



MENOPAUSE

For many women, the onset of menopause occurs around the time that their children leave home. These two ‘ending’ events often signal new opportunities, new outlets, new careers, or new adventures. For some women, this time of life leads them to careers in politics. In this month’s column, we profile four women who made significant political contributions after the “change of life”: Jeannette Rankin, Geraldine Ferraro, Madeleine Albright, and Nancy Pelosi – all of whom have been inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

Jeannette Rankin became the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress in 1916 when she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from the state of Montana. By that point in her career, she had dedicated many years of her life to securing women’s suffrage – including success in 1914 in Montana.

A life-long peace activist, Rankin was one of the few members of Congress to vote against the U.S. entry into World War I in 1917. While serving in the House, she ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1918. A committed pacifist, she was the founding Vice-President of the American Civil Liberties Union and a founding member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1940, at age 60, she ran for the U.S. House of Representatives again on an anti-war platform and was elected to Congress. In 1941, she became the only member of Congress to vote against war with Japan and the U.S. entry into World War II saying: “As a woman, I can’t go to war and I refuse to send anyone else. It is not necessary. I

vote NO.” In her eighties, she led a Vietnam War protest demonstration on the mall in Washington, D.C.

The Jeannette Rankin Peace Center in Missoula, Montana carries on her work and states that it “exists to connect and empower people to build a socially just, non-violent and sustainable community and world.” It is ironic that to date, Rankin, who famously said “We’re half the people; we should be half the Congress,” is the only woman to have been elected to the U.S. Congress from Montana.

In 1984, at age forty-eight, **Geraldine Ferraro** became the Vice Presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket with presidential candidate Walter Mondale. This was the first time that a woman had been on the ballot representing a major political party. Upon her selection, she said “Tonight, the daughter of an immigrant from Italy has been chosen to run for vice president in the new land my father came to love.” Ferraro had been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1978 representing constituents in New York City. Although the Democratic ticket was not elected, Ferraro broke much ground with her historic selection.



Ferraro had an active career after the election. President Clinton appointed her as a member of the United States delegation to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. She founded several non-profit organizations. Ferraro later became a television political commentator and served on the boards of corporations and non-profit organizations.

The first woman Secretary of State and the highest ranking woman in the U.S. Government at that time by virtue of this position, **Madeleine K. Albright** was sworn into that office in 1997 when she was fifty-nine years old. During her

tenure (1997-2001), Dr. Albright became known for her strong commitment to democracy, arms control, human rights and peace in the Middle East, Africa and other regions of conflict.

Appointed by President Clinton, she previously served as the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations and as a member of President Clinton's Cabinet and the National Security Council. A naturalized citizen who was born in Czechoslovakia, Albright emigrated to the U.S. with her family when she was eleven years old and spent her teenage years in Denver, Colorado. She received her undergraduate degree at Wellesley and masters and doctorate at Columbia University.



Since leaving office, Dr. Albright has authored four New York Times bestsellers. Her latest book, *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box* was published in 2009. Currently, Albright serves as a Chair of Albright Stonebridge Group, a global strategy firm, and Chair and Principal of Albright Capital Management LLC, an investment advisory company focused on emerging markets. Albright says: "There is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women."

Another significant historical event occurred in 2007 when **Nancy Pelosi**, at age 66, a Congresswoman from California, was elected as the first female Speaker of the House. She became the highest ranking female politician in American history when she assumed that position. Originally elected in 1987, Pelosi was the first woman, first Californian, and first Italian-American to

lead a major party in Congress. She served as Speaker for the 110th and 111th sessions of Congress.

Upon her selection as Speaker of the House, Pelosi said “It’s an historic moment for the Congress, it’s an historic moment for the women of America. It is a moment for which we have waited over 200 years. Never losing faith, we waited through the many years of struggle to achieve our rights. But women weren’t just waiting, women were working, never losing faith we worked to redeem the promise of America, that all men and women are created equal. For our daughters and our granddaughters, today we have broken the marble ceiling. For our daughters and our granddaughters, the sky is the limit. Anything is possible for them.”

While we all recognize that no woman has yet been elected either Vice President or President of the United States, we are hopeful that we will be able to see both political successes in our lifetimes. What will you do to contribute to those achievements? And do you bet (with us) that those successful women will be post-menopausal? Tell us what you think!



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