



## *A Cultural Connections Memo*

**From:** Shari Clarke, VP for Diversity & Chief Diversity Officer  
**To:** The EWU Community  
**Date:** August 18, 2020  
**Re:** Celebrating Women!

This week as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, we look to those who led the way. Today we profile the First Female in Congress: Jeannette Rankin (1880-1973) served two terms 1917-1919 and 1941-1943.

Jeannette Rankin successfully fought for a woman's right to vote in Washington State and Montana and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1916. She was the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress, and during her two separate terms Rankin helped pass the 19th Amendment and was the only Congressperson to vote against both WWI and WWII.

Jeannette Rankin was born on June 11, 1880, near Missoula, Montana. One of seven children, she was the daughter of a rancher and a schoolteacher. She earned a degree in biology in 1902 from the University of Montana and attended the New York School of Philanthropy (later the Columbia University School of Social Work). After a brief period as a social worker in Spokane, Washington, Rankin entered the University of Washington in Seattle. It was there that she joined the woman suffrage movement, a campaign that achieved its goal in Washington State in 1910. Rankin became a professional lobbyist for the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Her speaking and organizing efforts helped Montana women gain the vote in 1914. Jeannette saw this as an opportunity. Perhaps women voters could use their influence to elect a woman candidate.

With financial support from her family, Jeannette ran for a Montana seat in the United States House of Representatives. She ran a nonpartisan campaign that promoted national woman suffrage, social welfare, and pacifism. On August 29, 1916, Jeannette Rankin became the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress. She said "I may be the first woman member of Congress, but I won't be the last." Jeannette strongly believed that war was wrong and that no problem could be solved by fighting. But she also knew that her position as the first female representative carried great responsibility. She sat on the House Committee on Woman Suffrage and opened the House's first debate about the national suffrage amendment. In addition to suffrage, Jeannette also represented Montanan causes. She defended the rights of miners and laborers, and took an interest in public land use.

She worked tirelessly to promote peace, and was drawn by the nonviolent protest tactics of Mohandas K. Gandhi. During the Vietnam War, she led the Jeannette Rankin Brigade, numbering 5,000, in a protest march on Washington in January 1968 that culminated in the presentation of a peace petition to House Speaker John McCormack of Massachusetts.

Read more about Congresswoman Rankin:  
[Life Story: Jeannette Rankin \(1880-1973\)](#)  
[United States House of Representatives: History, Art, and Archives](#)