

# WOMEN'S HISTORY SPOTLIGHT

## A Civics In Real Life Series

### FEMALE FIRSTS

### DIANNE FEINSTEIN



On September 29, 2023, one of California’s two U.S. senators [passed away](#) at the age of 90. First elected to the U.S. Senate in 1992, Dianne Feinstein was the oldest sitting U.S. senator and the longest serving female senator. To many Californians, Feinstein was an icon and a symbol as legendary as the Golden Gate Bridge. Feinstein was born and raised in San Francisco, California. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in political science and history from [Stanford University](#), Feinstein took a job serving on the [California Women’s Board of Terms and Parole](#). After six years in this role, she went on to chair the San Francisco Advisory Committee for Adult Detention for a few years. In 1969, Feinstein won a seat on the [San Francisco Board of Supervisors](#). She would later become the board’s first female president. Twice, Feinstein unsuccessfully ran for mayor of San Francisco. However, in 1978, Mayor George Moscone and City Supervisor Harvey Milk were [assassinated](#). As president of the Board of Supervisors, Feinstein was next in the line of succession for the office of mayor. After leading the city through a difficult time, Feinstein won the election for mayor outright in 1979 and served in the position until 1988. She was the first female mayor of San Francisco. Her legacy as mayor centered around improvements made to the city’s transportation services and advancements in gay rights. After serving two terms as mayor, Dianne Feinstein ran for governor of California but lost. The winner of that election, [Pete Wilson](#), was serving in the U.S. Senate at the time, which meant his victory left the Senate seat vacant. Feinstein won the special election to that seat, making her the first woman to represent California in the U.S. Senate. She was reelected to a full term in 1994 and served until her death. During her career in the Senate, Feinstein continued to advocate for issues important to both her and her California constituents, such as criminal justice, reproductive rights, and environmental concerns. She is also remembered for the important role she played in writing and co-sponsoring the [1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban legislation](#). Within the Senate, Feinstein was the first female member of the Appropriations Committee and the first female member and chair of the Rules and Administration Committee and Select Committee on Intelligence. Known as a more centrist Democrat, Feinstein’s pragmatic views and willingness to reach across the aisle drew both praise and criticism during her Senate tenure. On October 1, 2023, California Governor Gavin Newsom [announced the appointment of Laphonza Butler](#) to fill Feinstein’s seat for the remainder of the term. California voters will elect a successor for Senator Feinstein in November 2024. Regardless of who comes out of that already crowded race victorious, it will no doubt be difficult to replace the “trailblazer” and “giant in the Senate” Dianne Feinstein.

### Civics Challenge: Search & Learn

Current U.S. Senators Representing Your State:	
Longest Serving Member of Your State Senate:	
Has Your State Ever Elected a Female U.S. Senator? Elaborate.	
Has Your City Ever Elected a Female Mayor? Elaborate.	

