



CHAPTER IV

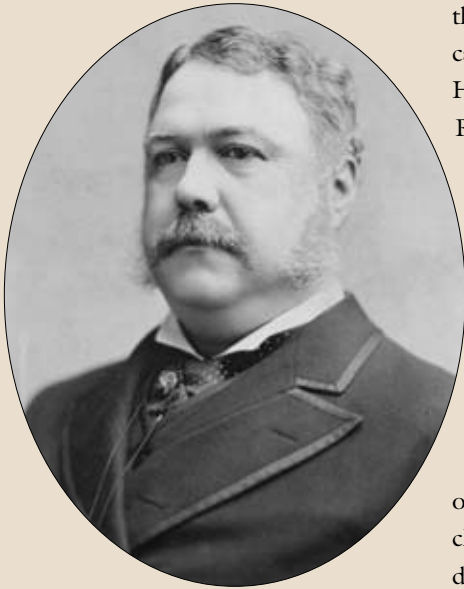
---

ORIGINS OF THE  
MODERN SENATE

*1881-1920*

March 18, 1881

## A Dramatic Tiebreaker



*Chester Arthur served as vice president of the United States, from March 4 to September 20, 1881, when he assumed the presidency upon the death of President Garfield.*

On March 18, 1881, early in a special session called to consider nominations received from newly inaugurated Republican President James Garfield, the vice president's hands trembled as he reached for the roll-call-vote tally sheet. In a Senate Chamber packed with senators, House members, and even the chief justice of the United States, Republican Vice President Chester Arthur announced the result of a vote to select a Republican slate of committee chairmen and members. Those in favor: 37; those opposed: 37. When the vice president cast his tie-breaking vote in favor of the Republican slate, the chamber exploded in volleys of cheers and boos.

The triumphant Republicans then moved to elect a secretary of the Senate and sergeant at arms. At this point, a newspaper correspondent observed that the Democratic senators “were not in a hilarious mood. Their countenances were those of mourners at a funeral. Behind their desks was a grim row of clerks witnessing with solemn interest the proceedings that would deprive them of snug positions.” With the Senate equally divided on organizational questions, the Democrats had hoped to strike a bargain. While grudgingly accepting a one-vote Republican margin on each committee, they insisted on retaining the officers they had selected when they controlled the Senate of the previous Congress. The Republicans refused to negotiate.

The resulting stalemate disrupted Senate business for the next two months. With several Republicans absent due to illness, the Democrats were able to stall a vote on the staffing issue by leaving the chamber each time Republicans tried to muster the majority quorum necessary to conduct business.

Soon a split developed within Republican ranks over Garfield's nominee to fill a key New York City federal post. Both of New York's Republican senators opposed that choice and were angry with Garfield for ignoring their views. In a tactical move, they dramatically resigned from the Senate, expecting that their state legislature would soon reelect them and thereby send the White House a message about their political standing within New York.

The Republican resignations gave the Democrats a two-vote Senate majority. But in the interest of wrapping up the deadlocked special session, Democrats agreed not to reopen the issue of committee control. In return the Republicans conceded the staffing issue—at least until the next session. Within months, however, the assassination of President Garfield dampened any desire for further battles over the management of this closely divided Senate.

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *The Senate, 1789-1989*, Vol. 1, by Robert C. Byrd. 100th Congress, 1st sess., 1988. S. Doc.100-20.

May 16, 1881

## Both New York Senators Resign

**B**rilliant and handsome, ambitious and arrogant, New York Republican Roscoe Conkling was one of the most compelling and colorful members of the late-19th-century Senate. Described as “a veritable bird of paradise amidst a barnyard of drabber fowl,” Conkling sported green trousers, scarlet coats, gold lace, striped shirts, and yellow shoes.

Soon after his arrival in 1867, this flamboyant orator became one of the Senate’s principal Republican leaders. Conkling built a strong state political machine through his control over New York City’s patronage-rich customs house. When an investigation uncovered a record of graft and corruption under customs collector and Conkling protégé Chester Arthur, a bitter struggle split the Republican Party. This partisan disarray helped the Democrats, in the 1878 elections, gain control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 18 years.

When James Garfield won the 1880 Republican presidential nomination, he tried to placate Conkling and his faction of the party by selecting Chester Arthur as his running mate. Once Garfield took office, however, he shifted direction and nominated as the New York City customs collector a candidate who lacked Conkling’s endorsement. When the appointment reached the Senate Chamber, a colleague reported that Conkling “raged and roared like a bull for three mortal hours,” claiming a violation

of “senatorial courtesy.” Garfield further baited the furious senator by boldly responding that he was the head of the government and not “the registering clerk of the United States Senate.” When it became clear that the president had the votes needed to confirm his nominee, Conkling took a gamble and persuaded his Senate colleague Thomas Platt to join him.

On May 16, 1881, both New York senators resigned their seats, confident that the state legislature would vindicate them with speedy reelection. In returning with this refreshed mandate, Conkling believed he would be able to humiliate his party’s president and control the Republican legislative agenda.

Unfortunately for Conkling and Platt, the state legislature took a dim view of this unorthodox scheme. As members deliberated throughout the summer, a deranged patronage seeker shot and mortally wounded President Garfield. When the legislature, in a wave of revulsion against Conkling’s tactic, selected two others to fill the Senate seats, Garfield murmured from his deathbed, “Thank God.” Thus ended Roscoe Conkling’s remarkable political career.



*In an 1881 showdown with President Garfield over patronage, Roscoe Conkling and Thomas Platt of New York resigned from the Senate.*

### Further Reading

Jordan, David M. *Roscoe Conkling of New York: Voice in the Senate*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971.

Platt, Thomas Collier. *The Autobiography of Thomas Collier Platt*. Edited by Louis J. Lang. New York: Arno Press, 1974.

September 2, 1884

## Henry B. Anthony, “Father of the Senate,” Dies



*Henry B. Anthony,  
senator from Rhode Island  
(1859-1884).*

At the height of his career, Rhode Island Republican Senator Henry B. Anthony was known to his colleagues as the “Father of the Senate”—the longest-serving member among them—a source of wisdom and stability in unsettled times.

In 1868, when the chief justice of the United States directed the Senate clerk to call the roll at the climactic moment of President Andrew Johnson’s impeachment trial, Anthony’s name stood at the head of the alphabet. “Mr. Senator Anthony,” the chief justice intoned, “How say you? Is the respondent, Andrew Johnson, president of the United States, guilty or not guilty . . . ?” Anthony’s response—meaningful because it was the first to be given and because he was known to be a supporter of Johnson—echoed like a thunder clap across the tense chamber: “Guilty!”

A rough-and-tumble old-time politician, Anthony did not hesitate—in the words of one modern writer—to employ “political legerdemain and bribery” to gain his objectives. His break with Andrew Johnson came after the president began directing Rhode Island patronage appointments to Anthony’s political adversaries.

On September 2, 1884, Anthony died at age 69. This politically adroit former newspaper editor and state governor had served continuously in the Senate for the 25 years since 1859. Only two others in Senate history to that time had held longer terms.

In an era when the Senate selected its president pro tempore more for popularity than seniority, and made that choice each time the vice president was away from the Senate Chamber, members picked “Father” Anthony a record-setting 17 times.

Americans of his day knew Anthony as a powerful orator, who delivered famous funeral orations for notable senators including Stephen Douglas and Charles Sumner. Today, Anthony’s name is known only to a few for its association with a Senate rule designed to keep measures that have been cleared for floor action from being bottled up on the Senate calendar.

Long before the Senate developed the position of majority leader to decide which items on its calendar would be given priority consideration, the “Anthony Rule” attempted to limit floor debate by allowing senators to speak no more than five minutes on certain measures before voting. It has since fallen into disuse, perhaps underscoring a biographer’s assessment that Anthony was “one of the type of senators whose services lie rather in the exercise of judgment and practical wisdom than in any [lasting] contribution to law or practice.”

### Further Reading

Dove, Robert B. “Anthony Rule.” In *The Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, edited by Donald E. Bacon, et al. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

May 13, 1886

## The Senate's Oldest Art Collection

Day and night, throughout the year, 20 grim-faced men keep watch over the Senate Chamber. Stationed in the gallery, they never speak. A visitor might ask who they are and how they got there.

These silent sentinels memorialize those who held the office of vice president of the United States between 1789 and 1885. They got to their gallery niches because the Senate agreed on May 13, 1886, to commission marble portrait busts to honor their service, under the Constitution, as presidents of the Senate.

An unveiling earlier in 1886 of a portrait bust in memory of Henry Wilson inspired this plan. Wilson, a popular vice president, had died 11 years earlier in the Vice President's Room, near the Senate Chamber. The notable American sculptor Daniel Chester French produced the Wilson bust, placed on permanent display in the Vice President's Room.

Sculptor French assisted the Senate in establishing guidelines for the larger collection and agreed to prepare the first entry—a likeness of the body's first president, John Adams. French accepted the Adams commission despite his misgivings about the paltry \$800 fee the Senate had set for each of these marble portraits. He said, "I consider it an honor and worth a great deal to have a bust of mine in so important a position. I do not know how many sculptors you will find who will look at it in the same way."

The Senate unveiled the portrait busts of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson on its 100th anniversary in 1889. By 1898, all 20 of the gallery's niches were occupied, and the Senate provided that additional busts be placed throughout its Capitol wing. Today, each of nation's first 44 vice presidents, from Adams to Dan Quayle, occupies a place in this special Senate Pantheon. Tennessee's Andrew Johnson will forever share a corner with Kentucky's John Breckinridge, whom he supported in 1860 for the presidency, denounced in 1863 for his military attacks on Tennessee, and pardoned in 1868 for his service as Confederate secretary of war.

Outside the chamber, the growing collection is arranged in chronological order throughout the second-floor hallways. Two of the Senate's best storytellers—John Nance Garner and Alben Barkley—flank the chamber's south entrance. Several paces to the right, Lyndon Johnson looks directly at Richard Nixon, the political adversary who followed him to the White House. Nixon casts his eyes slightly to the left, however, eternally avoiding Johnson's steady gaze.



*A bust of Henry Wilson, senator from Massachusetts (1855-1873), vice president of the United States (1873-1875), became the inspiration for the vice-presidential bust collection.*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *United States Senate Catalogue of Fine Art*, by William Kloss and Diane K. Skvarla. 107th Congress, 2d sess., 2002. S. Doc. 107-11.

August 7, 1893

## Confederate General Elected Secretary of the Senate



*William Ruffin Cox,  
secretary of the Senate  
(1893-1900).*

In the several decades that followed the Civil War, the Democratic Party—long associated with the states of the former Confederacy—struggled to restore its standing as a national political organization. After the 1892 elections, many Democrats believed they had finally succeeded. In those contests, for the first time since the war, they captured the presidency and gained control of both houses of Congress. Symbolizing their return to national power, Senate Democrats replaced the incumbent secretary of the Senate—a former Union army general—with a former Confederate general.

In the late 1850s, North Carolina native William Ruffin Cox actively encouraged the states of the Old South to secede from the Union. A prosperous lawyer, he studied military tactics and, at his own expense, equipped a light artillery battery. When war came, he organized and led a Confederate infantry company. During the May 1863 Chancellorsville Campaign, Cox lost three-quarters of his regiment in just 15 minutes of fighting. In June 1864, he accompanied General Jubal Early on a raid designed to capture Washington. They reached Silver Spring, Maryland—the closest threat to the capital of any rebel unit—before withdrawing in the face of superior forces.

After the war, William Cox returned home to Raleigh, resumed his law practice, and joined former secessionists in organizing a political faction that eventually restored Democratic rule to North Carolina. He represented a North Carolina district in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1881 to 1887.

When the Democrats elected Cox as secretary in August 1893, several Republican senators objected to the Senate's departure from its pre-Civil War practice "when a political change of the Senate did not cause a change of its executive officers." While noting that only four individuals had served as secretary during the Senate's first 72 years, a Republican leader acknowledged that "a new order of things has come and we on this side of the chamber recognize it fully and bow to the inevitable."

A man of "striking physical appearance, cultured and courtly," Cox carried out his Senate responsibilities "with acceptance and distinction." When the Republicans regained the Senate majority two years later, party leaders agreed to keep him in office. This decision owed much to his genial nature, but even more to the political realities of a Republican caucus sharply divided on larger policy issues. Finally, in 1900, a strengthened Republican caucus decided to make a change and the 69-year-old Cox retired.

### Further Reading

Raleigh [N.C.] *News and Observer*, December 27, 1919. Obituary.

U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record*. 53rd Cong., spec. sess., April 6, 1893, 97-99.

June 17, 1894

## Senate Service Record Set

Perhaps the moral of this story is that those who run for president need to take special care in choosing who will place their name in nomination at their party's national convention. In 1880 John Sherman was a major contender for the Republican nomination. A former chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee, he won further distinction as secretary of the treasury in the Rutherford Hayes administration. Sherman asked his former Ohio colleague, Representative James A. Garfield, to nominate him at the convention. "You ask for his monuments," Garfield told the delegates, "I point you to 25 years of national statutes. Not one great beneficial law has been placed on our statute books without his intelligence and powerful aid." Unfortunately for Sherman, the convention deadlocked, passed over front-runners like himself, and instead nominated the eloquent James Garfield.

Although he never became president, Sherman was one of the Senate's most illustrious members. In addition to chairing the Finance Committee, he also chaired the committees on Agriculture and Foreign Relations, served as president pro tempore, and headed the Senate Republican Conference.

John Sherman grew up in Ohio with seven siblings, including the future Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman. Trained as a lawyer, he won election to the U.S.

House of Representatives, where he served from 1855 until he entered the Senate in 1861. There, Sherman specialized in financial policy, sponsoring legislation to finance operations of the Union army and to establish a national banking system. As an anti-inflation, sound-money advocate, Sherman crafted laws to reduce the national debt and end the free coinage of silver.

After his service as secretary of the treasury, Sherman returned to the Senate in 1881, ironically to replace Garfield, whose election to the Senate had been superseded by his election to the presidency. In the Senate, Sherman sponsored the landmark Sherman Antitrust Act. He served until 1897, when another Ohioan, President William McKinley, nominated him for secretary of state.

Sherman captured one other Senate distinction. On June 17, 1894, he became the longest-serving senator in history, breaking the nearly 30-year service record that Thomas Hart Benton had set back in 1851. When Sherman left the Senate in 1897, his tenure approached 32 years. In the 110 years since his departure, 29 senators have exceeded Sherman's record length of service. There is no better measure of the increased attractiveness of Senate service in modern times.



*John Sherman, senator from Ohio (1861-1877, 1881-1897).*

### Further Reading

Sherman, John. *John Sherman's Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate, and Cabinet, An Autobiography*. 2 vols. Chicago: Werner Company, 1895.



November 6, 1898

## Capitol Gas Explosion

As the shadows lengthened on a quiet Sunday afternoon in November 1898, two policemen peddled their bicycles on a routine tour through a Capitol Hill neighborhood. Suddenly, a tremendous explosion shattered their conversation. They turned instinctively toward the Capitol, three

blocks away, to witness a sheet of flame rising from the building's basement-level windows along the east front.

Moments earlier, another police officer inside the building had detected the odor of gas. Until recently, gas had been commonly used to light the Capitol's interior, so the officer was not unduly alarmed. At the moment he set out to investigate, a large volume of gas from a leaky meter in the basement was rising slowly to the level of an open flame in a lamp left burning for the gas company's meter reader. The resulting explosion, just north of the Rotunda on the Senate side, heaved the floor upward spewing brick, plaster, and dense black smoke in all directions. As the intense fire raced up an elevator shaft to the upper floors, it melted steel, cracked stone, and incinerated priceless records.



*The stone floor in today's "small Senate rotunda" was blown away by the force of the gas explosion that rocked the Capitol on November 6, 1898.*

Gas pipes had honeycombed the Capitol since mid-century, when that fuel began to replace whale oil as the principal means of lighting the building. In 1865, 1,083 gas jets provided lighting for the Rotunda. On those rare occasions when evening sessions of Congress coincided with gala White House entertainments, the city lacked sufficient gas to fuel, at the same time, the East Room's chandeliers and the lighting apparatus above the Senate and House chambers. This spurred a search for a more reliable and safer means of lighting.

In the early 1880s, Capitol engineers experimented with electricity, but concluded that the flickering light of the primitive incandescent lamps was inadequate for the building's needs. Within a few years, however, advances in technology accelerated the installation of electric lights throughout the Capitol and by 1896 both chambers relied on this means of illumination.

For several more years, the Capitol employed chandeliers outfitted with both gas and electric lights. Then came the disastrous explosion of November 6, 1898. Although no one was injured, the blast reduced large portions of the interior to a 20-ton pile of debris. Thus ended the era of gas illumination in the United States Capitol.

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics*, by William C. Allen. 106th Congress, 2d sess., 2001. S. Doc. 106-29.

December 28, 1898

## Justin S. Morrill Dies

This significant late-19th-century senator lived in a Washington mansion that the architect of the Capitol designed specially for him. Renowned Capitol artist Constantino Brumidi decorated the ceiling of his drawing room. Every 14th of April, that ornate salon on Thomas Circle echoed to the merriment of the senator's birthday party, a highlight of Washington's spring social season. His portrait, which today hangs outside the Senate Chamber, captures the thoughtful image of a man to whom his colleagues in the 1890s accorded their ultimate term of respect: "Father of the Senate."

Justin Morrill was born in Stafford, Vermont in 1810. At age 15, he ended his formal schooling to become a storekeeper. Shrewd and hardworking, Morrill built a successful retail business, gaining the financial independence that allowed him to retire at age 38. He turned to politics and, in 1854, won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Morrill flourished in the House as a skilled behind-the-scenes negotiator and expert on the nation's financial affairs. During the Civil War, as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, he shaped legislation that created the nation's first income tax.

The Vermonter's greatest contribution during his 12 years in the House was the 1862 Land-Grant College Act. Sensitive about his own lack of educational opportunities, he pioneered a program that dedicated revenues from the sale of 17 million acres

of federal lands to establish public institutions of higher education in every state.

In 1867, Morrill began the first of six terms in the Senate. By the time of his death on December 28, 1898, including his House tenure, he had served in Congress a record-setting 44 years and had chaired the Senate Finance Committee for 17 years—a record that still stands

As chairman of the Joint Committee on Public Buildings, Morrill guided legislation for construction of the Capitol Building's west front terrace, the Executive Office Building, and the unfinished portion of the Washington Monument. It was his idea to convert the old House chamber into a national statuary hall.

Justin Morrill's greatest construction legacy was the grand, Italian Renaissance-style Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, which opened a year before he died. In his eulogy, a Senate colleague suggested honoring this singular representative and senator with a plaque in the new library's Great Hall. That proposal languished for decades, until 1997. On the occasion of the library building's centennial, Vermont's two senators at last implemented this most appropriate honor.



*Justin S. Morrill, senator from Vermont (1867-1898).*

### Further Reading

Parker, William Belmont. *The Life and Public Services of Justin Smith Morrill*. 1924. Reprint. New York: Da Capo Press, 1971.

February 22, 1902

## Senate Fistfight

From its earliest days, the Senate has followed a set of rules designed to promote courteous and respectful behavior among members while debating issues that frequently provoke strong feelings. Those rules include cautions not to interrupt another member while speaking and provisions for unruly members to be silenced until the presiding officer determines whether that member may proceed. Beyond these general guidelines, the Senate traditionally relied on common sense and “gentlemanly behavior” to keep tempers under control.

In 1856, the savage beating in the Senate Chamber of a senator by a House member sorely tested this arrangement. Members briefly considered, and then rejected, a rule providing that senators “shall avoid personality and shall not reflect improperly upon any state.” The majority believed that “general parliamentary law grown out of the wisdom and experience of a thousand parliaments and senates” should be adequate to guide the Senate without adding to the rules whenever “anything exciting occurs.”



*This 1896 cartoon depicts Senator Benjamin Tillman as, “That South Carolina cyclone, or the terrible tantrums of the untamable Tillman.”*

Nearly 50 years later, when fists began to fly, this “hands-off” arrangement fell apart.

On February 22, 1902, John McLaurin, South Carolina’s junior senator, raced into the Senate Chamber and pronounced that state’s senior senator, Ben Tillman, guilty of “a willful, malicious, and deliberate lie.” Standing nearby, Tillman spun around and punched McLaurin squarely in the jaw. The chamber exploded in pandemonium as members struggled to separate both members of the South Carolina delegation. In a long moment, it was over, but not without stinging bruises both to bystanders and to the Senate’s sense of decorum.

Although Tillman and McLaurin had once been political allies, the relationship had recently cooled. Both were Democrats, but McLaurin had moved closer to the Republicans, who then controlled Congress, the White House, and a lot of South Carolina patronage. When McLaurin changed his position to support Republicans on a controversial treaty, Tillman’s rage erupted. With McLaurin away from the chamber, he had charged that his colleague had succumbed to “improper influences.”

On February 28, 1902, the Senate censured both men and reluctantly added to its rules the provision—echoing the proposals of a half-century earlier—that survives today as part of Rule XIX: “No senator in debate shall, directly or indirectly, by any form of words impute to another Senator or to other Senators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a Senator.”

### Further Reading

Simkins, Francis Butler. *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian*. Baton Rouge, 1944.

# March 6, 1903

## Senate Democratic Caucus Organizes

On March 6, 1903, the faction-ridden Senate Democratic caucus decided it was time to get organized. On that day, for the first time in the Senate's history, the caucus formally elected a chairman and a secretary, agreed to keep regular minutes of its proceedings, and took steps toward the adoption of a "binding rule."

When Republican President Theodore Roosevelt called the Senate into special session on March 5, 1903, to consider ratification of a Panama Canal treaty, the Democratic caucus unanimously selected Maryland's Arthur Gorman as chairman. The dominant figure in late 19th-century Maryland political life, Gorman was a masterful legislative strategist and party loyalist. Based on his informal service as Democratic leader in the 1890s, his Senate colleagues believed he was just the man to revitalize their heavily out-numbered party in the early 1900s.

Gorman convened the caucus on March 6, 1903, in a third-floor Capitol room that offered an expansive view of the building's East Front plaza. The newly elected secretary, Tennessee Senator Edward Carmack, presumably began to keep regular minutes. Although the formal record of that session has not survived, the following day's Washington Post provided a richly detailed account. The existing minutes begin with the meeting of March 16, 1903. Democratic senators who opposed the pending Panama Canal treaty sought to unite their party by proposing a rule that would bind all 33 members to any decision approved by two-thirds of the caucus. The action, agreed to later that year, marked the first time a party caucus sought to exercise such a binding rule.

Adoption of the binding rule promoted a distinction between the terms "caucus" and "conference." As these words came to be used, senators were in "caucus" when they discussed whether or not to bind the party's vote on a given issue; they were in "conference" when considering election of officers or general legislative business.



*Arthur P. Gorman, senator from Maryland (1881-1899, 1903-1906).*

### Further Reading

Lambert, John R., Jr. *Arthur Pue Gorman*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate*, by Floyd M. Riddick. 100th Congress, 2d sess., 1988. S.Doc. 100-29.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Minutes of the Senate Democratic Conference: Fifty-eighth through Eighty-eighth Congress, 1903-1964*, Donald A. Ritchie, ed. 105th Congress, 1998. S. Doc. 105-20.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Minutes of the Senate Republican Conference: Sixty-second Congress through Eighty-eighth Congress, 1911-1964*, Wendy Wolff and Donald A. Ritchie, eds. 105th Congress, 1999. S. Doc. 105-19.

April 28, 1904

## Senate Office Building Authorized

**O**n April 28, 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt signed legislation authorizing purchase of land for the Senate's first permanent office building—today called the Richard B. Russell Building.



*View of the Maltby Building, left center, looking north from the Capitol.*

With the original Capitol's completion in 1830, many believed Congress' space needs had been fully met. The next 20 years proved them wrong. The admission of seven new states led to growing demands for enlarged chambers and additional member and committee office space. In 1850, Congress authorized construction of new Senate and House wings that more than doubled the Capitol's length.

Twenty-five years after those wings opened in the late 1850s, unrelenting pressures for additional space caused Congress to authorize construction of terraces along the Capitol's west front. When completed in 1891, these terraces provided 50 small rooms for Senate use. This was not enough, however, to accommodate the Senate's nearly 60 committees and the 12 new members from the six states that had entered the Union in the

previous two years. Consequently, as members moved into the new terrace rooms, they also voted to purchase a three-year-old, five-story apartment house.

Located on the corner of New Jersey and Constitution Avenues, the Maltby Building made it possible for every senator to have an office. This greatly irritated House members whose plan to acquire a similar structure on their side of Capitol Hill had fallen through. Why, they asked, should 76 senators have more space collectively than 332 House members? Several suggested, in vain, that the Senate share its Maltby space.

Soon, however, senators began to complain about their new Maltby quarters—stifling in summer, frigid in winter. The building had been constructed on the site of an old stable. Its heaviest component—the elevator shaft—settled seven inches into the underlying mire, carrying with it surrounding walls and floors. The city fire marshal considered the structure a firetrap. Although this deteriorating situation inspired the 1904 legislation for a permanent, fireproof office building, senators had little choice but to remain at Maltby until the new building's completion in 1909.

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics*, by William C. Allen. 106th Congress, 2d sess., 2001. S. Doc. 106-29.

February 17, 1906

## “Treason of the Senate”

In February 1906, readers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine opened its pages to this statement: “Treason is a strong word, but not too strong to characterize the situation in which the Senate is the eager, resourceful, and indefatigable agent of interests as hostile to the American people as any invading army could be.” This indictment launched a nine-part series of articles entitled “Treason of the Senate.”

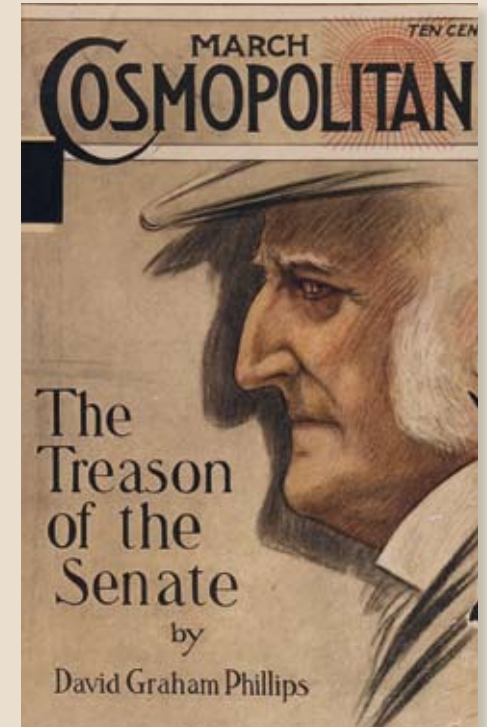
The “Treason” series placed the Senate at the center of a major drive by Progressive Era reformers to weaken the influence of large corporations and other major financial interests on government policy making. Direct popular election of senators fit perfectly with their campaign to bring government closer to the people.

As originally adopted, the Constitution provided for the election of senators by individual state legislatures. In the years following the Civil War, that system became increasingly subject to bribery, fraud, and deadlock. As Congress took on a greater role in shaping an industrializing nation, those with a major business stake in that development believed they could best exert their influence on the U.S. Senate by offering financial incentives to the state legislators who selected its members.

The campaign for direct election of senators took on new force in 1906, following conviction of two senators on corruption charges. Each had taken fees for interceding with federal agencies on behalf of business clients. The resulting negative publicity inspired publisher William Randolph Hearst, then a U.S. House member and owner of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, to commission popular novelist David Graham Phillips to prepare a series of investigative articles.

Making the point that large corporations and corrupt state legislators played too large a role in selection of senators, these articles doubled *Cosmopolitan*'s circulation within two months. Yet, Phillips' obvious reliance on innuendo and exaggeration soon earned him the scorn of other reformers. President Theodore Roosevelt saw in these charges a politically motivated effort by Hearst to discredit his administration, and coined the term “muckraker” to describe the Phillips brand of overstated and sensationalist journalism.

For several decades before publication of Phillips' series, certain southern senators had blocked the direct election amendment out of fear that it would increase the influence of African-American voters. By 1906, however, many southern states had enacted “Jim Crow” laws to undermine that influence. The Phillips series finally broke Senate resistance and opened the way for the amendment's ratification in 1913.



*Cast as a sinister-looking senator, New York's Chauncey Depew appeared on the cover of Cosmopolitan when “The Treason of the Senate” series began in 1906.*

### Further Reading

Phillips, David Graham. *The Treason of the Senate*. Edited with an introduction by George E. Mowry and Judson A. Grenier. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964.  
Ravitz, Abe C. *David Graham Phillips*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966.

April 19, 1906

## Senator La Follette Delivers Maiden Speech



*Robert La Follette, senator from Wisconsin (1906-1925).*

**B**enjamin Disraeli never forgot his first attempt to deliver a speech as a brand new member of the British House of Commons. It was, perhaps, a legislator's worst nightmare. As he began to speak, other members started laughing. The more he spoke, the harder they laughed. Finally, humiliated, he gave up and sat down. As his parting shot, this future prime minister pledged, "The time will come when you shall hear me."

From the Senate's earliest days, new members have observed a ritual of remaining silent during floor debates for a period of time—depending on the era and the senator—that ranged from several months to several years. Some believed that by waiting a respectful amount of time before giving their so-called maiden speech, their more senior colleagues would respect them for their humility.

On April 19, 1906, Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette was anything but humble. A 20-year veteran of public office, with service in the House and as his state's governor, he believed he had been elected to present a message that none of his more seasoned colleagues was inclined to deliver. La Follette waited just three months, an astoundingly brief period by the standards of that day, before launching his first major address. He spoke

for eight hours over three days; his remarks in the *Congressional Record* consumed 148 pages. As he began to speak, most of the senators present in the chamber pointedly rose from their desks and departed. La Follette's wife, observing from the gallery, wrote, "There was no mistaking that this was a polite form of hazing."

A year later, in 1907, Arkansas Senator Jeff Davis shocked Capitol Hill by waiting only nine days. The local press corps, keeping a count of such upstart behavior, noted that Davis was the fourth new senator in recent years who "refused to wait until his hair turned gray before taking up his work actively."

For most of the Senate's existence, the tradition of waiting several years before delivering a maiden speech has been more an ideal than reality. As one Senate insider explained, in this modern era of continuous and immediate news coverage, "the electorate wouldn't stand for it." The tradition, however, of paying attention to "maiden speeches," regardless of when they are delivered, remains important to senators, constituents, and home-state journalists.

### Further Reading

"Few in Senate Hear La Follette," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1906, 10.

"Nettled at Empty Seats," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1906, 4.

May 21, 1906

## High Court Upholds Senator's Conviction

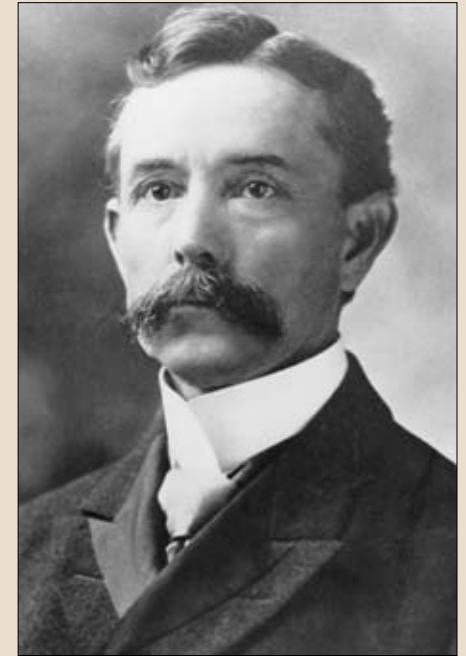
Daniel Webster had a great deal of trouble with his personal finances. While a senator, he maintained a busy law practice to supplement his congressional salary. On occasion, he took clients into the Senate Chamber to watch as he advocated their legislative interests. In the midst of a crucial 1833 battle to recharter the Bank of the United States, he reminded the bank's president that it was time for his retainer to be "refreshed."

In those days, before any formal prohibition on senatorial conflicts of interest, most of his Senate colleagues disdained Webster's blatant tactics, but a significant number saw nothing wrong with representing the interests of private clients before the federal agencies whose appropriations they controlled. By the time of the Civil War, however, the expansion of those appropriations and the federal government's growing regulatory role increased opportunities for corruption. Consequently, in 1864, Congress outlawed this practice and barred those found guilty from holding federal office.

In 1905, for the first and only time, two senators were convicted of violating the 1864 statute. Oregon's John Mitchell died as the Senate prepared expulsion proceedings. Kansas Senator Joseph Burton, found guilty of taking money to help a St. Louis company scuttle a U.S. Post Office mail fraud investigation, avoided Senate action pending his appeal.

On May 21, 1906, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Burton's conviction, but ruled that the 1864 law's bar against federal office holding did not automatically vacate his Senate seat or require the Senate to expel him. Only the Senate could determine its members' eligibility for continued service. Within days Burton resigned to begin a six-month prison term.

Several weeks earlier, a colorful and forthright Texas senator named Joseph Bailey expressed a view he believed common among other members. Speaking 63 years before the Senate adopted its first ethics code, he said, "I despise those [senators] who think they must remain poor to be considered honest. I am not one of them. If my constituents want a man who is willing to go to the poorhouse in his old age in order to stay in the Senate during his middle age, they will have to find another senator. I intend to make every dollar that I can honestly make, without neglecting or interfering with my public duty."



*Joseph Burton, senator from Kansas (1901-1906).*

### Further Reading

Baker, Richard Allan. "The History of Congressional Ethics." In *Representation and Responsibility: Exploring Legislative Ethics*, edited by Bruce Jennings and Daniel Callahan. New York: Plenum Press, 1985.



July 31, 1906

## Russell Building Cornerstone Laid

In April 1906, as workmen laid the cornerstone to what we know today as the Cannon House Office Building, President Theodore Roosevelt thrilled a large audience with a speech attacking muckraking journalists. That speech has since become a standard part of Roosevelt administration political folklore. Three months later, on the Senate side of Capitol Hill, a second cornerstone placement almost escaped public notice. On July 31, 1906, a handful of Senate employees, construction workers, and passers by watched as a crane operator lowered a large white block of Vermont marble into position. The highest-ranking official present, the Capitol superintendent, stood in the shade, fanning himself with a wide-brimmed Panama hat against the 90-degree heat.

Perhaps the Senate had good reason not to publicize its first office building. Three years later, on March 5, 1909, when the initial occupants moved into the grand Beaux Arts-style structure that is now designated the Richard Brevard Russell Senate Office Building,

newspaper editors blasted the opening with headlines such as “New Building Fitted Up Regardless of Expense.” Responding to a statement explaining that this was where senators’ business activity would take place, *The New York Times* began, “When in the course of human events it became necessary for these ninety-two business gentlemen to have business offices, they erected a building that a thousand men would feel lonesome in.” Noting its bronze ornamentation, mahogany furniture, gymnasium, telephone for each office, and running ice water, the same writer concluded, “It looks about as much like a prosaic business office building as a lady’s boudoir does.”

By today’s standards, the space the building offered seems modest. Each senator received only two rooms. The senator’s private office featured a fireplace, a large window, a double-kneehole “battleship” desk, six chairs, and a couch. The slightly smaller adjacent room housed the senator’s personal staff, which at that time generally consisted of one secretary and one messenger. The building also contained eight committee rooms and a large, ornate conference room for party caucus meetings. Unlike its fraternal House twin, the Senate structure originally had only three sides, with an open courtyard facing First Street. By the early 1930s, expanding legislative activities and staff resources justified the addition of a fourth side along First Street, with 28 additional office suites. That occasion passed without much journalistic notice—muckraking or otherwise.



*Laying the cornerstone  
of the Senate Office Building,  
July 31, 1906.*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics*, by William C. Allen. 106th Congress, 2d sess., 2001. S. Doc. 106-29.

April 12, 1907

## Woodrow Wilson's Changing Views of the Senate

In 1906, the president of Columbia University invited the president of Princeton University to deliver a series of lectures on American government. On April 12, 1907, Columbia students turned out to hear Princeton President Woodrow Wilson discuss the United States Senate.

In the 20 years since he had prepared his doctoral dissertation on Congress without ever visiting Congress, Wilson had gained considerable first-hand experience with the Senate. In 1907, he viewed the body with a spirit of cordiality and toleration. "There is no better cure for thinking disparagingly of the Senate than a conference with men who belong to it, to find out how various, how precise, how comprehensive their information about the affairs of the nation is; and to find, what is even more important, how fair, how discreet, how regardful of public interest they are."

Wilson noted sympathetically the "unmistakable condescension with which the older members of the Senate regard the President of the United States." Senior senators treat him "at most as an ephemeral phenomenon," because they have served longer than presidents and their "experience of affairs is much mellowed than the President's can be; [they look] at policies with steadier vision than the President's; the continuity of the

government lies in the keeping of the Senate more than in the keeping of the executive, even in respect to matters which are of the especial prerogative of the presidential office. A member of longstanding in the Senate feels that he is the professional, the President an amateur."

Over the following decade, conditioned by experience as governor of New Jersey and president of the United States, Wilson acquired a decidedly darker view of executive-legislative relations. In 1913, he denounced senators delaying a vote on a conference report as "a lot of old women." In 1917, those who filibustered armaments legislation were "a little group of willful men." In 1919, asked to accept reservations to the Treaty of Versailles offered by Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Henry Cabot Lodge, he said, "Never! I'll never consent to adopt any policy with which that impossible name is so prominently identified."

Never in American history was there a president better equipped by training and experience to work constructively with the Senate. Considering the tragic flaws of the Treaty of Versailles, never were there more serious consequences of his failure to do so.



Woodrow Wilson, circa 1902,  
as president of Princeton  
University.

### Further Reading

Wilson, Woodrow. *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885.

Wilson, Woodrow. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, edited by Arthur S. Link. 69 volumes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-1994.

August 4, 1908

## William Allison Dies

He sits watchfully at the entrance to the Senate Chamber. His world-weary eyes cautiously examine those who pass busily before him. His white hair and neatly trimmed beard give a sense of solemn gravity to this statesman of an age long past. When he died on August 4, 1908, 79-year-old William Boyd Allison, Republican of Iowa, had served in the Senate for 35 years—longer than any other member in history to that time. He spent his entire Senate career on the Appropriations Committee and chaired that panel for a quarter-century—a record for leading a Senate committee that is not ever likely to be broken. He also sat on the Finance Committee for 30 years and chaired the Senate Republican Conference for the final 12 years of his life.

William Allison's extraordinary Senate career began with a stinging political defeat. After losing a race for the post of county attorney in his native Ohio, Allison decided to leave the state in search of a climate more favorable to his political ambitions. He settled in Iowa, joined a small law firm in Dubuque, and built a successful record of defending the interests of the major railroads

vital to that region's economic development. That success assured him the financial backing necessary to pursue his public career. In 1873, after eight years in the U.S. House of Representatives, Allison moved to the Senate.

In the Senate, the dignified and unassuming Allison earned a reputation as a master conciliator and political moderate, successfully balancing the antagonistic interests of his state's farmers and railroads. He used his powerful committee assignments to forge and move to enactment legislation responsive to the leading issues of his day: tariff reform, currency stabilization, and railroad regulation.

A major national figure, the Iowa senator narrowly missed winning the Republican presidential nomination in 1888 and again in 1896. Happy to remain in the Senate, he turned aside offers to serve in the cabinets of that era's Republican presidents. Allison's death in 1908 brought an end to a decade in which he, with Republican senators Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island, Orville Platt of Connecticut, and John Spooner of Wisconsin, directed the Senate and shaped the laws of the nation.

Soon after Allison's death, the Senate purchased the oil portrait that now hangs in a place of honor to the right of the Senate Chamber entrance, a few paces from the Republican side of the center aisle.



*Known as the Senate Four, left to right, Orville H. Platt of Connecticut (1879-1905), John C. Spooner of Wisconsin (1885-1891, 1897-1907), William B. Allison of Iowa (1873-1908), and Nelson W. Aldrich of Rhode Island (1881-1911) informally led the Senate at the turn of the 20th century.*

### Further Reading

Sage, Leland L. *William Boyd Allison: A Study in Practical Politics*. Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1956.

April 27, 1911

## House Member Introduces Resolution to Abolish the Senate

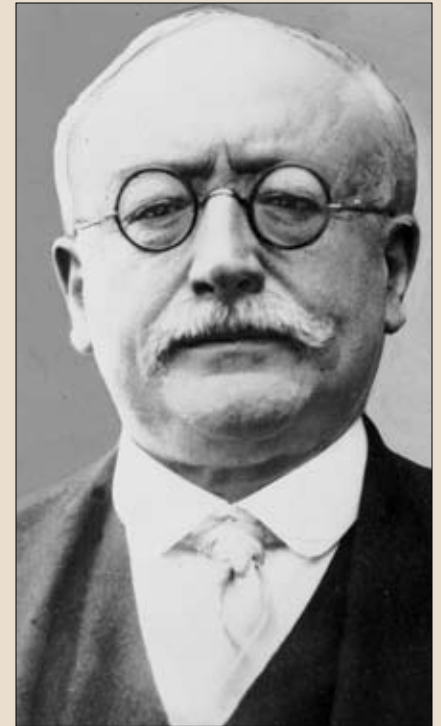
“**W**hereas the Senate in particular has become an obstructive and useless body, a menace to the liberties of the people, and an obstacle to social growth; a body, many of the Members of which are representatives neither of a State nor of its people, but solely of certain predatory combinations, and a body which, by reason of the corruption often attending the election of its Members, has furnished the gravest public scandals in the history of the nation. . . .”

This text formed the preamble to a constitutional amendment introduced in the House of Representatives on April 27, 1911, by that chamber’s first Socialist member, Victor Berger of Wisconsin. Continuing evidence of corrupted state legislative elections for U.S. senators and the Senate’s apparent reluctance to follow the House in passing a constitutional amendment to require direct popular election of its members inspired Berger’s resolution. It provided that all legislative powers be vested in the House of Representatives, whose “enactments . . . shall be the supreme law and the President shall have no power to veto them, nor shall any court have any power to invalidate them.”

In his brief time as a member, the Milwaukee Socialist had made more enemies than friends among his House colleagues, which may explain why many in that body jumped so quickly to the Senate’s defense with talk of enforcing the House ban against public criticism of the Senate.

As with nearly all of the more than 11,000 constitutional amendments proposed from 1789 to our own day, Berger’s proposal died silently in committee. Yet, less than seven weeks later, perhaps nudged by Berger’s gesture, the Senate approved its long-delayed direct-election resolution, which would soon be ratified as the Constitution’s 17th Amendment.

Berger left the House in 1913, but remained a prominent social critic. For speaking against U.S. participation in World War I, he was convicted under the Espionage Act and sentenced to 20 years in prison—a sentence that the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated in 1921. In 1918 he lost a three-way race for the Senate, while polling more than a quarter of the votes cast. Later that year, he won back his old House seat, but that body refused to seat him. Following the dismissal of his conviction, he won the next three House elections and served there from 1923 to 1929.



*Congressman Victor Berger  
of Wisconsin.*

### Further Reading

“Wants Senate Abolished,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1911, 8.

May 11, 1911

## Senate Deadlocked

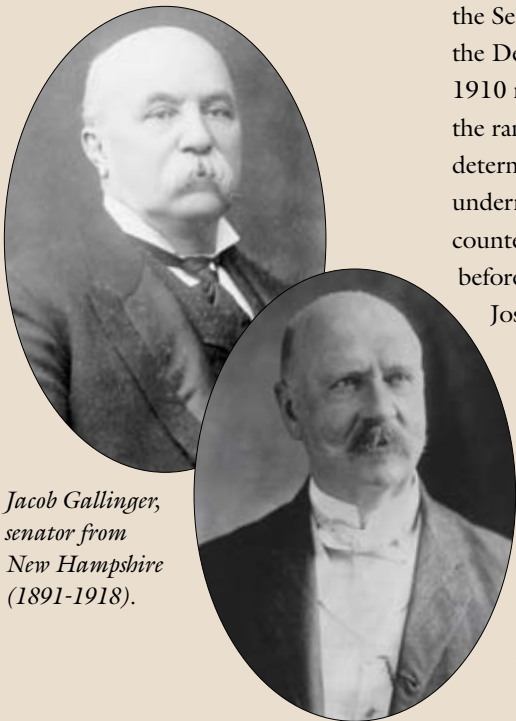
Soon after the Senate convened in April 1911, its members sensed they were witnessing the end of an era. Just a few years earlier, four senior Republicans had virtually ruled the Senate with the help of their party's two-to-one majority over the Democrats. Now, all four were gone. As a result of the recent 1910 mid-term elections, 10 new Democratic members bolstered the ranks of the minority. On the Republican side, a small but determined band of eight progressive insurgents worked to undermine their party's old-guard leadership much as their counterparts had done in the House of Representatives the year before in a successful revolt against the autocratic rule of Speaker Joseph Cannon.

Early in the session, illness forced the resignation of President pro tempore William Frye of Maine, another old-guard Republican. Frye had held that office for 15 of his 30 years in the Senate—a record that still stands. To replace him, the Senate Republican caucus nominated New Hampshire's Jacob Gallinger without dissenting votes. The insurgents, however, considered Gallinger one of the Senate's most reactionary members and were particularly angry because, as chairman of the party's

committee on committees, he had denied them choice assignments. They concealed their opposition to his election until the full Senate took up the nomination on May 11, 1911.

When the clerk announced the results of the vote, the majority party candidate Gallinger shockingly trailed Democratic caucus nominee Augustus Bacon of Georgia. With several other senators receiving smaller numbers of votes, neither caucus candidate gained an absolute majority. After conducting six additional and equally fruitless ballots that day, the Senate—in an acrimonious mood—recessed without making a selection.

They tried again the following week, the following month, and the month after that. Each time the deadlock continued, as the Democrats held firm behind Bacon, and the eight insurgents voted for other candidates. Finally, on August 12, as pressure mounted for a decision on statehood for Arizona and New Mexico, and members agitated to escape Washington's wilting heat, party leaders brokered a compromise. Under that plan, Democrat Bacon would alternate as president pro tempore for brief periods during the remainder of the Congress with Gallinger and three other Republicans. Over the previous 15 years, one man had held the largely honorary post; over the next 15 months, five would. A new era seemed at hand.



*Jacob Gallinger,  
senator from  
New Hampshire  
(1891-1918).*

*Augustus Bacon,  
senator from Georgia  
(1895-1914).*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *The Senate, 1789-1989*, Vol. 2, by Robert C. Byrd. 100th Congress, 1st sess., 1991. S. Doc.100-20. Chapter 6.

July 14, 1911

## The Senate Guarantees Tenure to Union Vet Employees

The Civil War took more casualties than all other American wars combined. Well into the 20th century, tens of thousands of disabled veterans throughout the nation bore witness to that conflict's horrible cost. Many of those veterans and their relatives thronged the Capitol's corridors in the postwar era desperately seeking support through government pensions or congressional jobs.

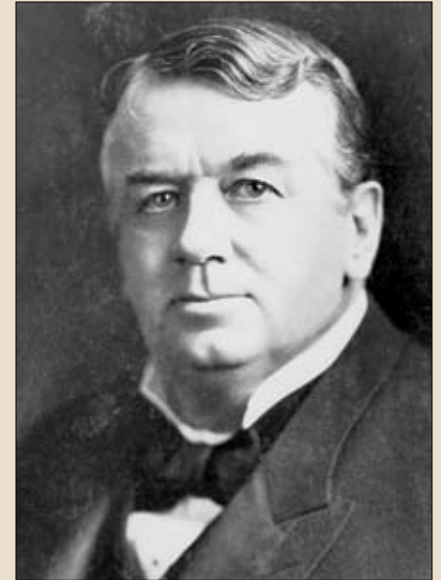
Up to the time of World War I, the Senate staff included Civil War veterans working as clerks, elevator operators, and doorkeepers. Predominately soldiers of the Union Army, most of these men owed their appointments to Republican senators, who controlled the Senate—and thus the majority of its patronage—for all but four years between 1861 and 1913.

In 1911, the Democratic Party won control of the House of Representatives and narrowed the Republican majority in the Senate. The prospect of a Democratic-controlled Senate by 1913 inspired Idaho Republican Weldon Heyburn to sponsor a resolution guaranteeing permanent tenure to all Union veterans still on the Senate payroll. One of the last senators to “wave the bloody shirt” of hostility to the former Confederacy, Heyburn had won national notoriety for opposing federal funding of Confederate monuments.

On July 14, 1911, the Senate unanimously adopted Heyburn's resolution.

Two years later, after they did win control of the Senate, the Democrats met to decide whether to rescind the Heyburn resolution as part of a larger review of Senate staffing allocations. From the minutes of Democratic caucus deliberations, first published in 1998, we learn of their concern, shared by Republicans, to protect productive workers and weed out malingers—regardless of party allegiance. We learn also of their desire to treat the Republican minority, in allocating patronage appointments, as the Republicans, over the years, had treated the Democratic minority.

Among the approximately 300 employees then on the Senate payroll, the majority caucus agreed to keep the 29 “old soldiers.” They reasoned that a repeal of the Heyburn Resolution would “arouse a hostile excitement which would not be justified by the results.” But the caucus also recommended that these aging veterans be reassigned to less challenging, lower-paid positions. By the standards of the times, this proved to be a politically suitable compromise—supporting veterans while reducing the Senate payroll.



*Weldon Heyburn, senator from Idaho (1903-1912).*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Minutes of the Senate Republican Conference, 1911-1964*, edited by Wendy Wolff and Donald A. Ritchie. 105th Congress, 1999. S. Doc. 105-19.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Minutes of the Senate Democratic Conference, 1903-1964*, edited by Donald A. Ritchie. 105th Congress, 1998. S. Doc. 105-20.

July 13, 1912

## Senator Ousted

In 1873 Senator Samuel Pomeroy invited a state legislator for a midnight meeting in his hotel suite. There he handed him \$7,000 to secure his vote in the upcoming state legislative balloting for reelection to the U.S. Senate. The legislator called a press conference, confessed to setting up Pomeroy for a

bribery charge, displayed the cash, and ended a Senate career. Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner included a thinly disguised version of this widely publicized story in their 1873 novel *The Gilded Age*.

Over the next 40 years, charges of bribery were heard with increasing frequency as state legislatures struggled with their constitutional responsibility to elect U.S. senators. In 1890, Senate President pro tempore John Ingalls captured the rough-and-tumble spirit of those contests. “The purification of politics,” he growled, “is an iridescent dream. Politics is the battle for supremacy. The Decalogue and the Golden Rule have no place in a political campaign. The object is success.”

William Lorimer sympathized with Ingalls’ famous remark as he won his Senate seat in 1909 following a lengthy and acrimonious deadlock in the Illinois legislature. Nearly a year into

his term, Lorimer asked the Senate to investigate charges by the *Chicago Tribune* that he had obtained his seat through bribery and corruption. A Senate committee noted the Senate’s practice of invalidating elections only if the accused senator had actively promoted the bribery and concluded that under such a standard Lorimer had done nothing wrong. After a rancorous six-week debate and despite considerable evidence against Lorimer, the Senate in March 1911 dropped the case. The resulting storm of public outrage, combined with an infusion of recently elected progressive-minded members, led the Senate on June 12, 1911, to approve a long-pending constitutional amendment providing for direct popular election of senators.

A week before the Senate vote on the constitutional amendment, additional public charges against Lorimer led the upper house to reopen his case. After hearing from 180 witnesses over the following year, a committee majority again found no clear trail of corruption. The full Senate, however, decided differently. On July 13, 1912, with the direct election amendment on its way to state ratification, the Senate declared Lorimer’s 1909 election invalid. This action closed a major chapter in Senate history and accorded Lorimer the dubious distinction of being the last senator to be deprived of office for corrupting a state legislature.



This cartoon reflects public sentiment against Senator William Lorimer of Illinois (1909-1912).

### Further Reading

Tarr, Joel A. *A Study in Boss Politics: William Lorimer of Chicago*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *United States Senate Election, Expulsion and Censure Cases, 1793-1990*, by Anne M. Butler and Wendy Wolff. 103d Cong., 1st sess., 1995. S. Doc. 103-33.

January 28, 1913

## Key Pittman Barely Elected

This Nevada Democrat barely made it to the Senate. On January 28, 1913, Key Pittman won a seat by a mere 89 votes. (In 1948, a Texas Democrat would become known as “Landslide Lyndon” for winning a Senate primary by 87 votes and in a 1964 Nevada general election Howard Cannon defeated Paul Laxalt by 84 votes.) Setting another record in that 1913 election, Pittman gained his seat by attracting a total of only 7,942 votes—the smallest number by which a U.S. Senate candidate has ever entered office. Key Pittman’s election is noteworthy for a third reason. He won by a popular vote at a time when the Constitution still required state legislatures to elect senators. How was that possible?

By the second half of the 19th century, the state legislative election system had proven increasingly susceptible to deadlock and corruption. In the 1890s, the House of Representatives repeatedly passed constitutional amendments for direct popular election, only to see them die in the Senate. Early in the new century, more than half the states devised election systems that included a popular referendum for senators and a pledge by state legislative candidates to vote according to the referendum’s results. Nevada operated under such a system. In 1910, that

state’s voters had narrowly endorsed the Republican Senate incumbent. Although Democrats had regained control of the state legislature when it convened in 1911, they followed the will of the voters and awarded the seat to the Republican. He died soon thereafter, opening the way for Key Pittman to win the special election in 1912—the year the Senate finally agreed to a direct election amendment.

When the Nevada legislature met in January 1913, four months before the 17th Amendment’s ratification, it formalized Pittman’s slim popular-vote victory. Pittman went on to a colorful and productive 27-year Senate career. As one biographer notes, he “won advantages for his constituency by clever use of difficult domestic and foreign situations . . . [and by masterfully manipulating] amendments, riders, and especially conference committee compromises.”



*1918 photograph of Key Pittman, senator from Nevada (1913-1940).*

### Further Reading

Glad, Betty. *Key Pittman: The Tragedy of a Senate Insider*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.



March 15, 1913

## Senate Banking Committee Established

Until 1913, the Senate operated without a banking committee. Unlike the House of Representatives, which had created its own banking panel in 1865, the Senate chose to refer banking and currency legislation to its Committee on Finance. When the Senate finally made its move

on March 15, 1913, the two most responsible forces were Oklahoma Senator Robert Owen and that year's pending Federal Reserve Act.

Six years earlier, in 1907, Robert Owen had become one of Oklahoma's first two senators and, with Charles Curtis of Kansas, one of the Senate's first two members of Native American descent.

In his early 20s, Owen had moved with his mother from his native Virginia to live with her family in the Indian Territory's Cherokee Nation. He earned a law degree in the 1880s, became a federal Indian agent, and helped secure citizen-

ship for residents of the Indian Territory, located adjacent to the Oklahoma Territory. He also successfully lobbied Congress to extend the provisions of the National Banking Act to the Indian Territory and organized a bank in Muskogee in 1890.

Owen was a natural choice to become one of Oklahoma's first senators. A Progressive Democrat, he focused on national banking policy. Owen was particularly interested in creating an elastic system of currency to help the nation absorb the shock of financial panics such as the one that had occurred during his first year in the Senate.

Over the six years following the 1907 economic crisis, leaders in both houses of Congress became convinced of the need for a system to prevent a few large New York banks from controlling the vast majority of the nation's financial assets. A February 1913 House report on this dangerous concentration of wealth and influence finally led the Senate to conclude that it needed the full-time expertise of a separate committee on banking.

When Congress convened under Democratic control in March 1913, with a newly inaugurated Democratic president in the White House, pressures built for passage of legislation to create the Federal Reserve System. As a tireless sponsor of that legislation, Robert Owen became the new Senate Banking Committee's first chairman. With the aid of his House counterpart and President Woodrow Wilson, Owen overcame powerful opposing forces to secure passage of the Federal Reserve Act. His major substantive contribution to that act was its provision that the United States government rather than the banks would control the Federal Reserve Board.



*Members of the Senate Banking Committee, circa 1913.*

### Further Reading

Brown, Kenny L. "A Progressive from Oklahoma: Senator Robert Latham Owen, Jr." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 62 (Fall 1984): 232-65.

May 28, 1913

## Senators Require a Whip

Soon after Democrats took control of the Senate in 1913, they began to suffer from poor attendance at their party caucus meetings. Party leaders had decided to make key decisions on the Democratic administration's legislative priority—tariff reduction—in caucus rather than in the Finance Committee. This would allow Democrats to achieve a party position on politically sensitive tariff rates before confronting the Republican minority. Poor caucus attendance by those favoring tariff reduction, however, gave greater weight to Louisiana's two Democrats who vigorously supported high protective tariffs on imported sugar. Additional defections would have risked letting these senators significantly undermine the party's commitment to lower tariffs.

On May 28, 1913, the Democratic caucus convened with only 33 of its 50 members present. It unanimously adopted a resolution requesting regular attendance of all members. To enforce that agreement, the caucus then created the post of party whip. In doing so, they followed the example of both parties in the House of Representatives. Two years later, Senate Republicans also added the position of party whip to promote floor as well as caucus attendance.

As their first whip, Democrats chose a member with less than two months' service—Illinois Senator James Hamilton Lewis. Those who encountered “Ham” Lewis never forgot his elegant, courteous, and somewhat eccentric manner. Noted for his flowing red hair and carefully parted pink whiskers, he dressed in perfectly tailored clothes, wore beribboned eye glasses, carried a walking stick, and sprinkled his conversation with literary references.

Lewis lost his reelection bid in 1918 to publisher Medill McCormick, but he returned 14 years later, after defeating McCormick's widow, Ruth. When the Democratic whip's position fell vacant in 1933, as Senate Democrats again returned to the majority after an extended season in the minority, they elected Lewis to that post. Following his death in 1939, the Senate accepted a portrait of its first whip and later placed it near the chamber's entrance—perhaps to inspire senators of succeeding generations to timely attendance.



*James Hamilton Lewis,  
senator from Illinois (1913-1919,  
1931-1939).*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *The Senate, 1789-1989*, Vol. 2, by Robert C. Byrd. 100th Congress, 1st sess., 1991. S. Doc.100-20. Chapter 8.

June 2, 1913

## Senators Disclose Finances

On May 26, 1913, newly inaugurated President Woodrow Wilson warned the nation of the “extraordinary exertions” that lobbyists were making to kill his tariff reform legislation. Washington, he observed, “has seldom seen so numerous, so industrious, or so insidious a lobby.



*This cartoon depicts Woodrow Wilson cutting into the Capitol dome with a knife labeled “lobby investigation,” releasing birds labeled “lobbyists.”*

It is of serious interest to the country that the people at large should have no lobby and be voiceless in these matters, while great bodies of astute men seek to create an artificial opinion and to overcome the interests of the public for their private profit.”

For the first time in 18 years, Democrats controlled both houses of Congress and the White House. President Wilson had made tariff reduction his top legislative priority. When the House easily approved the administration’s bill, opponents believed they could stop it in the Senate, where Democrats held only a three-vote majority. This triggered the fierce lobbying campaign that so alarmed the president.

Within a week of the president’s warning, on June 2, 1913, the Senate launched a formal investigation of the president’s charges, instructing the Judiciary Committee “to report within ten days the names of all lobbyists attempting to influence such pending legislation and the methods which they have employed to accomplish their ends.”

In its first 20th-century step toward public financial disclosure, the Senate required all of its members to explain under oath whether they had assets that might benefit from passage of any currently pending legislation. For six days, from morning to late evening, senators in groups of four paraded before a special Judiciary subcommittee to answer 11 prearranged questions. Humor and irony enriched their responses as members denied any dealings with “insidious” lobbyists. While the subcommittee struggled to define a “lobbyist,” insidious or otherwise, Republicans joked that they had found one in President Wilson. Why not subpoena him to explain rumors that he planned to deny presidential patronage to Democrats who voted against the administration?

Proving that there is nothing so easy to start, or so difficult to end, as a congressional investigation, the “lobby committee” moved quickly from media frenzy to quiet obscurity, as it shifted its attention from 96 senators to scores of lobbyists in the weeks ahead. Although no “improper influences” were discovered, by temporarily weakening lobbying pressures on senators, this unique investigation gave Woodrow Wilson his first important legislative victory when Congress enacted the lower tariff rates he had championed.

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. *Maintenance of a Lobby to Influence Legislation*. Hearings before a Subcommittee, 63rd Cong., 1st sess. (1913).

# March 9, 1914

## Smoking Ban

On March 9, 1914, the Senate unanimously agreed to ban smoking in its chamber. Although senators never smoked in the chamber during public sessions, they happily brought out their cigars whenever the Senate went into executive session to consider nominations and treaties. During most executive sessions, until 1929, doorkeepers cleared the galleries and locked the doors. No longer on public display, members removed their ties and jackets, and lit their cigars. In this relaxed setting, senators more readily resolved their differences over controversial nominees and complex treaties.

In 1914, South Carolina Democrat Benjamin Tillman was one of the Senate's most senior members. Always a controversial figure, Tillman was best remembered for a speech at the 1896 Democratic National Convention in which he prodded President Grover Cleveland to adopt policies that would aid economically strapped farmers of the South. Otherwise, he promised, he would go to the White House and "poke old Grover with a pitchfork." For the rest of his colorful career, the fiery South Carolina senator would be known as "Pitchfork Ben."

After 1910, however, a series of strokes slowed his pace. His precarious medical condition led him to try various unconventional health regimens. They included deep breathing, drinking a gallon of water each day, a vegetarian diet, and avoidance of tobacco.

Concerned for his own well being, along with that of his colleagues, in the often smoke-filled chamber that he likened to a "beer garden," Tillman introduced a resolution to ban smoking there. Noting the high death rate among incumbent senators—within the previous four years 14 had died, along with the vice president and sergeant at arms—he surveyed all members. Non-smokers responded that they would like to support him, but worried that their smoking colleagues would consider this a selfish gesture.

The majority of smokers, however, responded in the Senate's best collegial tradition. They saw no reason why an old and sick senator should be driven from the chamber, his state deprived of its full and active representation, merely for the gratification of "a very great pleasure." In this spirit, the Senate adopted Tillman's resolution.

Following his death four years later, the Senate kept the restriction in force. The language of the Senate rule was drafted broadly. It prohibits not only the actual act of smoking, but also—perhaps to avoid the temptation to sneak a puff—the carrying into the chamber of "lighted cigars, cigarettes, or pipes."



*Benjamin Tillman, senator from South Carolina (1895-1918).*

### Further Reading

Simkins, Francis Butler. *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944.

July 2, 1915

## Bomb Rocks the Capitol

A solitary figure slipped quietly into the Capitol on the Friday afternoon leading to a Fourth of July weekend. He cradled a small package containing three sticks of dynamite. The former professor of German at Harvard University, Erich Muentzer, also known as Frank Holt, came to Washington

to deliver an explosive message. Although the Senate had been out of session since the previous March and was not due to reconvene until December, Muentzer headed for the Senate Chamber. Finding the chamber doors locked, he decided that the adjacent Senate Reception Room would serve his purposes. He worked quickly, placing his deadly package under the Senate's telephone switchboard, whose operator had left for the holiday weekend. After setting the timing mechanism for a few minutes before midnight to minimize casualties, he walked to Union Station and purchased a ticket for the midnight train to New York City.

At 20 minutes before midnight, as he watched from the station, a thunderous explosion rocked the Capitol. The blast nearly knocked Capitol police officer Frank Jones from his chair at the Senate wing's east front entrance.

Ten minutes earlier, the lucky Jones had closed a window next to the switchboard. A 30-year police veteran, the officer harbored a common fear that one day the Capitol dome would fall into the

rotunda. For a few frantic moments, he believed that day had come. Jones then entered the Reception Room and observed its devastation—a shattered mirror, broken window glass, smashed chandeliers, and pulverized plaster from the frescoed ceiling.

In a letter to the *Washington Evening Star*, published after the blast, Muentzer attempted to explain his outrageous act. Writing under an assumed name, he hoped that the detonation would “make enough noise to be heard above the voices that clamor for war. This explosion is an exclamation point in my appeal for peace.” The former German professor was particularly angry with American financiers who were aiding Great Britain against Germany in World War I, despite this country's official neutrality in that conflict.

Arriving in New York City early the next morning, Muentzer headed for the Long Island estate of J. P. Morgan, Jr. Morgan's company served as Great Britain's principal U.S. purchasing agent for munitions and other war supplies. When Morgan came to the door, Muentzer pulled a pistol, shot him, and fled. The financier's wounds proved superficial and the gunman was soon captured. In jail, several days later, Muentzer took his own life.



*Erich Muentzer, a.k.a. Frank Holt, after his capture in New York.*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics*, by William C. Allen. 106th Congress, 2d sess., 2001. S. Doc. 106-29.

# March 8, 1917

## Cloture Rule

Woodrow Wilson considered himself an expert on Congress—the subject of his 1884 doctoral dissertation. When he became president in 1913, he announced his plans to be a legislator-in-chief and requested that the President’s Room in the Capitol be made ready for his weekly consultations with committee chairmen. For a few months, Wilson kept to that plan. Soon, however, traditional legislative-executive branch antagonisms began to tarnish his optimism. After passing major tariff, trade, and banking legislation in the first two years of his administration, Congress slowed its pace.

By 1915, the Senate had become a breeding ground for filibusters. In the final weeks of the Congress that ended on March 4, one administration measure related to the war in Europe tied the Senate up for 33 days and blocked passage of three major appropriations bills. Two years later, as pressure increased for American entry into that war, a 23-day, end-of-session filibuster against the president’s proposal to arm merchant ships also failed, taking with it much other essential legislation. For the previous 40 years, efforts in the Senate to pass a debate-limiting cloture rule had come to nothing. Now, in the wartime crisis environment, President Wilson lost his patience.

Decades earlier, he had written in his doctoral dissertation, “It is the proper duty of a representative body to look diligently into every affair of government and to talk much about what it sees.” On March 4, 1917, as the 64th Congress expired without completing its work, Wilson held a decidedly different view. Calling the situation unparalleled, he stormed that the “Senate of the United States is the only legislative body in the world which cannot act when its majority is ready for action. A little group of willful men, representing no opinion but their own, have rendered the great government of the United States helpless and contemptible.” The Senate, he demanded, must adopt a cloture rule.

On March 8, 1917, in a specially called session of the 65th Congress, the Senate agreed to a rule that essentially preserved its tradition of unlimited debate. The rule required a two-thirds majority to end debate and permitted each member to speak for an additional hour after that before voting on final passage. Over the next 46 years, the Senate managed to invoke cloture on only five occasions.



*The President’s Room in the U.S. Capitol, where President Wilson hoped to meet weekly with committee chairmen.*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *The Senate, 1789-1989*, by Robert C. Byrd, Vol. 2. 100th Congress, 1st sess., 1991. S. Doc.100-20. Chapter 5.

April 2, 1917

## A Senator Attacks a Constituent

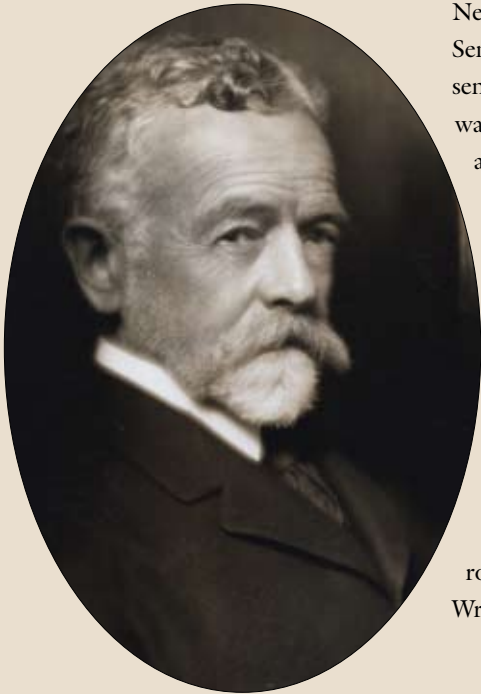
On rare occasions throughout the Senate's history, frustrated constituents have physically attacked senators. In 1921, a man bearing a grudge about a Nevada land deal entered the Russell Building office of Nevada Senator Charles Henderson. He calmly pulled a pistol, shot the senator in the wrist, and then meekly surrendered. Henderson was not seriously hurt. In 1947, a former Capitol policeman fired a small pistol at his Senate patron, John Bricker, as the Ohio senator boarded a Senate subway car. Neither of the two shots hit Bricker, who had crouched down in the car and ordered the operator to "step on it."

There have also been rare instances of physical violence between senators. In 1902, South Carolina Senator Ben Tillman landed a blow to the face of his home-state colleague John McLaurin after the latter senator questioned his motives and integrity (see "Senate Fistfight," February 22, 1902). In 1964, South Carolina's Strom Thurmond engaged in a wrestling match outside a committee meeting room with his Texas colleague Ralph Yarborough (see "Senators Wrestle to Settle Nomination," July 9, 1964).

But only once, as far as we know, has a senator attacked a constituent. On April 2, 1917, a minor-league baseball player from Boston named Alexander Bannwart and two other antiwar demonstrators visited Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge in his Capitol office. They had come to protest President Woodrow Wilson's request for a congressional declaration of war against Germany. They sought out Lodge because he was their senator and an influential member of the committees on Foreign Relations and Naval Affairs.

Four Boston newspapers carried accounts of that confrontation, and the accounts differed according to the respective papers' attitudes about Lodge, the war, and baseball players. They agreed only that there was an angry exchange of the words "coward" and "liar." As tempers flared and shoving began, the 67-year-old senator struck the 36-year-old ball player in the jaw. Capitol police quickly arrested the visitor.

Hours later, the senator announced that he was too busy to press charges against his constituent. And two days later, on April 4, 1917, Lodge joined the majority of his colleagues in a vote of 82 to 6 to enter World War I. Caught up in the surging tide of patriotic spirit, the constituent announced that he had changed his mind about the war and he marched off to enlist.



*Henry Cabot Lodge,  
senator from Massachusetts  
(1893-1924).*

### Further Reading

Garraty, John A. *Henry Cabot Lodge*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.

October 6, 1917

## La Follette Defends “Free Speech in Wartime”

With only 26 hours remaining in the life of the 64th Congress on March 3, 1917, Progressive Republican Senator Robert La Follette of Wisconsin launched a filibuster. At issue was whether the Senate would pass House-approved legislation to arm merchant ships against a renewed campaign of German submarine attacks. Seeing passage of this measure as taking the nation closer to intervening in World War I, La Follette sought a national referendum to demonstrate his belief that most Americans opposed that course.

A dozen senators who agreed with La Follette’s tactic spoke around the clock until 9:30 on the morning of March 4. When La Follette rose to deliver the concluding remarks, the presiding officer recognized only those who opposed the filibuster. The Wisconsin insurgent erupted with white-hot rage and screamed for recognition. While Democrats swarmed around the furious senator to prevent him from hurling a brass spittoon at the presiding officer, Oregon Senator Harry Lane spotted a pistol under the coat of Kentucky Senator Ollie James. Lane quickly decided that if James reached for the weapon, he would attack him with a steel blade that he carried in his pocket. While La Follette dared anyone to carry him off the floor, the Senate ordered him to take his seat. He then blocked a series of unanimous consent agreements to take up the bill, which died at noon with the 64th Congress.

Weeks later, only six senators, including La Follette, voted against the declaration of war. As he continued to speak out against U.S. involvement, a Senate colleague called him “a pusillanimous, degenerate coward.”

Following a September 20 speech, which La Follette delivered extemporaneously in Minnesota, a hostile press misquoted La Follette as supporting Germany’s sinking of the *Lusitania*. His state legislature condemned him for treason. In the Senate, members introduced resolutions of expulsion.

On October 6, 1917, in response to these charges, La Follette delivered the most famous address of his Senate career—a classic defense of the right to free speech in times of war. Although this three-hour address won him many admirers, it also launched a Senate investigation into possible treasonable conduct.

Early in 1919, as the end of hostilities calmed the heightened wartime emotions, the Senate dismissed the pending expulsion resolutions and paid La Follette’s legal expenses. Forty years later, when the Senate named five of its most outstanding former members, the honored group included Robert M. La Follette.



*This cartoon shows Senator John Williams of Mississippi charging Senator Robert La Follette of Wisconsin with making a disloyal speech—a reference to a speech La Follette had given on September 20, 1917, in Minnesota.*

### Further Reading

U.S. Congress. Senate. *The Senate, 1789-1989*, Vol. 3: *Classic Speeches, 1830-1993*, by Robert C. Byrd. 100th Congress, 1st sess., 1994. S. Doc.100-20. Chapter 26.



# September 30, 1918

## A Vote for Women

**O**n the morning of September 30, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson hoped that his trip to Capitol Hill would change the course of American history. In a 15-minute address to the Senate, he urged members to adopt a constitutional amendment giving American women the right to vote. The House of Representatives had approved the amendment months earlier, but Senate vote counters predicted that without the president's help, they would miss the required two-thirds majority by two votes.

Until the end of the Civil War, nearly every state prohibited women from voting. The 1868 and 1870 ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments, which provided voting rights for African-American men, spurred women's rights advocates to seek a women's suffrage amendment.

The first such amendment was offered in the Senate in 1868, but it got nowhere. Ten

years later, the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections held hearings on a renewed proposal. As suffragists pled their cause in the packed hearing room, committee members rudely read newspapers, or stared at the ceiling. Then they rejected the amendment.

In 1882, as pressure mounted, the Senate appointed a Select Committee on Woman Suffrage, which favorably reported the amendment. Opposition forces, including a solid bloc of southern senators, derailed that proposal, and the many that followed, because of their concern that it would extend voting rights to African-American women. Others worried that newly enfranchised women temperance advocates would use their votes to outlaw the sale of alcoholic beverages.

By 1912, the number of states that allowed women to vote had risen to nine—mostly in the West. In January 1913, a delegation of suffragists presented to the Senate petitions signed by 200,000 Americans.

By 1918, President Wilson had dropped his previously indifferent attitude and fully supported the constitutional amendment. In his September 30th speech to the Senate, he cited the role of women in supporting the nation's involvement in World War I. "We have made partners of the women in this war," he said. "Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil, and not to a partnership of privilege and right?" Despite his oratory, the president failed to pry loose the needed two votes and the amendment again died.

Finally, in 1919, a new Congress brought an increase in the ranks of the amendment's supporters, permitting adoption of what would become the Constitution's 19th Amendment—52 years after it was first introduced in the Senate.



*Suffragists parading in New York City with a banner reading, "President Wilson favors votes for women."*

### Further Reading

Flexner, Eleanor. *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996.

November 5, 1918

## Jeannette Rankin Runs for the Senate

No history of American representative government could properly be written without a major reference to Representative Jeannette Rankin. The Montana Republican carries the distinction of being the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress. That singular event occurred in 1916. A year later, she earned a second distinction by joining 49 of her House colleagues in voting against U.S. entry into World War I. That vote destroyed her prospects for reelection in 1918.

Over the next 20 years, Rankin tirelessly campaigned for world peace. In 1940, riding a tide of isolationism, she won her second term in the House. The December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor put an end to isolationism, but Rankin remained true to her anti-war beliefs, becoming the only member of Congress to vote against declaring war against Japan.

What is less well known about Jeannette Rankin is that she was the first woman to organize a major campaign for a seat in the U.S. Senate. After her 1917 vote opposing World War I, she knew she stood no chance of winning a seat in a congressional district that the state legislature had recently reshaped with a Democratic majority. Instead, she placed her hopes for continuing her congressional career on being able to run state-wide as a candidate for the Senate. Narrowly defeated in the Republican primary, she launched a third-party campaign for the general election.

Although unsuccessful in her 1918 Senate race, Rankin helped destroy negative public attitudes about women as members of Congress. During her second House term in 1941, she served with six other women members, including Maine's Margaret Chase Smith. Those members carefully avoided making an issue of their gender. Rankin agreed with a colleague's famous comment, "I'm no lady. I'm a member of Congress."

Rankin and Margaret Smith followed separate paths. One promoted pacifism; the other advocated military preparedness. Rankin respected Smith as the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress. Shortly before Rankin's death in 1973, however, prospects for women in the Senate looked bleak. Margaret Smith had lost her bid for a fifth term. During the next six years, no woman served in the Senate, and not until 1992 would more than two serve simultaneously.

Three-quarters of a century separated Rankin's 1918 Senate campaign from that 1992 turning point. Since then, the slowly increasing number of women members has become the norm rather than the exception.



*Jeannette Rankin became the first woman to organize a major campaign for a seat in the U.S. Senate.*

### Further Reading

Smith, Norma. *Jeannette Rankin: America's Conscience*. Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2002.

November 19, 1919

## A Bitter Rejection

When members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee learned of former President Woodrow Wilson's death in 1924, they asked their chairman, Henry Cabot Lodge, to represent them at the funeral. Informed of this plan, the president's widow sent Lodge the following note: "Realizing that your presence would be embarrassing to you and unwelcome to me, I write to request that you do not attend."

Democrat Wilson and Republican Lodge had disliked one another for years. Among the first to earn doctoral degrees from the nation's newly established graduate schools, each man considered himself the country's preeminent scholar in politics and scorned the other.

The emergency of World War I intensified their rivalry. By 1918, Wilson had been president for nearly six years, while Lodge had represented Massachusetts in the Senate for a quarter century. Both considered them-

selves experts in international affairs. In setting policy for ending the war, Wilson, the idealist, sought a "peace without victory," while Lodge, the realist, demanded Germany's unconditional surrender.

When the 1918 midterm congressional elections transferred control of the Senate from the Democrats to the Republicans, Lodge became both majority leader and Foreign Relations Committee chairman. Whether Wilson liked it or not, he needed Lodge's active support to ensure Senate approval of the Treaty of Versailles and its provision for a League of Nations on which he had staked so much of his political prestige.

Wilson chose to ignore Lodge. He offended the Senate by refusing to include senators among the negotiators accompanying him to the Paris Peace Conference and by making conference results public before discussing them with committee members. In a flash of anger against what he considered Senate interference, Wilson denounced Lodge and his allies as "contemptible, narrow, selfish, poor little minds that never get anywhere but run around in a circle and think they are going somewhere."

After Lodge's committee added numerous "reservations" and amendments to the treaty, the frustrated president took his campaign to the nation. During a cross-country tour in October 1919, he suffered a physical collapse that further clouded his political judgment.

In November, Lodge sent to the Senate floor a treaty with 14 reservations, but no amendments. In the face of Wilson's continued unwillingness to negotiate, the Senate on November 19, 1919, for the first time in its history, rejected a peace treaty.



*This Clifford Berryman cartoon, published on September 5, 1919, depicts Henry Cabot Lodge, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, escorting the battered Treaty of Versailles out of a room labeled, "Operating Room, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations."*

### Further Reading

Cooper, John Milton, Jr. *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

January 15, 1920

## Democratic Leadership Deadlock

The death of Senate Democratic Leader Thomas Martin in November 1919 touched off a battle among Senate Democrats that revealed a deeply divided party. A year earlier, the midterm congressional elections had ended six years of Democratic control in the Senate, giving the Republicans a two-vote majority. A week after Martin's death, the Senate rejected President Woodrow Wilson's plan for U.S. participation in the League of Nations by refusing its consent to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. When acting Democratic leader Gilbert Hitchcock visited the White House to discuss a plan to revive the treaty, the bitter president—partially paralyzed following a stroke weeks earlier—refused to see him.

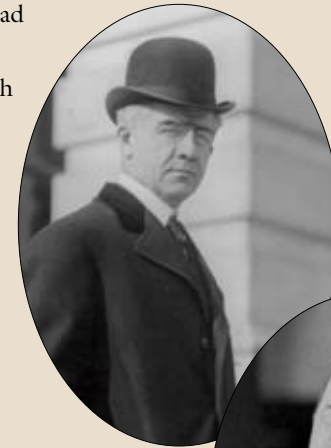
Leaders of both parties wanted the treaty issue resolved so that it would not dominate the 1920 presidential election. With World War I at an end, the American public was losing interest in the treaty controversy and became more focused on domestic issues. Hitchcock eventually gained access to the White House and, with other Senate Democrats, urged the president to soften his opposition in order to salvage the treaty.

In this super-charged political environment, members of the Senate Democratic caucus met on January 15, 1920, to elect a new floor leader. Preliminary headcounts indicated that the two

candidates—Hitchcock of Nebraska and Oscar Underwood of Alabama—each had 19 supporters. To break this deadlock, Underwood's allies sought a ruling that would allow Treasury Secretary Carter Glass to vote. The governor of Virginia had recently appointed Glass to fill Martin's seat but Glass was not immediately free to leave the cabinet. Sensing that such an arrangement would taint his claim to the leadership, Underwood agreed to postpone the election for several months.

This situation further aggravated the treaty fight and deepened ill feelings among the Democrats. Lacking the status of elected floor leader, neither Hitchcock nor Underwood was in a position to unite the party to forge a compromise.

This stalemate produced a second defeat for the treaty in March 1920. By the time the Democratic caucus assembled in April to choose its leader, Hitchcock had tired of the battle. He withdrew in favor of Underwood, who won by acclamation. Secretary of State Robert Lansing knew both men well and offered an assessment that may have explained Underwood's victory. "Hitchcock will obey orders. Underwood prefers to give them. One is a lieutenant, the other a commander."



*Gilbert Hitchcock, senator from Nebraska (1911-1923).*



*Oscar Underwood, senator from Alabama (1915-1927).*

### Further Reading

Cooper, John Milton, Jr. *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

May 12, 1920

## Spring Comes to the Senate

In recent times, the Senate has noted the arrival of spring with a poetic speech of welcome by Senator Robert C. Byrd. While Senator Byrd faithfully follows the calendar, senators in the early 20th century heralded that season by following the habits of a junior senator from Colorado named Charles Thomas.

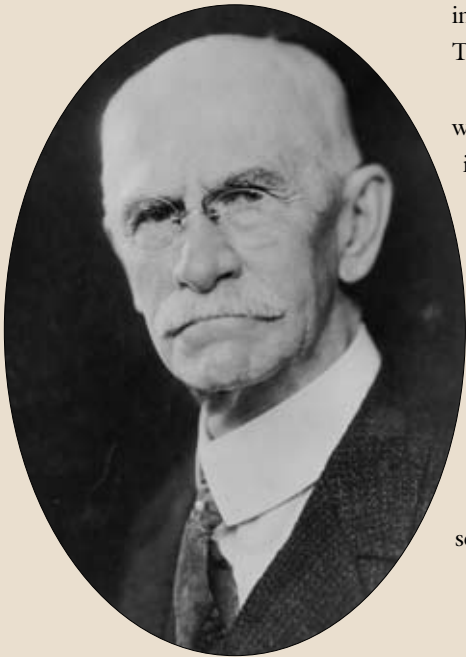
A native of Georgia, Thomas had moved in 1871 to Colorado where he built a successful practice as an attorney for lead mining interests. Although he became chairman of the Colorado Democratic party, Thomas' acerbic manner and unconventional views frustrated his highest political ambition: a seat in the United States Senate. Refusing to be discouraged, he ran in three contests over a period of 24 years, losing each one. Finally, in 1913, at the age of 63, he achieved his goal.

When Thomas reached Washington in January, his new colleagues took note of his rich, full head of hair. Then, several months later, as the month of April brought the year's first spring-like weather, Thomas did something that shocked many senators. He appeared in the Senate quite bald.

As a young man, Thomas had become prematurely bald. Sensitive to cold drafts, he donned a lush toupee during winter months, retiring the headpiece when the weather turned warm. On what he considered the right day in April 1913, Thomas packed his toupee in mothballs and headed off to work. When he reached the Senate Chamber, a doorkeeper blocked his way, explaining that only senators were allowed inside. Thomas responded, "But my friend, I have a right here. I am Senator Thomas of Colorado." "No sir, you couldn't be," said the doorkeeper. "Senator Thomas has a wonderful head of hair." At that moment, Thomas spied his state's other senator, who readily vouched for him.

As Thomas entered the chamber, Illinois Senator J. Hamilton Lewis rose to call attention to an event on a par with the sighting of the first robin of spring. Others joined in, establishing a tradition that lasted for the remainder of Thomas' years in the Senate.

Each spring, newspapers ran accounts similar to one that appeared in the May 12, 1920, *New York Times*. "At two minutes past twelve o'clock noon today, Spring arrived in the Senate Chamber. At that hour, Senator Thomas of Colorado came in without his wig." After that, senators could safely go out and purchase their Palm Beach suits and straw hats.



*Charles Thomas, senator from Colorado (1913-1921).*

### Further Reading

"Omen of Spring in Senate," *New York Times*, May 12, 1920, 4.

May 27, 1920

## The Senate Eliminates 42 Committees

When Wisconsin's crusading reformer Robert La Follette arrived in the Senate in 1906, he received a form letter from the Republican Committee on Committees inviting him to submit a list of the panels on which he wished to serve. He responded that he had only one preference, the Committee on Interstate Commerce. Aware of La Follette's recent success as Wisconsin's governor in regulating railroads, party leaders saw no reason to place this firebrand on that influential committee. Instead, they awarded him seats on several lesser panels.

In 1906, the Senate maintained 66 standing and select committees—eight more committees than members of the majority party. Although the minority party traditionally received a share of those chairmanships, a majority party freshman like La Follette also had reason to expect one. The large number of committees and the manner of assigning their chairmanships suggests that many of them existed solely to provide office space in those days before the Senate acquired its first permanent office building.

The Committee on Committees did find a chairmanship for La Follette. Years later, he looked back on his appointment to lead the Committee to Investigate the Condition of the Potomac River Front at Washington. "I had immediate visions of cleaning

up the whole Potomac River front. Then I found that in all its history, the committee had never had a bill referred to it for consideration, and had never held a meeting." He continued, "My committee room was reached by going down into the sub-cellar of the Capitol, along a dark winding passage lighted by dim skylights that leaked badly, to the room carved out of the terrace on the west side of the Capitol."

Fourteen years later, in 1920, the Senate responded to a post-World War I mood to modernize all levels of governmental operations and decided to do something about its large number of obsolete and redundant committees. That year's *Congressional Directory* listed nearly 80 committees. Among them were the Committee on the Disposition of Useless Papers in the Executive Departments, and the Committee on Revolutionary War Claims—still in business 137 years after the conclusion of that conflict.

On May 27, 1920, with all members assigned private quarters in the 11-year-old office building, the Senate acknowledged that governmental efficiency could extend even to the halls of Congress by quietly abolishing 42 obsolete committees.



*The newly opened Senate Office Building (today's Russell Building) featured office space for senators, as well as committee rooms such as this one used for Senate hearings.*

### Further Reading

McConachie, Lauros G. *Congressional Committees: A Study of the Origins and Development of Our National and Local Legislative Methods*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1898.  
Smith, Steven S., and Christopher J. Deering. *Committees in Congress*. 3rd ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1997.

November 2, 1920

## A Senator Becomes President

**W**hat are the chances of being elected president directly from a seat in the Senate? History's answer, at best, is "slim." While 15 of the nation's 43 presidents served in the Senate at some point in their public

careers, only two—Warren Harding and John F. Kennedy—won their presidential races as incumbent senators.

In 1832, Henry Clay became the first senatorial incumbent to run. He lost to presidential incumbent Andrew Jackson. Four years later, Daniel Webster tried his luck, but came in a poor fourth against Vice President Martin Van Buren. The campaigns of 1848, 1852, and 1860 included incumbent senators, but we look in vain on the list of that era's presidents for the names of Lewis Cass, John Hale, or Stephen Douglas.

The 1850s opened up another possible route to the White House for incumbent senators—the vice-presidency. In 1852, Democratic Senator William King of Alabama—Franklin Pierce's running mate—became the first incumbent to gain his party's vice-presidential nomination. Soon after he won the election, however, he became ill and went to Cuba to recover. Too ill to return to Washington, he took his vice-presidential oath in Cuba and died soon thereafter.

Since William King's day, 24 incumbent senators have gained major party vice-presidential nominations. Of this number, 13 won the vice-presidency, but only three—Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, and Lyndon Johnson—subsequently became president.

In 1920 Warren Harding, an Ohio Republican, won his party's nomination as a compromise candidate on the 10th ballot. Harding fit a popular image of what a president should look like. Tall and handsome with silver hair and dark eyebrows, he had easily won a Senate seat six years earlier. A cheerful and friendly party loyalist, he seemed to get along well with everyone. While in the Senate, Harding developed a talent for speaking so vaguely on major issues that he was able to appeal to people on both sides of any political question. This served him well in the 1920 presidential campaign. Although his speeches make little sense when read today, they soothed a war-weary nation.

While the Democratic ticket of James Cox and Franklin Roosevelt campaigned frantically throughout the nation, Harding conducted his campaign from his front porch, ever careful to avoid sensitive subjects. On November 2, 1920, the American people rewarded his promise for "a return to normalcy" with the largest margin of victory in any presidential election to that time.



*Warren G. Harding, senator from Ohio and Republican nominee for president, posing in the shade of his front porch for Louis Keila, noted sculptor, on October 22, 1920.*

### Further Reading

Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., ed. *Running for President: The Candidates and their Images*. 2 vols. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.