

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

A Civics In Real Life Series

FEMALE FIRSTS

Nellie Tayloe Ross

For much of American history, leadership in government and politics was dominated by men, and women were often excluded from holding high public office. That changed in a historic way in the early 20th century when [Nellie Tayloe Ross](#) became a trailblazer for women in political leadership. Ross made history as the first woman ever elected governor of a U.S. state. [Nellie Tayloe Ross](#) was born Nellie Tayloe in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1876 and was raised in Kansas. She attended teacher training school and worked as an educator before marrying William B. Ross, a lawyer and Democratic politician. Although she did not initially seek a political career, Ross became actively involved in public life through her husband's work and developed a strong understanding of government, policy, and public service. In 1922, [William Ross](#) was elected governor of Wyoming. Just two years later, he died suddenly while in office. Rather than allow his work to end unfinished, Nellie Tayloe Ross decided to run for the remainder of his term. In 1924, she won the [special election](#), becoming the first female governor in United States history. Her election was a landmark moment, not only for Wyoming but for women across the country, coming at a time when women had only [recently](#) gained the right to vote nationwide. As governor, Ross focused on issues such as education, workers' protections, and fiscal responsibility. She supported [Prohibition](#), which was common at the time, and helped update how the state government operated. Although she served only one term, her impact was lasting. After leaving the governor's office, Ross remained active in national politics. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her as Director of the [United States Mint](#). With this appointment, Ross again made history as the first woman to serve as Director of the U.S. Mint, a position overseeing the nation's coin production and currency standards. She held the role for 20 years, serving under multiple presidents, making her one of the longest-serving directors in the Mint's history. Throughout her career, Nellie Tayloe Ross repeatedly broke barriers for women in government at a time when female leaders were still rare. As the first woman governor and the first female to lead the U.S. Mint, she opened doors for future generations of women to pursue leadership roles in politics and public service. Nellie Tayloe Ross believed strongly in the importance of continuing progress for women in government, once saying, "Any thought that women's rights are won forever is wishful thinking," a view reflected in her groundbreaking leadership and lasting impact on American politics, as well as the fact that to this day, she remains the only woman to have served as governor of Wyoming.



Civics Challenge: Search & Learn

First Female Governor Of Your State:	
Political Party:	
Term/Year:	
Total Female Governors In Your State History:	



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