

Speaker Ryan: Celebrates Opening of 'First Women in Congress' Exhibit

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ASHINGTON—House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) today hosted a reception to mark the opening of a U.S. Capitol exhibit honoring The First Women in Congress. Following are the Speaker's remarks at the reception, as prepared for delivery:

"Hi everybody. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank the people who made this exhibit possible: our Clerk, Karen Haas; our House curator, Farar Elliott; and our House historian, Matt Waisniewski. You—and your teams—do incredible work, and you really have outdone yourselves yet again.

"This exhibit is about Jeanette Rankin and the First Women in Congress, but I want to recognize all the current women in Congress who are here. Also with us today is the first woman in our history to serve as Librarian of Congress, Dr. Carla Hayden. Thank you all for the example that you set.

"I only wish that my daughter Liza could be here. She is actually the vice president of her 9th grade class. Which just goes to show you that someone in my family can be elected vice president...

"But something we have taught Liza—and all our kids—is the importance of daring...the notion that nothing is impossible if you're willing to go out and fight for it. And that, to me, is what this exhibit is all about.

"Think about the story of Edith Nourse Rogers. Edith was elected in 1925 as a Republican from Massachusetts. That alone makes her a pioneer...

“Edith was elected to finish her husband’s term after he passed away from cancer. And the political bosses told her that, as much as they appreciated her, the plan was to find a suitable male replacement.

“Well, Edith had other ideas. You see, during and after World War I, she had become deeply invested in the plight of disabled veterans. In fact, they called her the ‘Angel of Walter Reed Hospital.’

“And so Edith ran again, and she was re-elected—17 times.

“In those 35 years, Edith secured pensions for army nurses, created the women’s army auxiliary corps, and sponsored a package of measures to help veterans that would later be called the GI Bill of Rights.

“The American Legion made Edith the first woman to receive the Distinguished Service Cross.

“Here is someone who was told she would have her seat for a matter of months. And to this day, Edith Nourse Rogers holds the longest tenure of any woman to serve in the House.

“We owe so much to our pioneers, and this exhibit makes a rich addition to our collection. It is a chance to remember public servants who made this institution and this country what it is today—for all of us, especially our daughters.”