

Liz Abzug

Daughter of U.S. Representative Bella Savitzky Abzug of New York

Speaking “Out and Loud” on Capitol Hill

Liz Abzug demonstrates the ways her mother challenged accepted norms on and off the House Floor.

Interview recorded November 20, 2018

The challenges were from the first—the get go. I mean, the Speaker—the Doorkeeper of the House—they always have a doorkeeper. He was a southerner, and he would—Fishbait Miller was his name, and he would tell her, when she came to the chambers, to take off her hat before she came in. And she would say, “I’m not taking off my hat.” And he would say, “Take your—you have to. That’s protocol.” She said, “I’ll take off my hat when I, when I’m ready to take off my hat.” So she would walk in and have a seat and then finally take off her hat. There were a lot of issues: the gym, the pool wasn’t open to women. The pools in the gym, I mean. There were not enough ladies’ restrooms, barely, near the, near the chamber. The early women who were elected then had to fight for all that—my mother—we always say my mother integrated the congressional pool, because a lot of men would swim naked, and she would come in there and say, “I want to swim.” And they said, “You can’t come in here, we’re swimming naked.” She said, “Well, then you’re going to swim naked. I’m coming in to go swimming.” And—because she was a big swimmer for exercise. So, and then the fact that, you know, she was this person from New York City who wasn’t afraid to speak up and out and loud and, you know, really the thing that they couldn’t do, though, couldn’t beat her on was that she was a terrific—she knew the procedures and she knew the legislative process. And, you know, it was one thing to attack someone, you know, on personality or on characteristics, it was another thing—they couldn’t get away with it because she was, you know, very well versed on legislative tactics and the procedural tactics of the House and then the law. So that no matter what, she would always be well prepared.