

The Honorable Barbara Boxer

U.S. Representative of California (1983–1993) and U.S. Senator of California (1993–2017)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Accessing the House Gym: Part Two

The Honorable Barbara Boxer describes the leading role she played in women Members gaining access to the House Gym.

Interview recorded November 29, 2018

And I went to Danny Rostenkowski because he was taking up a great big room next to the men's gym, which we could have used, but he said, he'd store—you're not going to believe this—Helene Curtis products that—Helene Curtis was this big, you know they made shampoo, and all of these amenities, and they gave him all this stuff to give out as Christmas gifts to the staff, something that obviously we can't, we're not allowed to do anymore. But he said, "No, I need that room for the Helene Curtis Christmas gifts," and I sort of gave up. But I knew I had to use a sense of humor, so I wrote a song and I put together a singing group of Marcy Kaptur, Mary Rose Oakar, and myself. And to make a long story short, we sang it to the caucus, to Tip O'Neill and to the caucus, and we said, "Exercise, glamorize, where to go? Will you advise? Can't everybody use your gym? And equal rights, we'll wear tights, let's avoid those macho fights. Can't everybody use your gym?" Anyway, you can find those lyrics; they're in my book. So to make a long story short, they said, "Okay already, it's fine." So what I found is you can use a sense of humor, and we got into the gym. Now, once we got into the gym, they then said, "Well, you can only use it on the weekends." And we said, "No, no." Then they said, "Well, you can only use it certain hours." And we said, "No." And we said, "We're going to go public with this." And they finally said, "Okay." So we got into the gym. And I'm very happy—it's something that I personally took on and won using a sense of humor because, you know, in those years the angry woman was not going to get anywhere. That was the way it was.