

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

“It Was a Hard Race”

The Honorable Barbara Boxer describes the challenges she faced during her first congressional campaign when she ran to replace Representative John Burton of California.

Interview recorded November 29, 2018

But it was a hard race. Both were hard because the district included a, a naval shipyard, and I was in a very blue collar area. And John was very blue collar. The district was very—let’s say it was reapportioned in a strange way, but it had parts of San Francisco, all of Marin County, and, and this area called Vallejo, which had a naval shipyard called Mare Island Naval Shipyard, and, you know, the last thing those people wanted to do, the blue collar workers, was elect a woman from suburbia, you know? They were what—and, and someone who made her career based on peace. And so, it was a hard race, and, but, but I did it. I had—and, and it’s funny, you ask about endorsements, I had a lot of male Congressmen who really helped me, like Vic Fazio was one of them, John Burton was one of them, George Miller. And they all came to Vallejo, and they said, “Hey, she’s, she’s good people. She could do it. You know, her husband’s a labor lawyer, so vote for her,” you know. I was fortunate that my husband was a labor lawyer so, but it was a very hard race. But I knew, I knew I could win it, but I knew also it was going to be hard.