in televised hearings; his ruthless and exaggerated tactics were broadcast to millions of viewers. In December 1954, the Senate censured McCarthy. Voting with the majority were his Republican colleagues Senator Smith and Senator Abel.

*Communist-hunting Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin (center) confers with his two principal aides, G. David Schine (left) and Roy Cohn in this June 1954 photo. McCarthy came to prominence in February 1950 when he accused the State Department of being infiltrated by dozens of communists. In 1953, McCarthy became chairman of the Government Operations Committee's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations—a prime perch from which to pursue alleged communist activities in the U.S. government. McCarthy's sweeping and unsubstantiated accusations, carried widely by the press, produced no communists but ruined many careers and perpetuated public fears about domestic subversives.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

*Margaret Chase Smith, a freshman Senator, directly challenged McCarthy in a Senate Floor speech that demonstrated great moral courage.*

*Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (left) and Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine on the set of the political television program* Face the Nation *in Washington, D.C., on November 11, 1956. Both women were leading figures in the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE FDR LIBRARY/ NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

*Accompanied by U.S. Marine officers, Senator Margaret Chase Smith tours a U.S. military facility. Smith was the first woman to serve on the Armed Services Committee in both the House and the Senate.*

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

## Crafting an Identity

Second-generation women in Congress legislated sporadically on issues of special importance to their gender and on the initiative of individuals rather than that of a group. The paucity of Congresswomen inhibited the development of a coherent women's-issues agenda until the 1970s. Few embraced a "feminist" agenda —preferring to work within the prescribed institutional channels.

There were exceptions, however. Congresswoman Winifred Stanley introduced the first equal-pay legislation in Congress, arguing that women and men should receive the same compensation for the same type of work. "Merit, regardless of sex, should be the basis of employment," Stanley said. "Jobs should be filled by those best qualified by ability, training and experience, with the consideration given to men and women of the armed services."[31] Unsuccessful equal pay measures were introduced repeatedly in the decades that followed, notably by Representative Kelly in 1951 and by Representative Cecil Harden of Indiana in 1957. Stanley, along with then-Representative Margaret Chase Smith, also renewed the drive for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1943 to mark the 20th anniversary of its introduction to Congress.

House veteran Mary Norton realized that there were not enough women in Congress to support such an agenda. In the months immediately following the war, she despaired that a quarter century after earning the vote, women had failed to organize as an effective political bloc. "We won't see a dozen women in Congress in our day because women won't vote for women," Norton lamented.[32] More than a dozen women did serve in the 83rd Congress, two years after Norton retired. But women did not consistently hold even two dozen seats in Congress (about 5 percent of the total membership) until the mid-1980s.

Chase Woodhouse, one of Norton's contemporaries, recalled that she and her women colleagues in the House earnestly pursued individual projects but did not reach a consensus on legislation about issues that were particularly relevant to women, namely, education, employment, childcare, reproductive rights, and health issues. Norton, Woodhouse observed, worked hard to minimize distinctions between women and men in everyday House activities, insisting that the men treat the women as "Congressmen"; there were no "ladies first" in the line for the elevator, and women Members would wear plain business suits and no "frillies" or hats on the House Floor. "None of us were women's women," Woodhouse recalled years later of colleagues like Emily Douglas, Helen Douglas, Sumner, and Luce.[33] Woodhouse secured federal money for programs and organizations that were important to women, particularly prenatal clinics and child welfare agencies.[34] Acutely concerned with helping women in the workplace, Woodhouse nevertheless distanced herself from vocal feminists. "I always say I never attack a brick wall," she observed years later. "I try to go around it, and the people who are defending the other side are so surprised to see me that they even say, 'How do you do? What can I do for you?'"[35] Her colleague Frances Bolton chafed at the term "Congresswoman." "It doesn't exist" in the dictionary, she once snapped. "We've had Congressmen here for a good many generations. But we've never had Congresswomen. You're a woman Congressman. It's just like a chairman. Some people say chairwoman. But that's just silly."[36]

Importantly, however, a new legislative style for women in Congress was being pioneered by celebrities-turned-politicians—a "show horse," or publicity-

driven style.[37] Capitalizing on their fame, Luce and Helen Douglas chose to become partisan champions of the issue *du jour* rather than to specialize in areas of legislative interest. Congresswoman Luce, a glamorous playwright, delivered the keynote address at the 1944 GOP National Convention; it was the first time a woman was accorded this honor by a major party.[38] Several weeks later, Douglas, an actress and a singer and the wife of film star Melvyn Douglas—then making her first run for the House—was featured prominently at the Democratic National Convention.[39] The energy these women derived from the intense media coverage of their House careers became part of their style. Reflecting late in life on her move to a career in politics, Douglas remarked, "I never felt I left the stage."[40] While neither Luce nor Douglas used this legislative style to advance a "women's-issues" agenda, later generations of women in Congress adopted their style to become public advocates for feminist concerns, particularly Bella Abzug of New York and, to a lesser degree, Martha Griffiths of Michigan and Patricia Schroeder of Colorado. In the late 1940s, California Congressman Jerry Voorhis marveled at the precarious balancing act of his women colleagues, who charted "a course midway between two fatal mistakes." Voorhis observed that "the woman member must take care that she does not base her appeal for the cause in which she is interested on the fact of her womanhood. She cannot expect chivalry from the male members when it comes to casting their votes. Neither, on the other hand, can she hope to gain a strong position for herself if she attempts the role of a hail fellow well met and tries to be like the men. What she has to do is to be simply a member of the House who quite incidentally happens to belong to the female sex."[41]

Institutional and cultural barriers added to the precariousness of women's new foothold in national political life. The Cold War, enduring paternalistic social patterns, and the temporary decline of feminist reform blunted women's drive for political power, leaving the third generation of Congresswomen—those elected from the 1950s to the early 1970s to begin fundamentally altering the legislative landscape.

NOTES

1 "Mrs. O'Day Pledges Opposition to War," 29 October 1934, *New York Times:* 4; "38 Women Run for House," 3 November 1936, *New York Times:* 9.

2 Allan G. Bogue, Jerome M. Clubb, Carroll R. McKibbin, and Santa A. Traugott, "Members of the House of Representatives and the Processes of Modernization, 1789–1960," *Journal of American History* 63 (September 1976): 275–302.

3 The standard biography of Eleanor Roosevelt is Blanche Wiesen Cook's *Eleanor Roosevelt,* two volumes (New York: Viking Press, 1992, 1999). For more on Roosevelt's connections to prominent women activists and politicians, see Lillian Faderman, *To Believe in Women* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

4 Gretchen Urnes Beito, *Coya Come Home: A Congresswoman's Journey* (Los Angeles and London: Pomegranate Press, Inc.): 65–66.

5 Committee attractiveness during this period is based on Charles Stewart III, "Committee Hierarchies in the Modernizing House, 1875–1947," *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (No. 4, November 1992): 835–856. At the beginning of this period, there were 47 House committees; the Senate had 33 standing committees (see, for example, committee listings in the *Congressional Directory* for the 75th Congress, 1st Session, 1937). The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 restructured the committee system. After its implementation in 1947, the number of standing House committees was reduced to 19 and standing Senate committees to 15. The process of streamlining was achieved by eliminating the number of panels altogether and by renaming, reconfiguring, or broadening the jurisdiction of others. Committee structure has been modified since 1947, with the addition of the Budget Committee in the early 1970s, and again after the Republicans came to power and enacted institutional reforms in 1995. Currently in the 109th Congress, the House and Senate have 20 and 16 permanent standing committees, respectively. The House also has the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. The Senate has three permanent select committees. In addition, House and Senate Members serve on four joint committees.

6 "Military Affairs Mrs. Luce's Post," 19 January 1943, *New York Times:* 21; "Urge House Women on War Committees," 15 January 1943, *New York Times:* 15.

7 Chase Going Woodhouse, Oral History Interview, U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress (hereinafter USAFMOC), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.: 225.

8 Woodhouse, USAFMOC, Oral History Interview: 237.

9 The New Deal policies enacted in the 1930s by the Roosevelt administration and Congress dominated American political life and were, in some measure, a culmination of the welfare and social work efforts that had engaged women for a century. Many New Deal programs benefited from the experience of women reformers of the Progressive Era. The professionalization and institutionalization of "1920s" women's reform groups, such as the League of Women Voters and the Women's Bureau in Labor Department, prepared women for having a voice within the administration. See, for example, Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

10 Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989): 202.

11 See, for example, William E. Leuchtenburg, "Franklin D. Roosevelt's Supreme Court 'Packing' Plan," in *Essays on the New Deal,* Harold M. Hollingsworth and William F. Holmes, eds. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969): 69–115.

12 See, for example, Wayne Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

13 Jessie Sumner, "We Are Right To Be Safe," Address to the Republican League of Women, 2 October 1939, reprinted in the *Congressional Record,* House, 76th Cong., 2nd sess. (2 October 1939): A 91–92.

14 Jessie Ash Arndt, "Rep. O'Day Offers Plan Against War," 15 July 1937, *Washington Post:* 19.

15 *Congressional Record,* House, 77th Cong., 1st sess. (11 December 1941): A 5565.

16 Norma Smith, *Jeannette Rankin: America's Conscience* (Helena: Montana Historical Society, 2002): 185.

17 David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 776.

18 These rising wartime employment statistics masked surprisingly resilient traditional views of women's place in society. The surge appears far less dramatic in light of the fact that about half these women had recently graduated from school and would have soon joined the workforce anyway. By 1947, moreover, women's participation in the national workforce had decreased to 28 percent. In addition, "Rosie the Riveter" was atypical; most women had secretarial or clerical jobs. While defense plants employed some two million women, the vast majority (95 percent) held unskilled positions. Ironically, few were riveters, since this position required specialized skills, and employers were hesitant to train women they expected to be temporary employees. Indeed, government propagandists and business made it abundantly clear to women that their employment would end when the men returned from war. See Kennedy's discussion, *Freedom From Fear:* 776–782; also Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 276–277; 294; Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wag, 1992).

19 Annabel Paxton, *Women in Congress* (Richmond, VA: Deitz Press, 1945): 37; see also Norton's obituary from the 1959 *Current Biography.*

20 Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear:* 857–858. For a comprehensive discussion of the African-American experience and the civil rights struggle, see John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans,* 8th edition (New York: Knopf, 2000); see 475–504 for a discussion of African Americans and World War II. For more context on the emergence of the civil rights movement in the postwar era, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

21 *Congressional Record,* House, 78th Cong., 1st sess. (25 May 1943): 4849.

22 For more on the origins of the Cold War and American foreign policy during this era, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994) and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

23 *Congressional Record,* House, 79th Cong., 1st sess. (8 June 1945): 5810.

24 For more on HUAC, see Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968).

25 *Congressional Record,* House, 79th Cong., 1st sess. (24 October 1945): 10036.

26 *Congressional Record,* House, 79th Cong., 2nd sess. (29 March 1946): 2856–2859; quote on 2857.

27 *Congressional Record,* House, 80th Cong., 2nd sess. (18 May 1948): 6030–6031.

28 For more on McCarthy and "McCarthyism"—the term coined by *Washington Post* cartoonist Herblock to describe his red-baiting tactics—see David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Free Press, 1983). See also the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations,* Volumes I–V, edited by Donald A. Ritchie and Elizabeth Bolling (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2003).

29 "Smear Campaigns Laid to 'Traitors,'" 19 November 1950, *New York Times:* 38.

30 *Congressional Record,* Senate, 81st Cong., 2nd sess. (1 June 1950): 7894–7895. For an account of the episode and its effect on Smith's career, see Janann Sherman, *No Place for a Woman: A Life of Senator Margaret Chase Smith* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000): 104–126.

31 "Miss Stanley Backs Bill and Plank on Equal Pay," 20 June 1944, *New York Times:* 22.

32 Quoted in Norton's obituary in the 1959 *Current Biography.*

33 Chase Going Woodhouse, oral history interview with Joyce Pendry, 31 January 1981, Center for Oral History and Women's Study Programs, University of Connecticut, Storrs: 63–69.

34 "*Chase Going Woodhouse," Current Biography, 1945* (New York: H. W. Wilson and Company, 1945): 690-692.; see also on the housing issues, *Congressional Record,* House, 79th Cong., 2nd sess. (28 June 1946): 7894–7897; on the OPA and price controls see, *Congressional Record,* House, 79th Cong., 2nd sess. (16 April 1946): 3798–3800; *Congressional Record*, House 79th Cong., 2nd sess. (17 April 1946): 3892–3893.

35 Chase Going Woodhouse, Oral History Interview, USAFMOC: 31.

36 Peggy Lampson, *Few Are Chosen: American Women in Political Life Today* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968): 33.

37 For more on the differences between the "work horse" and the "show horse" styles, see Donald R. Matthews, "The Folkways of the United States Senate: Conformity to Group Norms and Legislative Effectiveness," *American Political Science Review* 53 (December 1959): 1064–1089. The same pattern has been observed in the House; see Charles L. Clapp, *The Congressman: His Work As He Sees It* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964): 22–23. See also James L. Payne, "Show Horses and Work Horses in the United States House of Representatives," *Polity* 12 (Spring 1980): 428–456.

38 Kathleen McLaughlin, "Mrs. Luce Assails 'Bumbledom' Trend," 28 June 1944, *New York Times:* 15.

39 "'Fencing' with Mrs. Luce Barred by Miss Gahagan," 16 July 1944, *New York Times:* 26; "Republican 'Double Talk' Assailed by Mrs. Douglas," 21 July 1944, *Christian Science Monitor:* 14; "Roosevelt Needed, Mrs. Douglas Says," 21 July 1944, *New York Times:* 11.

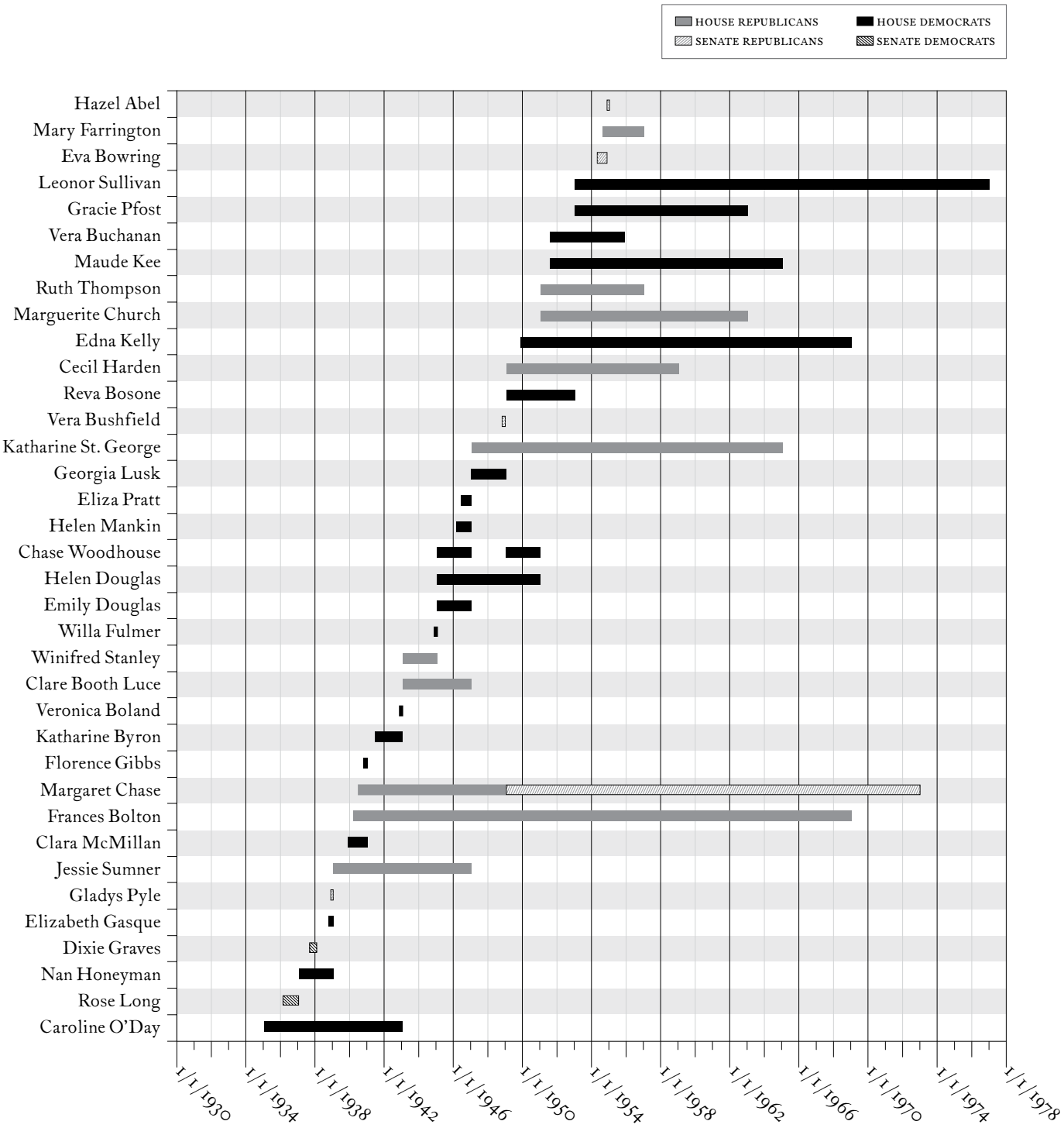
40 Ingrid Winther Scobie, *Center Stage: Helen Douglas, A Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995): 306.

41 Jerry Voorhis, *Confessions of a Congressman* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1947): 35.

# Visual Statistics

## *Congressional Service*

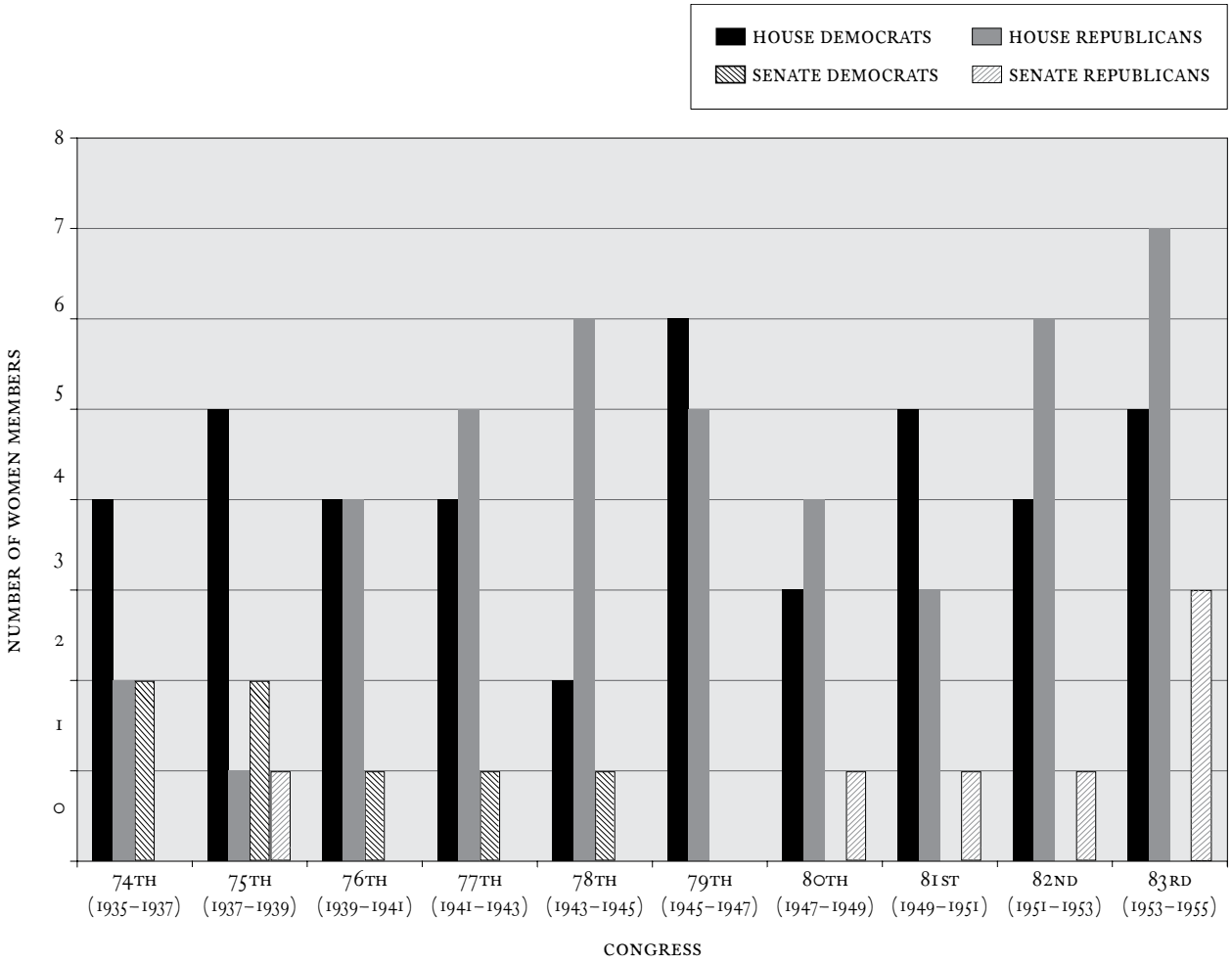
This timeline depicts the span of congressional service for women first sworn in between 1935 and 1954




Source: *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–2005* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005); also available at http://bioguide.congress.gov.

## *Party Affiliation: Women in Congress, 74th–83rd Congresses (1935–1955)*

This chart depicts the party breakdown only for women Members during this time period.




Source: Appendix B, "Women Representatives and Senators by Congress: 1917–2007," *Women in Congress, 1917–2006*.