

# IOWA HISTORY



*Courtesy Library of Congress*

Ella Hamlin hoped to represent Iowa in the House of Representatives in 1926

## Candidate Runs on ‘Mind Your Business’ Platform

“Let the United States mind its business, form no entangling alliances and collect European debts—principal plus interest.” A candidate for U.S. Congress wasn’t shy about expressing an opinion in May 1926. Nothing unusual about that. However, the candidate was a woman; and that was newsworthy.

Ella Bushnell Hamlin announced her candidacy with a motto, “Mind your business.” Her slogan was “Spirit of 1776.” Running as an independent, she described herself as a “Lincoln republican and a Jefferson democrat.” And she boasted she was running her campaign “without money.”

Hamlin was a Davenport business owner. Her publishing company published a magazine, the *Trident*. She and another woman had started the company in 1904. When her partner decided to leave the state for a position with a land investment company, Hamlin purchased her half of the publishing company. From her Brady Street office over a shoe store, she continued to publish the magazine.

Hamlin was trying to unseat Republican Congressman F.D. Letts, a well-known Davenport attorney and judge. She had challenged Letts to a debate, but he had been “silent in seven languages,” according to Hamlin.

While Letts remained silent, Hamlin was vocal and outspoken when it came to expressing her opinions about how to govern. “Congress should promote firm treaty agreements with all countries to outlaw war...” she said.

She complained that current laws were driving farmers into “economic slavery.” Hamlin called for government operation of telephone and telegraph lines through the post office department. She held firm beliefs about the nation’s natural resources.

“I’m in favor of developing our internal waterways to the limit,” Hamlin said. She contended the government should own and operate the nation’s water power plants, which would provide “every household in the land” with “abundant light and power at no cost.” She also advocated public control and “permanent conservation” of the nation’s coal, iron, oil and timber lands.

Hamlin failed to win the seat in the fall election. Some blamed it on her “radical nature.”  
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#### Sources

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- “Mrs. Ella Hamlin,” *Brown County Democrat*, May 20, 1926.
- “Woman Seeks Letts’ Seat,” *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, Oct. 12, 1926.