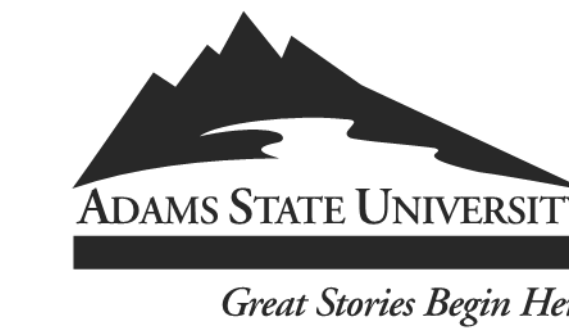


FIRST LADIES EXERCISING POWER ON CAPITAL HILL: AN ANALYSIS OF FIRST LADIES WORKING WITH CONGRESS ON PROMOTING CAUSES AND PROGRAMS

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Abstract

First Ladies are in a unique, yet powerful position in the federal government which allows them opportunities and a platform while in the White House to sponsor programs and promote issues personal to their causes. Sometimes First Ladies impact the creation of legislation and other times have testified in Congressional Committees to give voice to such causes. This research aims to analyze First Ladies and their presence on Capitol Hill that has impacted various issues, as a unique example of Exercising Power as First Lady of the United States in the federal government to better the country.

Table 1

First Ladies who have Testified before Congress, During Tenure

First Lady	Date	Committee	Topic
Eleanor Roosevelt	December 1940	House Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute	Interstate migration
	January 1942	House Select Committee Investigation Defense Migration	National defense migration
Rosalynn Carter	February 1979	Senate Labor & Human Relations	Reappraisal of mental health
	April 1979	House Science & Technology	Technology
Hillary Clinton	September 1993	House Ways & Means	Health care reform
		House Energy & Commerce	Health care reform
	September 1993	Senate Labor & Human Relations	Health care reform
		House Education & Labor	Health care reform
September 1993	Senate Finance	Health care reform	
Laura Bush	January 2002	Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions	Teaching salaries Training for Head Start "Preserve America" campaign

Table 2

Former First Ladies who have Testified before Congress

First Lady	Date	Committee	Topic
Betty Ford	March 1991	House Select on Aging	Alcoholism treatment coverage under health care
Betty Ford	March 1994	Senate Labor & Human Relations	Health Securities Act
Rosalynn Carter	May-June 1991	House Appropriations	Health and welfare
Rosalynn Carter	March 1994	Senate Labor & Human Resources	Health Securities Act
Nancy Reagan	March 1995	House Government Reform & Oversight	Drug control, drug abuse, drug trafficking

Teaching Opportunities

- First Ladies and their promotion of causes and programs.
- First Ladies as an influence of political power in the presidency and Congress.
- First Ladies influencing social issues and social justice.
- Women's history
- Social and cultural history
- Political history
- Presidential history
- Social activism
- Unique position of political power

First Lady Influence on Capitol Hill

Eleanor Roosevelt

As the first to do many activities that impacted First Ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt became the first to testify in Congress, which raised some scrutiny towards her. Roosevelt spoke out on matters that many in Congress tried to avoid, and was accused of running a "parallel administration" alongside the president. As a giant supporter of civil rights, Roosevelt used her position to advance rights to all, exhibited in her testimony in Congress.



Rosalynn Carter

As a key advisor in the Carter Presidency, Rosalynn Carter did not face criticism when she took her sponsorship on mental health issues and the Equal Rights Amendment to Congress. Carter worked on her cause of mental health and increasing federal spending for programs. In her efforts, Carter also championed work in Social Security reform, retirement age for federal workers, and improved medical services for elderly.



Hillary Clinton

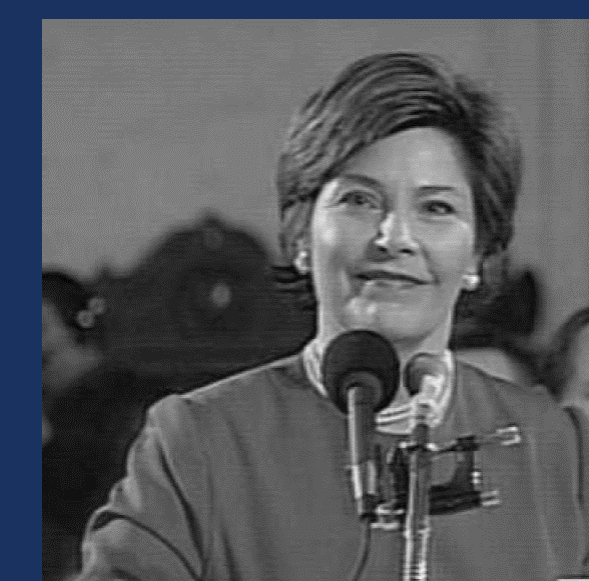
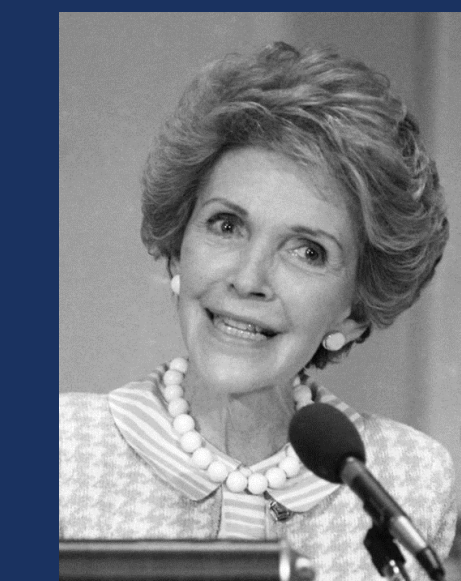
Health care was much of the focus for Hillary Clinton as First Lady. Leading the administration's health care reform efforts, Clinton testified on behalf of the president's health care plan and worked through thirty bills on women's and children's health. However, Clinton was met with deep scrutiny. Similar to Roosevelt, Clinton redefined and increased the power of the Office of First Lady. Further, she would later become a United State Senator and Secretary of State, entangling more influence as a former First Lady.



Overview

Although there are no constitutional demands of the First Lady, there has been many instances where her presence on Capitol Hill has been influential. In fact, First Ladies have been making their presence on Capitol Hill since the early days. Dolley Madison had a permanent seat in the House. President Lincoln had to intervene with a congressional investigation over Mary Todd Lincoln's expenditures. Edith Wilson held power over the president and influenced his agenda with congressional leaders. Lady Bird Johnson influenced her own legislation. As well, modern First Ladies are always seated in the House gallery during the President's State of the Union.

First Ladies Roosevelt, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and L. Bush have all testified in Congress on issues that extend their agendas as First Lady. Did this make a large impact? Definitely so. In a unique position in the government, First Ladies have used their position and influence in exercising their power in history.



First Lady Influence on Capitol Hill (cont.)

Laura Bush

Education and literacy were the focus of both Barbara and Laura Bush as First Ladies. As First Lady, Laura Bush took on the causes of education. In an interesting testimony in the Senate Committee on EHLR, where Senator and former First Lady Hillary Clinton was a member, Bush spoke about the need in raising teachers' salaries, better training for Head Start programs, and created a national initiative called "Ready to Read - Ready to Learn" for early childhood education.

Betty Ford

Never shy about discussing her beliefs or personal struggles of addiction after leaving the White House, First Lady Ford serves as an example of an activist for women's rights and social causes. First Lady Ford joined with Rosalynn Carter to testify in Congress over the inclusion of mental health and substance abuse treatment benefits in the national health care plan. Having suffered from addictions and substance abuse herself, she opened the Betty Ford Center, providing rehabilitation from those suffering from this disease.

Nancy Reagan

Known widely as the protector of the president and championed her "Just Say No" program to fight the war on drugs in the 1980s, First Lady Reagan took this program not only to a national spotlight, but also to an international stage, joining with other first ladies around the world to fight issues related to drugs. In her testimony in Congress, First Lady Reagan focused on the issues of drug control, abuse issues, and drug trafficking.

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For a copy of this poster or the full paper, please contact Gagliardi at: jgagliardi@adams.edu