



Robert M. La Follette

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THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE Progressive Movement, Robert La Follette was born in Primrose, Wisconsin, on June 14, 1855. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1879, was admitted to the bar in 1880, was appointed district attorney of Dane County from 1880 to 1884, and served from 1885 to 1891 in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he supported the McKinley Tariff Bill. Breaking with the party leadership, La Follette returned to his law practice and concentrated on improving the political system in Wisconsin.

Elected governor by acclamation in 1891, he proposed and implemented his “Wisconsin Idea.” This became the foundation of the Progressive Movement; it included opposition to political bosses, employment of technical experts for public service, direct primary nomination, railroad regulation, and tax reform. Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1905, he worked for progressive reforms on a national level, including the direct election of senators. He championed the conservation movement and led the opposition to the Payne-Aldrich Tariff. In 1912 he lost the Republican presidential nomination to Theodore Roosevelt. To make his progressive ideas better known he founded *La Follette’s Weekly Magazine* in 1909 and the National Progressive Republican League in 1911. He opposed American involvement in World War I and President Wilson’s foreign policy. He wrote the resolution authorizing the Senate investigation of the Teapot Dome scandal. In 1924 he ran unsuccessfully for president on the Progressive ticket. He died on June 18, 1925, in Washington, D.C.



Marble by Jo Davidson
Given in 1929; located in National Statuary Hall.

April 2011